

A Structural Analysis of the 1999 Malaysian General Election: Changing Voting Preference of Ethnic Chinese and Malay Groups and Party

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Even facing the 1997 financial crisis and the social unrest caused by the Anwar Event, Mahathir still won the 1999 General Election. The ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) obtained 56.51% of the votes and 76.7% seats in parliament. The opposition Barisan Alternatif (BA) took 40.3% of the votes but only 21.8% seats. The considerable gap between the votes and seats was BN's 'excess profit.' This election was mostly a two-bloc antagonism. The electoral outcome was that BN secured their two-third majority in parliament but lost Kelantan and Terengganu, which were taken by the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS). PAS was the biggest winner of this election.

The implications and significance of the 1999 election include:

- 1. Muslim power base is rising, and Malayan voters' preference splits.*
- 2. The votes and seats of the ruling coalition shrank.*
- 3. Chinese voters supported BN. Their political capital decreased and their future looks uncertain. In this election the Chinese community missed their chances to lift their political status.*
- 4. Mahathir reshuffled the Cabinet and appointed Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the Acting Chairman of United Malays National Organization (UMNO), to be his successor.*
- 5. Under the tight administrative control, Malays' political, economic, social and cultural status will continue rising.*

In May 2000 Mahathir and Abdullah Ahmad Badawi won the leadership elections of UMNO to become Chairman and Acting Chairman respectively. Mahathir became the longest-serving leader in Asia. Malayan votes, economic growth and opposition party's power are the three important variables of Malaysian political transition in the near future.

Key Words: Mahathir, Barisan Nasional (BN), Barisan Alternatif (BA), Anwar Effect, party politics.

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INTRODUCTION

Two years after being shaken by the 1997 financial crisis, there were significant political and economic changes in Malaysia. There emerged two blocs of parties-Barisan Nasional and Barisan Alternatif. During the 1999 election campaign, middle-classed parties and ethnic parties debated about national interest and ethnic interest

repeatedly. The result was that Mahathir won his fifth tenure as prime minister and became the longest-serving leader in Asia.

In 1999 the Anwar Effect surprisingly fueled the Reformasi movement. To what extent this movement would be supported by the people and furthermore would shake Mahathir's authoritarian regime was political observers' main concern. From a historical perspective voters' choice could bring about a two-party system and end BN's predominant one-party hegemony. This was the hope of democracy pursuers.

The political culture in Malaysia is fragmented in the multi-racial and multi-cultural society. It is difficult to take care of the individual interests of specific ethnic groups. The Administrative State controlled by the ruling coalition closely monitored civil society¹. The Anwar Event offered a chance for civil society and non-governmental organizations to cooperate. As Farish Noor explains, 'it is precisely because of its lack of exhaustive content that the concept of Reformasi has become so effective as a tool for political and ideological confrontation.'²

As a victor of the 1999 election, Mahathir personally appointed Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as his successor. However, the implication of this election was the subsequent change of ethnic politics and the divided preference of Malayan voting. The Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) won 27 seats in parliament and became the ruling party in Kelantan and Terengganu. These two states are seen as the fortress states defending Malays' interest.

This research aims to interpret the influence of the Reformasi movement over the election and analyzes the change in preference of ethnic groups and political parties. This essay tries to answer the following questions:

1. The direction of the development of ethnic groups in Malaysia.
2. The potentiality of the end of predominant one-party hegemony system.
3. The competitiveness of future opposition forces against the long- ruling BN.
4. The possible direction of ethnic politics during the post-Mahathir era.

I. Political Culture in Malaysia

Lucian Pye's *Asian Power and Politics* had pointed out that there are two incompatible culture in Malaysia.³

1.1 The Chinese political culture

These two cultures present numerous points of conflict that make Chinese and

¹ Milton J. Esman, *Administrative and Development in Malaysia: Institution Building and Reform in Plural Society*, (Ithica, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985).

² Meredith L. Weiss, "What Will Become of Reformasi? Ethnicity and Changing Political Norms in Malaysia", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 21, No. 3, December 1999, pp. 426-427.

³ Lucian Pye, *Asian Power and Politics: the Culture Dimension of Authority*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1985).

Malays scornful of each other. The Chinese are urban people, interested in money and market activities, and they are committed to self-improvement and have strong family ties. The Malays are rural, are contemptuous of merchants, prefer service careers in the army and police, are more easygoing in social relations, and are tolerant of divorce. The Chinese are at home in a “tightly structured” society; the Malays have a “loosely structured” society. With respect to religion and customs, the two rub each other the wrong way: Malays practice Islam in varying degrees but they universally abhor the pig; Chinese have vaguer religious identities and are fond of eating pork.⁴

All of these contrasts, which are identified in standard interpretations of Malaysia’s ethnic tensions,⁵ would be quite enough to create problems of nation-building; but they are made far worse by the deeper psychological way in which each community tries to cope with the tensions that exacerbate their antagonisms. Politically the situation is explosive because the concepts of power and of the proper use of authority are antithetical. Consequently, when the leaders of one community do what is expected of them in their own culture, the members of the other community are infuriated.

In Pye’s view, within the Chinese community reflect a totally inward-looking mentality, the entire Chinese community would be suspected of being in sympathy with the Communists, who by going into the jungles had triggered the emergency conflict. Thus was born the Malaysian (later Malaysian) Chinese Association (MCA), which has remained the junior partner of the Malays’ Party, the United Malay Nationalist Organization (UMNO), the dominant force in what was called first the Alliance and later the National Front, which has controlled Malaysian politics ever since. Before independence, when the country was called Malaya, the term Malayan was used in reference to both the general society and the Malay ethnic community.⁶

1.2 Malayan Culture

James C. Scott has argued that this characteristic of distrust among Malay officials stems from a culture of poverty which includes the belief that because resources are limited there is only a “fixed pie” and everything is part of a zero-sum relationship. Milton Esman concurs with this view.⁷ It is likely that Malay culture has, over time, incorporated many of the orientations common to a culture of poverty, in which the belief prevails that there is a rigidly fixed social product. Yet the attitudes of distrust and ineffectiveness are also characteristic of well-to-do Malays who have had generous support in their education and have moved into the ranks of the elite. Not many members of the Middle Classes come from peasant backgrounds, but many belong to the aristocracy and have a casual attitude toward material things and a

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

⁵ See Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, (London, Oxford University Press, 1951).

⁶ Pye, *op. cit.*, pp. 251-252.

⁷ See Esman, *op. cit.*, especially chapter 4.

tolerance for conspicuous consumption.⁸ Indeed, the Malays seem to think that the Chinese are misers and hoarders, but they believe themselves to be generous and mutually supportive.

According to both Esman and Scott, Malaysian officials regard people as self-seeking, egotistic, and opportunistic, hence needing to be checked by government and religion, and as having a low sense of efficacy and a strong sense of hierarchy—characteristics which both scholars attribute to a fixed-pie orientation. But these characteristics are also consistent with what would be expected from the Malaysian socialization practices. Malay children, even in middle-class families, are taught to have pride and to maintain their personal dignity. Their world is also filled with dangers in the form of both this-worldly enemies and otherworldly spirits. Even before formal religious training begins, the Malay child is exposed to the idea that invisible forces are constantly at work in his environment.⁹ Indeed, Scott and Esman completely ignore the Malay's patient expectation that something miraculous is going to happen.

II. The Internal and External Political and Economic Situation

Pye points out that the political culture in Malaysia is fragmented. Due to the difference in value systems and life styles among Malays, Chinese and Indians, it is extremely difficult to achieve cultural assimilation. Therefore, it is not easy to generate a universal consensus or identity and witness the development of fellowship.

The tenth General Election in November 1999 can be regarded as the biggest challenge to the career of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohammad. The internal and external situation was to his disadvantage. Internally, the 1997 financial crisis afflicted Southeast Asian countries, and Malaysia was no exception. Anwar Ibrahim, the appointed successor to Mahathir, was arrested in August 1998. As a result the opposition movement gained strength in the following year. On the eve of the election, surprisingly, solidarity in the opposition bloc was reached. Barisan Alternatif (BA) was founded by the alliance of four opposition parties and their coalition was confrontational to the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN). All of a sudden there appeared a strong demand for more civil rights, a fair justice system and greater freedom of expression.

Externally, Indonesian President Harbibi and President of the Philippines Estrada expressed their concern about the arrest of Anwar at the annual meeting of APEC. They even threatened to boycott the meeting. Generally speaking, Mahathir faced an uphill struggle in the run up to the election.

2.1 The disputes between Mahathir and Anwar

Mahathir is seen as 'creative, anti-superstitious, and bizarre' by some observers. To some extent, Mahathir and Anwar shared something in common, maintaining a close

⁸ Haru Miller, *Prince and Premier: A Biography of Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj*, (London, G.C. Harrap, 1959), esp. chapter 1 &2.

⁹ M.G. Swift, *Malay Peasant Society in Jelebu*, (London: Athlone Press, 1965).

relationship for more than ten years. The peak of this relationship was reached in early 1995 when they practiced Chinese calligraphy together to celebrate the Chinese New Year in a Chinese community. In 1995 the economic growth rate was 8%. The BN government launched some more tolerant policies in the field of cultural affairs aimed at the non-Malayan communities. Deputy PM Anwar even facilitated the opening of the International Conference on the Exchange of Islamic and Confucius Cultures.¹⁰ As a result the BN won 166 seats in the parliament¹¹ and 338 in the state Senates. The once threatening BA (Alternative Front) in 1990 was defeated while the BN enjoyed the victory.

In the 1996 election, Anwar earned more than 70% of the support in the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and became the Executive Chairman. This legitimized his status as the appointed successor to Mahathir. This period was seen as this pair's 'honeymoon.' In the 1970s Anwar was a student radical, then headed Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM). In 1982 Mahathir lured Anwar to join UMNO. From 1983 onwards Anwar was a member of the Cabinet and became the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Minister of Agriculture and Minister of Education. (See Index A) In 1993 he was promoted to the position of Deputy PM and Acting Chairman of UMNO. In May 1997 Anwar was appointed to the position of acting PM for two months during Mahathir's overseas visits. Mahathir disclosed to the media several times that Anwar being his successor was as close to him as his son.

However, this intimacy did not last long. Anwar gradually strengthened his power and was highly acclaimed by the international media for his effort in pursuing liberal democracy. A subtle peace between successor and predecessor was observed, although the former had been accumulating his political capital too quickly. However, the political climate changed in July 1997 when the Asian financial crisis afflicted Southeast Asian countries including Malaysia. Thailand, South Korea and Indonesia were forced to accept the economic reform policies introduced by the IMF. The IMF required greater transparency of financial systems and high interest rates. Anwar was willing to follow the IMF policy in this regard. In addition, he put forward the so-called '*Three Ks*' principle.¹² To the public's surprise, PM Mahathir had his own ideas about how to restructure the endangered financial system. Mahathir not only conducted the debate with Krugman, fixed exchange rates between RM and U.S. dollars at 1:3.8, but also expanded the government's budget on infrastructure and helped banks cope with their bad debts. At the end of November 1999 Malaysian stock prices rose significantly and foreign investment returned.

On September 2 1998, Anwar was unceremoniously sacked from his posts as Deputy PM and Minister, of Finance and on September 3, from his positions and membership within UMNO. Later he was arrested under the Internal Security Act (ISA) and accused of corruption and misconduct. Anwar's supporters condemned the arrest as political conspiracy. Anwar, accompanied by his wife, Wan Azizah Ismail,

¹⁰ Kuo-Chang Wang, *The Ethnical Political Party in Malaysia*, (Taipei: Tan-Shan Press, 1998), p. 182.

¹¹ 46 seats occupied by the Semangat, which returned to the coalition later, were included.

¹² They were Collusion, Cronism, and Corruption.

embarked on a nationwide tour before he was jailed. While Anwar was incarcerated, his wife, an ophthalmologist and political neophyte, swiftly founded the opposition Parti Keadilan Nasional (PKN), which is chaired by her.

2.2 Mahathir's skillful maneuvers

Anwar was a well-regarded reformist during the 1980s, so the fact that he joined the UMNO and became a minister dealt a severe blow to the opposition movement. A great dissatisfaction with regard to his betrayal developed at that time, so he was not entirely sympathized with in 1998 when he stepped down¹³. Mahathir made strenuous efforts to convince the general public that Anwar was indeed guilty of misconduct and was not the hero as he appeared.

To safeguard his regime, Mahathir relied on gerrymandering the election. He also meticulously manipulated election regulations while he was dealing with Anwar's case. His efforts were observed as follows:

1. The voting day was decided to be before Ramada.
2. Young as yet ineligible voters who numbered 680,000, were assumed to be more reform-oriented, but were to be excluded.
3. The 300,000 Chinese votes, which amounted to 24% of the total votes, were too crucial to be lost.

Eventually, November 29 was chosen as the election day. Mahathir's government surprisingly did not propose the budget until October 29, 1999. This action came as a surprise to the electorate, as the budget review process was bound to be lengthy, and could not be completed before the General Election in November. Besides, December was the month of Ramadan, so it was reasonable to expect that the election might have to be postponed until January 2000. If so, the interval between the dismissal of parliament and the election campaign would be less than one month, this would be have been unprecedented.

The exclusion of young voters was linked with the choice of voting day. According to *the Election Law*, Malaysians become eligible to vote only after they have reached the age of 21, and their registration has to have been completed six months prior to an election, thus excluding them from the poll in November.

Strategies employed by Mahathir to win the Chinese votes included:¹⁴

1. Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji was invited to visit Malaysia from November 22 - 26, to endorse Mahathir's achievement. Zhu's visit overlapped the election campaign, held from November 21 - 28¹⁵. His appearance was perceived as being to aid Mahathir from a distance. He enthusiastically encouraged Chinese voters to elect Mahathir.
2. Mahathir on more than one occasion praised the performance of Chinese schools and the Chinese contribution to the Malaysian economy. The

¹³ Quoted from Chang Chi-chun, a lecturer at Academia Senica on March 21, 2000.

¹⁴ "A Storm in a Teacup," *Asiaweek*, Vol. 26, No. 16, April 28, 2000.

¹⁵ See *Lianhe Zaobao*, December 1 1999, p. 2.

forthcoming increase in the number of Chinese secondary and primary schools in the countryside was supported. Even Don Razak university began to recognize a diploma from a Chinese school as a valid certificate with which to gain eligibility to sit the entrance examination. The new found tolerance shown by the ruling party as such was unprecedented.

3. To strike fear in the minds of the Chinese, the media was instructed to preach that if the PAS came to power, Malaysia would become an Islamic state. By then entertainment and alcohol would be forbidden, women would be required to be veiled in public, minority groups would be deprived of their rights, and hudud (Islamic criminal code) laws would be applied even for minor crimes. As a result, ethnic clashes might have erupted, and even the 1969 “the Accident on May 15” might have been repeated. Chinese businessmen and the Chinese middle classes were the main target of this negative propaganda.

Table 1. The Comparison of 1995 & 1999 General Elections

		Ruling Coalition Barisan Nasional, BN	Opposition coalition Barisan Alternatif, BA
1999	Parliamental Seats	148	42
	Seats(%)	76.70%	21.80%
	Votes(%)	56.5%	40.3%
The Excess Profit of BN over 20% Ratio of Seats and Votes			
		National Front	Other parties
1995	Parliamental Seats	132	Semangat 46 34
	Seats(%)	68.75%	PAS 8
	Votes(%)	65.36%	DAP 7
			PBS 3
		Revolutionist(Sabah) 1	
		Independent 3	

The PM's calculations were such a success that the 'iron law' of the previous elections was nearly destroyed. For example, Chinese leaders from the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) of the BN and The Democratic Action Party (DAP) were not preferred by their fellowmen. In the past they were ridiculed for not daring to fight in districts which were dominated by the Chinese community. Rather, their seats were secured largely by the Malayan votes in the mixed communities. However, the turnout of this election was that UMNO leaders had to rely on Chinese support in the Malayan districts. The safe Chinese votes were gathered by the BN coalition, contributed to UMNO's victory and legitimized Mahathir's ruling. However, Chinese people also missed a good opportunity to raise their political power at a crucial juncture.

III. The Turning Point of Democratic Transformation: The Confrontation between BN and BA Generated by the Anwar Event

If Anwar's case is scrutinized from the perspective of party system rather than

ethnic division, the Reformasi movement gathered strength during this time. The most obvious indication was the national attention raised by his arrest. Tens of thousands of people rallied during each of Anwar's speeches without exception. What was more obvious was that the ethnic gap between the opposition forces had been bridged. The mostly Chinese Democratic Action Party (DAP), Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), PKN, and the Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM) established the Barisan Alternatif (BA). From the beginning it was confrontational to the ruling BN (see table 1).

This great coalition aimed to take over one third of the seats in parliament, end the supremacy of the BN and force Mahathir to step down. However, the four constituent parties did not share much in common apart from the above goal. The dispute between the Chinese and the Muslims was noticeable and questioned by outsiders repeatedly¹⁶. This disagreement worked in the BN's favor allowing them to attack its opponent frequently. The BN claimed that once the PAS established their regime, Chinese schooling would be canceled.

Lim Kit Siang, the ex-Secretary-General of the DAP, observed that if the four parties individually could occupy at least 25 to 30 seats in parliament, these seats could balance ethnic politics and terminate the dominance of BN. This in turn would put an end to the predominant one-party hegemony in Malaysian politics¹⁷.

After experiencing dramatic changes in 1986, the PAS proposed the 'establishment of an Islamic state' and nominated candidates nationwide, but this plan was rejected by the public. In the 1990 election, owing to the split of UMNO and the 'two-line politics', the PAS allied itself with 'Muslim Solidarity Front'. However, this front was not influential enough except in Kelantan. During the election campaign in November 1999, the PAS initially lacked an attractive agenda until the unexpected arrest of Anwar provided one. The Anwar Event and the sequential development made the party a channel for Malays to voice their dissatisfaction¹⁸.

The Anwar Event by the nature of its development could have triggered the breakup of Chinese and Malays after the split of UMNO in 1990 and led to a two-party system initiated by the antagonism between BN and BA (See Table 2).

Samuel P. Huntington points out that political parties play a vital role in maintaining political stability by mobilizing and organizing political participation. A sound party system integrates general interest, replaces individual interests, surpasses local interests and establishes new political identity. To what extent parties and the party system can serve this function depends on the degree of institutionalization. The criteria of institutionalization of parties include:

1. Parties move from individualized leadership towards institutionalized recruitment of leadership.
2. Parties enrich their representativeness; that is, to converge

¹⁶ One of the most apparent one was the idea of establishing an Islamic state.

¹⁷ Please see *Lianhe Zaobao*, December 2, 1999, p. 5.

¹⁸ The electoral outcomes of the 1999 general election proved PAS to be the biggest winner. PAS gained 2 states: Kelantan and Terengganu.

more social interests .

3. Political activists and power pursuers identify themselves with specific parties¹⁹.

Table 2 The First to Tenth General Election Results: Percentage of Seats and Votes Comparison with Ruling Party and Opposition Party. (Compiled by the Author.)

year	Total seats	Seats Ruling party/ opposition party	Percentage of Ruling Party	Votes Ruling party/opposition party	Excess Profit
1959	104	74/30	71%	51.8/48.2	19.2
1964	104	89/15	86%	58.5/41.5	27.5
1969/ 1970	144	92/52	64%	47.4/52.6	16.6
1974	154	135/19	88%	60.7/39.3	27.3
1978	154	130/24	84%	57.2/42.8	26.8
1982	154	132/22	86%	60.5/39.5	25.5
1986	177	148/29	84%	55.8/44.2	28.2
1990	180	127/53	71%	51.9/48.1	19.1
1995	192	162/30	84%	65.0/35.0	19.0
1999	193	148/45	77%	56.0/40.3	22.94
The average value			80%	56.5/43.0	20.2

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 212-215.

Table 3. The Outcomes of 1999 General Elections

Party	Nomination	Win seats
UMNO	104	72
MCA	35	28
Gerakan	10	7
MIC	7	7
PPP	4	4
PBB	10	10
SUPP	7	7
PBDS	6	6
Semangat 46	1	1
USNO	4	3
PPP	3	2
PBS	1	0
PAPAS	1	1
National Front, BN	193	148
PAS	63	26
Justice Party	59	5
DAP	47	10
People's Party	4	0
Barisan Alternatif, BA	193	42
Democrat	11	0
BERJASA	1	0
Revolutionist	5	0
PBS	17	3
Justice Front	1	0
Independent	1	0
Other Opposition	63	3

Resources: Nanyang San Bao

High participation but low institutionalization bring about chaotic politics and violence. On the other hand, low participation weakens the effect of parties and the relative power of other political and social institutions²⁰.

Under the shadow of Mahathir's long-lasting strongman regime, the Deputy PM's stepping-down raised awareness of the opposition forces. They took over certain sectors of the Malayan vote from the BN. However, to a large extent Chinese voters were convinced by the BN's promise of stability and a non-Islamic state. This shift was an unprecedented blow to the DAP.

In a nutshell, the 1999 election could be counted as a good chance for a political transformation from an authoritarian regime to a democratic government. It is regretful that the internal and external constraints set limitations on the extent of the change. A few tendencies will develop in the unfolding political scenario:

²⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Society*, (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 12-13.

1. The power of the Muslims rose and the PAS became the biggest opposition party.
2. The MCA in the BN was a winner but did not contribute much to the Chinese community.
3. At least within 20 to 30 years the outlook of predominance of UMNO is still positive.
4. Political power of the Chinese community declined and missed the chance of strengthening themselves politically.

3.1 The Reasons for Mahathir's Success and the Opposition's Failure

The Outcomes of 1999 general election, the ruling party won the 148 seats, the opposition coalition won 42 seats, BN took two third seats, So PM Mahathir got victory again, (see table 3)

Reasons accounts for Mahathir's success include:

- The promise of stability met with Chinese voters' priority. The prevailing opposition movement did not connect with Chinese voters. The alliance of the DAP and the PAS failed to reassure Chinese voters' doubts about the idea of establishing an Islamic state. Their support of the BN coalition led to the failure of political heavyweights in the DAP.
- The economy guided by Mahathir was showing signs of recovery after the financial crisis. The stock and financial market were stabilizing.
- The BN's advertising during campaign attacked the opposition coalition by appealing to sensitive cultural and religious topics. The opposition forces were depicted as violent.
- The Anwar Event did not effect most Malayan voters.
- The representatives of multiple ethnicity and party, safeguarded the BN's ruling status.
- The BN effectively convinced their supporters by its past achievements. After all it had been in power for more than four decades. Besides, it was far more resourceful.
- The BN was a middle-way coalition, which was a contrast to the BA's radical image presented by the PAS and the DPA.

Reasons that account for the opposition coalition's failure include:

- The gerrymandered division of the districts was disadvantageous.
- The young voters were excluded owing to the carefully chosen voting day.
- Anwar's wife Wan Azizah did not demonstrate her charisma.
- The Administrative State controlled by Mahathir suppressed the potential development of the Reformasi movement.
- On the contrary to Malayan support of the opposition movement, Chinese support was the solid base of Mahathir's success.

IV. The Outlook of Party Politics in Malaysia

There are several frameworks of analysis that can be applied to the research of Malaysian plural democratic politics. They are the concepts of “consociational

democracy”²¹, “quasi-democracy”²², “semi-democracy”²³, “ethnic authoritarian democracy”²⁴, and “ethnic party politics”²⁵. There are considerable gaps between the ideal types and the reality. However, among them the idea of “consociational democracy” is creative and revealing. There are four characteristics in this framework of analysis: existence of mutual veto, guaranteed proportional representatives²⁶, high autonomy for internal affairs, and a government composed of leaders from different groups.²⁷

4.1 The party politics of multi-ethnicity

Malaysian plural politics is a fertile ground for producing different political ideas and theories, but pluralism remains the mainstream. Ratnam²⁸, Gordon P. Means²⁹, Alvin Rabushka³⁰, R. S. Milne³¹ and Ho Khau Leong³² (1988) conduct Malaysian political research from this basis.

The development of party politics in Malaysia is tightly linked with its democratic development. It can be divided into three stages: consociational democracy from 1955 to 1959, quasi-consociational democracy from 1960 to 1964, and ethnic authoritarian democracy from 1971 to the present.³³ However, it is worthwhile pointing out that neither ethnicity nor party preference can individually explain the multi-dimensioned politics in Malaysia. The “authoritarian democracy”

²¹ Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*, (New Haven: Yale University Press).

²² Haji Ahmad Zakaria, *Government and Politics of Malaysia*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987)

²³ William Case, “Semi-democracy in Malaysia: Withstanding the Pressures for Regime Change,” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 66, No.2, 1993.

²⁴ Chu Chia-hua □□□, 1994

²⁵ Wang, *op. cit.*

²⁶ Which means the distribution of public positions and expenditure parallels to proportion of ethnic groups. See Lijphart, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

²⁷ *Ibid.* Gordon P. Means's 'elite accommodation system' is similar to the concept of consociational democracy.

²⁸ K.J. Ratnam, *Communalism and the political process in Malaya*, (Kuala Lumpur : University of Malaya Press, 1965).

²⁹ Gordon P. Means *Malaysian Politics: The Second Generation*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1991)

³⁰ Alvin Rabushka, *Race and Politics in Urban Malaya*. (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1973).

³¹ R.S. Milne, *Politics in Ethnically Bipolar States: Guyana, Malaysia, Fiji*, (Vancouver : University of British Columbia Press, 1981); also by the same author, *Malaysia : Tradition, Modernity, and Islam*, (Boulder, CO. : Westview Press, 1986).

³² Khai-leong Ho, “The 1986 Malaysia General Election: An Analysis of the Campaign and Results,” *Asian Profile*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1988, pp. 239-256.

³³ Chu, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-110.

and “Malayan predominance” are mingled with each other.

Malay Nationalism is a historical phenomenon. It was difficult to build a Malay state based on Malay Nationalism in 1957 during the establishment of the Malaysian Federation³⁴. The cooperation of non-Malay's was indispensable. Therefore, an “Alliance” was established between UMNO, and MCA. In 1955 when the election of the Federal Legislative Council was held, the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) joined the 'Alliance.' Indian membership enriched the representativeness of ethnic groups in the 'Alliance.' Grounded on this coalition the 'Alliance' won the election and founded the government.

According to Giovanni Sartori's categorization, there are seven types of party system³⁵: one-party system, hegemonic one-party system, predominant one-party system, two party system, moderate pluralism, polarized pluralism and atomized pluralism. The development of party politics of an independent Malaysia can be divided into two stages: dominant 'Alliance' from 1955 to 1969 (between 1955 and 1965 UMNO was the pillar), and dominant BN from 1972 to the present (between 1972 and 1988 UMNO was the pillar).

Some analyses of the General Election focus on the variables of ethnicity and party system to explain the plural democracy in Malaysia. Their main concern is to explain how the electoral outcome will effect the development of party politics. The 1999 election showed that Chinese and Malays shifted their party preference and this will affect the course of political life in the future. The distinguishable phenomena in the election were as follows:

1. The PKN led by Wan Azizah won only 5 seats. This suggested that the votes could not be transformed to seats proportionally owing to the gerrymandering districts. The 'excess profit' is 20%.
2. The split of Malayan votes was a warning to Mahathir. The implication of the loss of two states and the failure of six ministers cannot be underestimated. It seems the ruling party had lost dominance like in the past.
3. The PAS rose to be the main opposition force, and Chinese political status declined. The victory of Islamic fundamentalism will prevail among the 'Reformasi Movement' in parliament. On the other hand the Chinese opposition party's future is uncertain due to the decline of the general-director of the DAP Lim Kit Siang.

4.2 Moving towards two party politics?

The prospect for a change of ruling party and the emergence of two party politics seems slim in Malaysia at present. During the 1960s while the Malay Communist Party was influential and powerful, the Socialist Front, based on class awareness and

³⁴ Chu-Tien Wu, “The Malaysian Ethnic Group: The Retrospect of Past Thirty Years,” *Issue and Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 5, 1993, p. 55.

³⁵ The categorization is based on strength of party, party's potentiality to rule and the competitiveness of party. Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 122.

labor alliance, was one of the active political actors. However, its influence faded after consistently failing to win one third of the seats in parliament.

The other chance of bringing about a two party system appeared during the great split inside the UMNO during 1980s. The split led to the so-called 'two-line' politics³⁶. Tengku Razaliagh left and established the 'Semangat 46' that mainly attracted Malay supporters. He resorted to advocating the establishment of a two party system and promoted the idea that 'democracy is more important than ethnic interests'³⁷, but he failed in this aim too.

Based on past experience, the ruling coalition implemented well designed countermeasures to meet the opposition's challenge. The solidarity created by the Anwar Event among the Reformasi movement and the antagonism between the BN and the BA seemed to generate a two party system. However, Mahathir's strategies, that aimed to please the Chinese and at the same time rose Malay dissatisfaction, proved to be more effective. The winner took his fifth tenure and became the Malaysian leader into the 21st century.

4.3 Will Malaysian Middle Classes be Political Participants?

More and more Malaysians are evidently now choosing to ignore the 'official' media and to pick up information from alternative news purveyors. The PAS weekly newspaper, Harakah, hit a circulation of more than 380,000 before it was forced by the Home Ministry to become a bimonthly paper. Indeed, certain strata of the knowing public have become so politicized that they have created and used a host of alternative news sources to supplement the existing, government-dominated media.³⁸

For the 900,000 Malaysian Internet users, not only have the number of Reformasi Internet sites increased by leaps and bounds, but the number of hits on the most popular ones have been unimaginable. For example, Laman Reformasi (a.k.a. Mahazalim) at time of writing when it was launched. At the height of the Anwar affair there were at least some 30 Reformasi-related sites in cyberspace. There are also a number of ongoing list serves and web-sites-freemalaysia, sangkancil, alternative reports and commentaries on the unfolding events.³⁹

The Reformasi movement has brought onto the political center stage a new political culture of peaceful political protest and dissent. Ironically, the reflexive intolerance of the Mahahir government to the Reformasi movement has only served to enhance the imperative for political reform. The new Parti Keadilaan Nasional, which is multiracial in approach and membership, and the other main opposition parties-PAS, DAP and PRM-were all propelled by the political events to band together to form an

³⁶ Khai-leong Ho, *Malaysian Chinese Political Figures: Orientation, Evolution and Typology*, paper presented at The 4th International Chinese Overseas Conference, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan, April 26-28, 2001, p. 147-154.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.150.

³⁸ See Johan Saravanamuttu, "Is There a Politics of the Malaysian Middle Classes," in *Southeast Asian Middle Classes*, ed. Abdul Rahman Embong, (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit, 2001).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

Alternative Front or Barisan Alternatif (BA) against the BN government.⁴⁰ Although the November 1999 elections returned the Barisan Nasional to power, the BA through PAS captured both the Kelantan and Terengganu state governments. Both Keadilan and DAP fared poorer than PAS, but obtained 10 and five parliamentary seats respectively and together, with the 27 PAS seats, now constitute the strongest opposition in Parliament in the Peninsula since 1969. The Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) in Sabah won three other seats and the opposition bench now has 45 members.

The above depiction of events and developments shows an interesting new trend in Malaysian politics, namely, the increasing involvement of Malays in issues relating to justice and human rights which are universalistic in terms of political discourse. While it cannot be denied that political mobilization on these issues continues predominantly through ethnic-cum-religious channels and processes—the formation of Keadilan, which is multi-ethnic in membership, is a political development that breaks that ubiquitous pattern of Malaysian politics. The formation of Barisan Alternatif also suggests that political practices are shifting in the direction of multi-ethnic coalitions, which valorise non-ethnic rather than ethnically slanted political discourses. In short, the discursive space of Malaysian politics has expanded to include universalistic agendas, which hitherto remained largely in the realm of “doxa”.⁴¹

V. Mahathir: the Oriental Giant of Authoritarianism

In November 1999, the ruling coalition led by PM Mahathir won 148 seats. Mahathir claimed victory and reshuffled the Cabinet. However, after Ramadan, he started a process of political cleansing. On January 12, 2000, when Mahathir and his wife headed overseas on holiday, the police arrested opposition members and a publisher.⁴² Zukifli-Sulong (□□□□□□), the Chief Editor of the PAS newspaper Harakah ('□□□') was included, and as well as the publisher Shiau lin-tai (□□□). The Acting Chairman of the DAP and a prestigious human rights lawyer Karpal Singh (□□□) was accused of violating the Anti-inflammation Act of 1984. The Vice Chairperson Marina and Director of Youth Group of Justice Party Mohamad Ezam (□□) were accused of violating the Anti-inflammation Act and the Official Secrets Act (OSA). On April 21 Mohamad Ezam and the Vice Chairman of the PKN Chua Tien-Chan (□□□) were respectively accused of colluding in the organization of an illegal rally⁴³ because the PKN was planning to hold an anniversary meeting for Anwar's first year in prison on April 15 at the National Islam Hall. They were arrested at a preparation meeting but both denied the charges.

Having sacked Anwar and enduring UMNO's loss of 30% of the Muslim votes in the General Election in November 1999, UMNO's Chairman Mahathir was still

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁴¹ “Doxa” denotes taboo in discursive terms, while “doxy” is the usual normalised and accepted political discourse.

⁴² *Asiaweek*, January 30, 2000; <http://www.yzzk.com/2005/5br5.htm>.

⁴³ *Lianhe Zaobao*, April 22, 2000.

capable of leading the country to overcome the financial crisis and its political instability.

The strategies employed by Mahathir of inviting Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji to visit Malaysia, meeting the demands of the Chinese electorate and dominating the election for Chairman of UMNO reminded observers how he won the election in 1990. Then he earned 127 seats in parliament and secured his third term as prime minister. He led his government for a second decade since 1981. He wrote down a big Chinese character ‘‘Ren’’ (endurance, 仁) during the meeting with Malaysian university students. This move greatly touched both Malayan and Chinese students.

Prime Minister Mahathir and the former Indonesian President Suharto can be seen as the advocates of oriental authoritarianism. Growing in the specific plural ethnic and cultural complexities, 'Mahathirism' is going to win the support of the middle class and Chinese voters. Mahathir's grabbing on power will make it more difficult to release the energy of civil society.

CONCLUSION

As predicted by a Chinese researcher, political democratization in Malaysia will be sluggish. The multi-racial and religious society can be helpful in modulating dynamic and liberal party politics. However, because of the split in support for the opposition coalition, the weak dual tendency of Malayan voting and low political awareness and sensitivity of Chinese people, the opportunity to terminate money politics, the tight control over the media and establish an independent justice system was missed. The Anwar Event generated a sense of solidarity, but it also made little contribution towards the removal of the authoritarian regime that has been existed at least for 21 years since the PM Mahathir's rule.

Mahathir, Suharto and Lee Kwan Yew are the leaders of three highly controlled 'Administrative States' in Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. Their personal leadership and characteristic ruling styles are an inseparable part of their legendary status. In May 1998 Suharto lost his power during the socio-political riots caused by the financial crisis. Lee Kwan Yew retired with honor in 1990 and has remained an influential Senior Minister since then. Only Mahathir remains on the stage. At the age of 76, he pushed the country through the severe challenge of the financial crisis and personally appointed his successor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. He has forged good relations with neighboring countries and has gained a bigger say for Malaysia in ASEAN. He is the longest-serving elected leader in Asia.

However, currently the peace and order in Malaysia might be superficial. The civil society has been squeezed by Mahathir's authoritarian regime. Whether the split Malayan votes can light the fuss to shorten the predominant one-party hegemony is an important variable; besides Malayan votes, economic growth and opposition party's power are two another critical variables which influence Malaysian political transformation in the near future.

Index 1

Anwar's Chronicle

- 1947 □ Anwar was born into a middle class Penang family. His father worked in a hospital and was brought up in the countryside. There was no electricity and running water in their house. Anwar was greatly influenced by Islamic culture.
- 1950s □ Anwar's parents joined the UMNO. His father became a Member of Parliament.
- 1959 □ Anwar was sent to a British-style college.
- 1967-70 □ Anwar studied at the University of Malaysia. Having been influenced by Malaysian nationalism, he headed a student movement. He led street protests and asked for Malaysian road signs to replace English ones.
- 1969 □ Mahathir was put in jail for political reasons. Anwar visited him in jail and the two became close friends.
- 1971 □ Anwar founded the pro-Islam 'Malaysian Youth Movement' and sought students' support for Mahathir's release.
- 1974-76 □ Anwar was arrested under the Internal Security Act and was imprisoned for 22 months.
- 1979 □ Anwar married ophthalmologist Wan Azizah Ismail. They have 5 daughters and one son.
- Mar. 29 1982 □ Anwar was invited to join the UMNO by Mahathir.
- Dec. 1 1993 □ Anwar was appointed to the position as Deputy Prime Minister. He was the second most powerful figure in the UMNO.
- May 1997 □ Anwar was appointed to the position of acting Prime Minister for two months.
- Sep. 2 1998 □ Anwar was sacked from the positions of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.
- Sep. 21 1998 □ Anwar was arrested under the Internal Security Act.
- Apr. 1999 □ Wan Azizah Ismail founded the PKN.
- Oct. 1999 □ The PKN and the other three opposition parties established the BA.
- Nov. 1999 □ The BA failed to win two third votes.