

Chapter 2

THE MALAYSIAN PRESS AND THE STATE

Introduction

This chapter discusses the relationship between the press and politics in democratic countries with a focal point on the Malaysian press system. In Malaysia, the press is closely associated with the state, or the political parties in the *Barisan Nasional* due to two reasons. First, there is an active involvement of press owners in the Malaysian politics. Second, the encroachment of a few prominent politicians in the local press institutions is believed to be intentional and politically motivated. In this chapter, the relationship between the press and politics is examined from a political perspective in the Malaysian context.

The press and politics

Today, communication-oriented society depend on the press to provide most of the material out of which they construct their understanding of reality. Based on information transmitted and news reported by the press, society is able to form their evaluation of political and socio-economic structures, public policies and social changes in the country. The functional role of media in the dissemination of information and provision of guidance is most

significant in shaping public opinion, particularly when individuals do not have pre-existing opinion towards the media agenda. On the other hand, the government is dependent on the press as a vehicle to represent and to define reality for the society it serves.

However, the concentration of press ownership in the hands of a few media barons is apparent when takeovers, acquisitions and mergers become a common practice for public listed printing presses. There are, in the media industry, companies that gradually expand into media-related business, while others diversify out of the publishing industry for better integration.¹ This has resulted in aggressive media groups becoming a one-stop media with controlling interests in different channels and mediums.

In countries where printing presses are required to apply for printing permits to start operation, press ownership thus becomes an exclusive business activity for those associated with the ruling

¹ For example, Nanyang Press (Malaya) Limited was incorporated in 1958 as an advertising and distributing agent of *Nanyang Siang Pau*, a Chinese language newspaper. The installation of its own plant and machinery enabled the company to start printing and publishing its own daily, *Nanyang Siang Pau*. The company changed its name to Nanyang Press (Malaya) Bhd in 1966, and was converted into a private limited company in 1974 before it was public listed in the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange in November 1988. To date, Nanyang Press (Malaya) Bhd is principally an investment and property holding company which has more than 20 subsidiaries. The holding company for Nanyang Press (Malaya) Bhd is Hume Industries (Malaysia) Bhd -- the flagship company of a well-diversified Hong Leong Group. The printing and publication business of Nanyang has been transferred to its wholly-owned subsidiary, Nanyang Siang Pau Sdn Bhd. This example shows how an advertising agent expanded into media-related business and later diversified out of media industry when it had gained sufficient financial backup from its holding company.

political party and the state. State intervention in the press system is often justified by authoritative state executives urging the vernacular newspapers to serve national interests and to safeguard harmony of the society, rather than serve the masses' right to know and to be informed.

Theoretically, the press in a libertarian state should give a truthful and comprehensive notion of social reality, which provides a forum for dominant and alternative ideas within the society.² The idea of a free and responsible press can only be realized when the press is financed by the public and when journalists are fully aware of the ultimate aim of the press, which is to serve the public interest rather than the interest of its owner.

Despite the continuous struggle for the independence of the press from the state as well as the owner, some argue that the influence of owners is ever-present and ever inevitable (Altschull, 1984). Ownership control takes place when owners intervene in editorial policies via both allocative and operational control, which determine the content of the newspaper. According to Graham Murdock (1982:122), there are two basic levels of control -- the allocative and the operational. At the allocative level, owner can define the overall

² The libertarian theory and social responsibility theory describe what the press ought to be rather than what they really are. These theories, however, provide guidelines to journalists about what the society expects from them.

goals and ideology of the organization and ways to deploy its productive resources. At the operation level, owner has the power to determine, instruct and supervise the editorial as well as the day-to-day operations. The control is sometimes structural rather than instrumental, as journalists who are aware of the owners' personal, political and economic interests will ensure the flow of information is consonant with those interests without instructions from the top management.

When a press is no longer independent of political control by the state and corporate power by its owner, it has the tendency to depend on official sources while ignoring dissent opinions. In other words, the press is not free from licensing, censorship, ownership control and political pressure is unlikely to provide a 'free marketplace of ideas' for its readers.

Furthermore, the press owners' support for the state is usually imposed subtly, so that even the most critical and well informed group is not aware of any biases in news reporting. Prominent leaders representing the status quo tend to define unacceptable opposition as dissident and deviant, and the views of the executives in power will be echoed without hesitation by media practitioners. In fact, hegemony is a constantly reasserted definition of a social situation, by way of

discourse rather than political or economic power, which becomes real in its consequences (Hall, 1982:56-90). This is especially true when newspaper owners are closely linked to political parties or politicians.

Within this framework of legal restrictions, political control and corporate ownership, the critical political economy media theory previously presented in Chapter 1 is believed to best describe the situation of the Chinese dailies in Peninsular Malaysia. In brief, this theory emphasizes economic power and logic in newspaper businesses, where newspapers are seen as a commodity to be exchanged with other production factors, rather than a mere cultural production with little economic value. The theory argues that public interest in communication is subordinated to private interest as the former is restricted by its objective or aim of profit making. However, this theory assumes that the sole intention of owners is to make profit by gaining popularity among advertisers and sustaining readership in the long run. It overlooks the society's influence on the press, where readers can play an active role to show preference in the media content, and advertisers are capable of determining commercial strategies in a free market.

Previous media research have focused on the functions and the effects of government-controlled media to improve the standard of living of the people, and how they could contribute to the economic

advancement in developing countries. The communication development approach is more concerned with the communicator of the development message and the effect of the communication. This dominant paradigm suggests that the power of media is influential especially in a just, liberal, democratic and legitimate society. Through systematic research practices in the social sciences, this paradigm has shown that the media are effective means to socialize, inform, mobilize and shape opinion of the society. However, this paradigm ignores the fact that there are contradictions within what is portrayed in the media and its distance from social reality. The content and effects of mass media appear superficial when dealing with problematic issues in relation to national identity, ethnic conflict, economic reality and political ideology. In short, this paradigm emphasizes a linear transmission model of media effects and overlooks the complex interface between the printing presses and the society they serve.

Contrary to this, the alternative paradigm shows that media are simply not value free. Media culture has to be viewed in a larger context, including the political and economic activities of the media. This paradigm argues that media content cannot be neutral or non-ideological due to commercialization, low standards of truth and control by unscrupulous monopolists (McQuail, 1994:46). It is thus necessary to explore the language or meaning of these media content,

to understand the media materials offered by groups with different priorities, and to carefully look beyond the intention of owning and controlling the mass media.

The critical view of this alternative paradigm is complementary as well as contradictory of the dominant paradigm. In the United States, where giant media firms combine with other giant corporations to project a common political front, they are powerful enough to decide who should be in political power by granting favourable treatment to a particular party, and unfavourable coverage or non reportage to another. The owners, usually with an intention to take personal interest in media ownership, are free to decide on the ideological content. On the other hand, the expression of ideas by groups with no access to media are apparently tuned down or silenced by these powerful owners. This has thus raised another question of freedom of expression, which was stated by libertarian theorists as early as the seventeenth century.

The libertarian theory supports the idea that the press should be a “free marketplace of ideas” to ensure that the entire society is not deprived of the opportunity of exchanging opinions. It also supports the rights of the society to receive information and to make judgements of their own; to resist censorship and regulations that prevent investigative journalism; to safeguard public interest rather than the

private interest of the owners and advertisers. On the negative side, it also paves the way to justify and defend the irresponsible acts of the media – to be insensitive, sensational and unethical, to show no respect for the status quo, privacy or decency. A free and rational society, nevertheless, will not tolerate these conducts which are likely to infringe on the harmony or the prosperity of the country and its people. It is argued that state intervention helps to draw proper guidelines and set necessary limits to freedom of expression.

Nevertheless, it later became evident that this approach is not in turn very satisfactory because it overlooks the self-interests of the private owners of contemporary media whose aim is to maximize profit, rather than to safeguard the well-being of the masses (audience). Media researchers began to realize that media power should also be interpreted and examined in relation to the media owner and ownership, a point which is much emphasized in the participatory paradigm of development communication (Kasoma, 1990:79-82).

Research on media organizations has been carried out extensively after the shifting paradigms of the power of media from the dominant to the alternative as a means to understand the inaccessibility of opposition to media in society.³ In other words, the

³ The dominant paradigm presumes an ideal society which is democratic (having elections and representation), liberal (secular, free-market conditions, freedom of press), pluralistic (institutionalized competition between parties and various interests)

alternative paradigm is more concerned with the inequality in society where opposition is often deprived of access to media and people are deprived of the right to know, thus resulting in misinterpretation and misunderstanding among members of society.

From a theoretical perspective, the press in a democratic society is obliged to report, comment and investigate actions of government and politicians without fear or favour. In addition, the press can enhance understanding and encourage exchange of ideas among members of the society. The press is able to guide the masses to think about certain issues deemed important by the press, by means of consistently portraying and emphasizing on other issues deemed important.

While it is widely accepted that the press should be free and independent to uphold the freedom of speech, an absolutely free and independent press has not yet come into being, not even in the most admittedly democratic country. A newspaper is controlled directly or indirectly by its owner and the state, and it is confined to governmental and societal constraints, legal or conventional.

There are, in general, two contradictory viewpoints pertaining to the relationship between the press and the state. The conflict-

and orderly (socially integrated, peaceful, fair, legitimate). The alternative paradigm offers a critical view of society and rejects value neutrality in the process of communication in a society which deprives the minorities.

provoking model sees the press as an independent entity from politics and the state. The press is a watchdog of the government to protest against power abuse by politicians. The 'Fourth Estate' is an ideal notion about the press playing the role of a watchdog independently from executive, judiciary and legislative systems. The press is responsible for the provision of truthful information to help the society in the decision making process particularly during political crises. For instance, the press plays an important role to uncover the truth when the credibility of the politicians is doubted. However, if the press is in such conflicting position with most political parties, it will be unable to obtain sufficient information for the readers.

On the contrary, the consensus-building model suggests that the press and political institution are interdependent. Political organizations providing information for the press will in turn be given favourable coverage. When the press takes a political stance in favour of a particular party, it is likely for the press to disseminate political propaganda of that party and practise self-censorship in the news selection against undesirable news to the party. This model regards the press and the state as having equal power, which is distant from the reality in most countries.

In Malaysia, the state-press relationship is neither conflict-provoking nor consent-building. The press is too often confined by the

state via legal constraints and supervision of the executives in power. It is dependent on the government for the granting of publishing licence and printing permit. Indeed, the press has little autonomy on what should and should not be published as the state is empowered to withdraw its publishing permit when the publication is deemed contrary to the public interest.⁴ The Malaysian press has not been given equal power with that of the state, but instead it is subservient under the control of state.

⁴ Section 13 and 13A of Printing Presses and Publications Act of 1984 and Section 13B of its Amendment Act A684.

An overview of Malaysian politics

Malaysia's Ninth General Election held on 24 and 25 April 1995 had shown overwhelming support for the ruling *Barisan Nasional*⁵ (BN) or National Front coalition, winning 162 of 192 parliamentary seats and securing a comfortable five-sixth majority in parliament to rule the country for another five-year term. The *Barisan Nasional* government headed by Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad gained strong support from the voters for its satisfactory performance in the economic sector. Malaysia has been able to accommodate a level of economic growth of eight per cent annually since 1988, following the recession in the mid-1980s. The political stability, social harmony, modernization in rural areas, coupled with the emergence of a large middle class, have led Malaysia to set an example of nation-building for other developing countries. Malaysians are now looking forward to becoming an industrialized nation by the year 2020, a vision inspired by the Prime Minister which entails the creation of a progressive, responsible, ethical and caring Malaysian society.

⁵ The *Barisan Nasional* government coalition as in the 1995 General Election consisted of fourteen political parties representing the interests of the different racial groups in the Peninsula, Sarawak and Sabah. The above mentioned parties were as follows: United Malays National Organization (UMNO), Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), Malaysian People's Movement (Gerakan), Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB), Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), People's Progressive Party (PPP), Sarawak National Party (SNAP), Parti Bangsa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS), Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat (AKAR), Sabah Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP), Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRs) and Parti Demokratik Sabah (PDS).

The history of the Malaysian political system dates back to the late 1950s. On 31 August 1957, eleven states of the Federation of Malaya headed by the first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman achieved self-rule and Independence from the British. The foundation of political culture in Malaya, and later Malaysia, is a reflection of the 'divide and rule' policy implemented by the former colonial government. Settlements of different ethnic groups were classified by occupational and residency identification.⁶ The Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak, together with Singapore, joined the Federation to form Malaysia on 16 September 1963. However, Singapore opted to separate from Malaysia to be independent in 1965.

Political parties with ethnically-based restrictions upon membership have been widely accepted by Malaysians in the previous elections and has now become an important scenario of Malaysian politics. During the British colonial period, political parties were formed to represent three major ethnic groups in the Peninsula – the Malays, Chinese and Indians. Three major political parties formed

⁶ The British government kept the Malays, Chinese and Indians under control by placing different ethnic groups in different economic sectors. The identification of occupation had caused diversification among the Malay indigenous and the Chinese and Indian immigrants. Among others, the geographical and language barrier, the lack of communication channels, and the fact that each community was ruled by their own leaders, allowed communal politics to be deep-rooted in the politics of Malay Federation and later in the independent Malaya in 1957 and Malaysia in 1963.

before Independence were the United Malays' National Organization (UMNO), Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). Paradoxically, when these political parties eventually combined to form a coalition⁷ to achieve a majority ruling in the elections, communal politics was reinforced by each ethnic group intended to rally support in constituencies comprising the Malay, Chinese or Indian electorate. Since Independence, communal parties have been preoccupied to mobilize support with a single ethnic group in mind at the expense of another ethnic group (Barracrough, 1986:270).

With the formation of Malaysia in 1963, the population of the new nation became more heterogeneous when indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak came into recognition.⁸ Given the diversity in ethnic background, the Alliance coalition played a vital role in uniting the different ethnic groups while preserving plurality. In June 1974, the Alliance expanded and formed the *Barisan Nasional* coalition to build

⁷The first coalition came into being between UMNO and MCA in 1952 during the Kuala Lumpur municipal election. The Alliance was formed when MIC joined the UMNO-MCA coalition in 1955.

⁸ In 1993, the total population of 18.2 million was made up of 62 percent Bumiputera -- predominantly the Malays and other indigenous peoples including Orang Asli from the Peninsula; Bidayus, Ibans, Dayaks, Kadazans and Melanau from Sabah and Sarawak, 29 per cent Chinese, 8 per cent Indians and 1 per cent others. *Yearbook of Statistics 1993*, Department of Statistics Malaysia, July 1993.

a stronger foundation for a multi-ethnic society along ethnic lines.⁹ The rationale for forming a new coalition was to control ethnic hostility, to depoliticize tense ethnic issues and to compromise at an elite level (NSTP Research and Information Services, 1994:2). Judging from results of the previous general elections where both the Alliance and the *Barisan Nasional* have secured majority seats in every general election since 1955, the formation of a multi-ethnic coalition has proved to be a strategic move that has gained general acceptance from the people.

The compromise and understanding among the component parties of the Alliance worked out well until it was shattered by the May 13 Tragedy in 1969, which later marked the milestone of the most fundamental policy change for the entire Malaysian society.¹⁰ The New Economic Policy (NEP) with its dual objectives to eradicate poverty and to restructure the society, was implemented in 1970. The

⁹ In February 1974, The Grand Alliance National Council decided to establish the Alliance Direct Membership Organization (ADMO) to give access to those who wished to be in the coalition but opted not to join any of the single ethnic parties. However, ADMO was abolished in 1975 when Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan) and People's Progressive Parties (PPP) which were open to all ethnic groups became component parties within the coalition. For an in depth explanation of Malaysian communal politics, see Simon Barraclough (1986: 268-281).

¹⁰ The racial riots of May 1969 was caused by the Chinese challenge to Malay political dominance under the leadership of the first Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman. There was also profound frustration among the people, especially the Malays, over the lack of economic progress after 12 years of independence. After the May 13 riots, the Malaysian politics and economy were set on a new course to assist the Malays by giving privileges to the Bumiputeras under the New Economic Policy (NEP).

perception of Malaysia as dominated by Malays -- one of the indigenous communities or *Bumiputeras* -- has been effective in moulding the political thinking of the Malays as the dominant community in the Malaysian political system (Ismail Kassim, 1979:7). The NEP had stressed on improving the economic status of the Malays and increasing the proportional shares of *Bumiputera* corporate equity, with a long term target of 30 per cent *Bumiputera* holding, while the remaining 70 per cent was to be held by foreigners (30 per cent) and non-*Bumiputera* (40 per cent). With the provision of aids by the government, the NEP has resulted in an up rise of a Malay business community and active involvement of *Bumiputeras* venturing into various corporate sectors.

While the marginalization of all the non *Bumiputera* minorities is accepted as a reality in the Malaysian politics, the Chinese community in general regretted that the NEP which emphasized the priority and privileges of *Bumiputeras* especially the Malays, had deprived the Chinese of opportunities in the socio-economic aspect with serious policy implications in education, politics and the social class struggles of the Chinese community. Chinese who involved themselves in trade and commerce in the well-developed west coast of the Peninsula were among the first to be affected by the NEP. This has in turn created an opportunity for the Democratic Action Party (DAP),

a Chinese-based opposition party to gain support among dissatisfied Chinese community. At the same time, MCA, the sole party representing the Chinese in the government was seen as increasingly incapable of satisfying Chinese aspirations and subservient to Malay political supremacy, or UMNO in particular (Heng, 1988:3).

However, from a cultural point of view, the Chinese community are not deprived of the right and opportunity to prosper in their cultural traditions through the practices of language, arts and customs. In spite of the status given to the Malay language (*Bahasa Melayu*) as the national language, and English as the second language, Article 152 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia also guarantees fundamental freedom to preserve and sustain the use and study of all languages. The use of the Chinese language as a medium of instruction in a total of 1289 national-type Chinese primary schools and 60 Chinese independent secondary schools throughout Malaysia has proved that the government is not against the use and study of the Chinese language (*Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 20/10/1993). In addition, the development of Chinese education, especially at the primary school level, has helped to foster the growth of Chinese-orientated cultural activities, such as publication of Chinese language newspapers. A survey carried out in June 1994 showed that Chinese dailies constituted seven of 15 vernacular language dailies published in the Peninsula,

with a total circulation of more than 600,000 copies reaching 2.3 million readers every day.¹¹

The state is aware of the functional role of the local press and the Ministry of Home Affairs is responsible for the collection and translation of articles that appear in the vernacular newspapers. The Ministry is well informed of the conduct of each newspaper so that the Minister can exert governmental control upon any publisher and printer when necessary.

Malaysian newspapers are diversified in nature and varied in four vernacular languages, i.e. the national language (*Bahasa Melayu*), English, Chinese (Mandarin) and Tamil. Besides differences in language, these newspapers vary from one another in terms of target readers, news content, style and focus of reporting. The Malay, Mandarin and Tamil language newspapers target at respective ethnic groups, whilst the English language newspapers target at readers of all ethnic groups. Hence, the newspapers' approach in news reporting and presentation of content also differ as a result of different target readers. For instance, the Malay language dailies focus on Malay politics and Islamic values, the Chinese dailies focus on education and

¹¹Survey Research Malaysia Mid-Year 1994 Media Index. The other non-Chinese dailies were three English language dailies: *The Star*, *New Straits Times* and *Malay Mail*; three national language dailies: *Berita Harian*, *Utusan Malaysia* and *Harian Metro*; and two Tamil dailies: *Malaysia Nanban* and *Tamil Nesan*.

culture, the English dailies emphasize business and leisure, while the Tamil language dailies give much emphasis to local events and entertainment.

Advances in information technology have helped to widen the scope and variety of these dailies. For example, sophisticated mechanisms are used to obtain news and information, to computerize layout and typesetting, to print coloured pictures and to improve the overall image of the newspapers. The venture of newcomers into the print media industry is almost prohibited by the competitive market and difficulty in getting revenue from advertising sources. Newcomers not backed by financially stable corporations would be unable to sustain growth in the industry. This explains why most Malaysian vernacular dailies are owned by large companies that have either started with media-related business, or have diversified into the publication of newspapers from other businesses.

In a society where power is continually renegotiated among competing groups, the control of newspapers eventually becomes an invaluable source of influence (Sorlin, 1994:146). In Malaysia, the political scenario and reality are as such that the dominant political power lies in the *Barisan Nasional* government, or more accurately in UMNO, the prominent political party that leads the coalition. Renong Bhd, an UMNO's flagship company, successfully worked out a reverse

takeover of Fleet Group Sdn Bhd and Hatibudi Nominees Sdn Bhd in April 1990. The takeover via a share-swapping exercise worth RM1.2 billion immediately converted Renong into the leading conglomerate which controlled The New Straits Times Press Group (NSTP), Sistem Television Malaysia Bhd (TV3), Bank of Commerce, Hume Industries, Times Engineering, Kita Kellas, Cement Industries of Malaysia (CIMA) and United Engineering (M) Bhd (UEM). By 1992, UMNO had already obtained monopoly in the privately-owned print and electronic media channels, such as NSTP and TV3 via acquisition by Renong Bhd.

Four public listed media groups -- the New Straits Times Press (NSTP) Bhd¹², Nanyang Press (Malaya) Bhd¹³, Utusan Melayu (M) Bhd Group¹⁴, Star Publications Bhd¹⁵ -- are closely linked to the political parties via direct ownership or interlocking directorate. Although the executives in the government do not personally own any of these dailies, they nevertheless control the press via their political affiliates in their positions on the boards of directors of these vernacular dailies.

¹² The NSTP was listed on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE) in April 1973.

¹³ Nanyang Press (Malaya) Bhd was listed on the KLSE in November 1988.

¹⁴ Utusan Melayu (M) Bhd was listed on the KLSE in August 1994.

¹⁵ Star Publications was listed on the KLSE in November 1995.

The largest and most diversified media group,¹⁶ NSTP is indirectly under the control of the Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim via his political affiliates who have stakes in Malaysian Resources Corporation Bhd (MRCB), the holding company of NSTP. Meanwhile, *Utusan Melayu*, the oldest Malay language newspaper established in 1939, has been taken over by UMNO members since 1961. On the outset, UMNO has shown determination to control the daily via supervision on its editorial policy.¹⁷ *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *China Press* are much associated with Renong Bhd after the acquisition of 50 per cent stake of Nanyang Press (Malaya) Bhd by the UMNO flagship company. *The Star*, the leading English tabloid, is owned by MCA, the prominent Chinese political party. The business ties between the press and political parties have led to a prevailing belief that the local press is no longer the watchdog of the executives in power, but a cheerleader and a mouthpiece for the *Barisan Nasional* government.

¹⁶ In 1995, NSTP publishes six dailies: *Berita Harian*, *New Straits Times*, *Business Times*, *Malay Mail*, *Harian Metro*, *Shin Min Daily News* and three weeklies: *Berita Minggu*, *New Sunday Times* and *Sunday Mail*. *Berita Harian* is the leading national language daily with a daily circulation of 310,000 in 1994 whilst *New Straits Times* is the second largest English daily with a daily circulation of 178,000. Figures are quoted from "Audited Circulation Figures: Return on Average Net Sales". 1994. Kuala Lumpur: Audited Bureau of Circulation.

¹⁷ See Chapter Three for more information on the strike of *Utusan Melayu* staff in 1961 by journalists against the takeover of the most popular national language, *Utusan Melayu*, by UMNO. See also Mohd. Safar (1996:247-265).

Looking at the inseparable linkage between the Malaysian press and the prominent political parties, it thus gives an impression that the Malaysian newspapers can hardly be neutral, apolitical and impartial in their news reporting. Despite the close relationship between the owners of the press and the dominant political parties, journalists generally regard stringent press laws, and *not* ownership control, as the reason to show favouritism or allegiance for the ruling coalition. It is therefore argued that state intervention is a threat to the freedom of the press and an ideological weapon to influence the perceptions of local journalists towards most of the mainstream news reporting while ignoring alternative views of the people.

Conclusion

This chapter begins with an overview of the interrelations or interdependence between the press and political institutions. It looks into the role of the state or the establishment in ensuring the flow of public information via national media policies. It also discusses the limitations of the press to depend on the state as a major source of news, and the necessity to comply with legitimacy and other restrictions by the state in order to maintain their businesses. In other words, the operation of press is indirectly controlled by the state and its competitiveness is determined by a laissez-faire marketplace.

An overview of the Malaysian press shows that political partnership and concentration of ownership are increasingly becoming a threat to press freedom and a hazard to democratise the freedom of speech in the country. At least in the near future, political parties already having stringent control over economic resources are unlikely to lose their grip on the local printing presses voluntarily. The interplay between political personnel and the private owners of the press is going to be an important issue where there is conflict of interest between the two parties. Furthermore, as more and more readers realise that there is political affiliation of owners of the press, they are likely to question the role of this invisible hand, as well as the independence of the press.

This chapter shows that ownership and other forms of control over the local press are inevitable and necessary for the ruling coalition. The state implements media policies to facilitate both the gathering and dissemination of public information, to ensure that only selected information favourable to the state is disseminated among the people, and to make the unfavourable ones unknown to the mass. In short, the control of information in Malaysia is direct and effectively carried out by the state via government-owned media channels. The indirect control, which this study is trying to prove, lies in the influence of key political personnel on privately owned media organisations.

In line with the advancement of the multimedia technology in the country, media groups that are closely linked to the ruling coalition will be among the first to own the telecommunication and other networks. In order to be close to the status quo, even non-media-related groups are attempting to diversify into powerful media chains. In Malaysia, as long as the state remains dominant over all media organisations via direct and indirect interventions, this will further homogenize news content due to the support for the government by the mainstream media organisations.

References

- Berelson, B., Lazardsfeld, P. and McPhee W. 1954. *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Cheong, Sally. 1992a. *Bumiputra-Controlled Companies in the KLSE*. Petaling Jaya: Modern Law Publishers & Distributors.
- Cheong, Sally. 1992b. *Chinese-Controlled Companies in the KLSE Industrial Counter*. Petaling Jaya: Corporate Research Service.
- Chu Chee Chuan. 1994. *Zongguan Huabao Wushinian : Malaixiya Huawenbao Fazhan Shikuang* 纵观华报五十年: 马来西亚华文报发展实况 (Newspaper in Fifty Years: The Development of Chinese Newspapers in Malaysia). Kuala Lumpur: Oriengroup.
- Gomez, Edmund Terence. 1994. *Political Business: Corporate Involvement of Malaysian Political Parties*. Australia: James Cook University of North Queensland.
- Gomez, Edmund Terence. 1990. *Politics in Business: UMNO's Corporate Investments*. Kuala Lumpur: Forum.
- Gurevitch, Michael et al. (eds.) 1982. *Culture, Society and the Media*. London: Routledge.
- Kasoma, Francis P. 1990. "Media Ownership: Key to Participatory Development Communication". *Media Asia* 17(2).
- Lasswell, H. 1948. "The Structure and Function of Communication in the Society". In L.Bryson (ed.). *The Communication of Ideas*. New York: Harper.
- McQuail, Denis. 1994. *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*. London: Sage Publication.
- NSTP Research and Information Services. 1994. *Elections in Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: The New Straits Times Press (Malaysia) Berhad.
- Picard, Robert G. 1982. *Media Economics: A Guide to Concepts and Issues*, Vol. 22. Newsbury Park: Sage Publication.
- Reeves, Geoffrey. 1993. *Communications and the 'Third World'*. London Routledge.
- Schramm, Wilbur. 1964. *Mass Media and National Development*. California: Stanford University Press.