

Chapter 5

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE 1995 MALAYSIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS AMONG CHINESE DAILIES

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the effects of ownership and control on the news reporting of Chinese dailies during the 1995 General Elections. The underlying rationale to analyze news reporting during the campaign period is that, owners of the dailies have a stronger tendency to show their political affiliations compared with non-election period. The method of content analysis has been used to examine issues highlighted during the ten-day campaign period, as well as major issues that were politicized by these Chinese dailies.

The Malaysian press and elections

Upholding the principles of the parliamentary and electoral systems of the former British colonial government, Malaya held her first election for a Pre-Independence Federal Legislative Council in 1955. Since Malaya achieved Independence from Britain in 1957, the Alliance and later the expanded coalition of *Barisan Nasional* (National Front) had secured majority votes to rule the country. The results of the previous general elections of 1955, 1959, 1964, 1969, 1974, 1978, 1982, 1986, 1990 and 1995 indicated that Malaysians had generally accepted a political

system based on this multiethnic alignment in the bicameral democratic parliamentary system.

At present, the 13 states of Malaysia and the two Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan are ruled by the Federal Government, with much of the executive power vested with the Prime Minister, who leads the Cabinet and the coalition party with majority seats in the House of Representatives. The supremacy and concentration of executive power in the hands of a few *Barisan Nasional* leaders are strengthened and maintained through excessive control over the courts, at the expense of intervention upon the Malaysian judiciary system.¹

Despite the appeal of the opposition parties for a more democratic government,² the people gave strong support for the *Barisan Nasional* in

¹ There has been an anti-judiciary sentiment within the ruling coalition headed by Mahathir Mohamad even before he became the Prime Minister in 1982. As early as 1977, when Mahathir was the Deputy Prime Minister, he was reported to have criticized the judiciary for its attempt to intrude in the affairs and the functions of the executive (Rais, 1995:307-8). His hostility towards the judiciary escalated during the UMNO crisis in 1987 when UMNO, the prominent Malay party was rendered unlawful by the court by virtue of the fact that 30 of its branches were not registered. This had further raised dissatisfaction in the Prime Minister despite the fact that the court allowed the formation of New UMNO in the following year. The incident was closely associated with the suspension of the Lord President, Tun Salleh Abas in 1988. Mahathir made allegations against Malaysian lawyers and the Malaysian Bar Council for conducting overseas campaigns against his government, which had "indirectly sabotaged the country's economy" (*The Star*, 30/10/1990).

² Among issues raised by the opposition parties before and during the campaign period were the extensive abuse of power by BN leaders via the implementation of strict laws such as the Internal Security Act, Official Secrets Act and Land Acquisition Act; the concentration of power and wealth among prominent UMNO leaders, the manipulation of and control over local media by the government to attack the opposition parties, privatization projects, money politics, the re-delineation exercise and the unsatisfactory federal-state co-operation in the state of Kelantan.

the 1995 General Elections, thus enabling it to surpass its goal to retain a two-third majority and with an increase of 11.6 per cent in popular vote, from 53 per cent in 1990 to approximately 65 per cent in 1995. One of the reasons for the massive victory of the *Barisan Nasional* obtaining 162 out of 192 parliamentary seats was the swing in Chinese voters supporting the ruling coalition. In the west coast states of Peninsular Malaysia, *Barisan Nasional* succeeded in diminishing the traditional Chinese support for the DAP. In Penang, Perak, Selangor, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, Johor and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, the *Barisan Nasional* accorded an average of 64.45 per cent majority vote in 58 constituencies where Chinese electorate constituted more than one-third of the total electorate (Gomez, 1996:32-33).

In the 1995 General Election, the *Barisan Nasional* enjoyed majority increases in almost all constituencies, winning more than one-third of the Chinese electorate. More than 20 per cent of these percentage majority increases were achieved in the following parliamentary constituencies: Pontian, Parit Sulong and Johor Baru of Johor; Lumut of Perak, Balik Pulau of Penang and Bukit Bintang of Kuala Lumpur (Gomez, 1996:31). This swing in the Chinese votes contributed to the massive victory of the BN coalition. On the other hand, the DAP managed

to retain only nine parliamentary seats compared to 20 seats in the previous general elections.

The overwhelming support of Malaysians for the ruling coalition is clearly seen from the increase of 35 parliamentary seats won by the *Barisan Nasional*, i.e. 162 seats in the 1995 General Elections, compared with 127 seats won during the 1990 General Elections. Table 5.1 shows the numbers of parliamentary seats contested and won by each component party that formed the ruling coalition during the 1990 and 1995 General Elections, as in comparison with those contested and won by the opposition parties.

Table 5.1: Malaysian Parliamentary Seats Contested and Won in the 1990 and 1995 General Elections.

Political Parties	1990		1995	
	Contested	Won	Contested	Won
<i>Barisan Nasional</i>				
UMNO	86	71	101	89
MCA	32	18	34	30
MIC	6	6	7	7
PGRM	9	9	10	7
PBB	10	10	10	10
PBDS	4	4	5	5
SNAP	5	3	4	3
SUPP	8	4	7	7
*Others	20	2	13	4
Total	180	127	191	162
Opposition Parties	Contested	Won	Contested	Won
DAP	30	7	46	7
PAS	58	20	50	9
<i>Semangat '46</i>	61	8	66	6
PBS	14	14	28	8
PRM	3	0	3	0
AKIM	n/a	n/a	2	0
Independents	61	4	43	0
AKAR	4	0	n/a	n/a
IPF	1	0	n/a	n/a
Total	232	53	238	30
Grand Total	412	180	429	192

Sources:

1. NSTP Research and Information Services. 1994. *Elections in Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: The New Straits Times Press (Malaysia) Berhad.
2. Mara Institute of Technology. 19 April 1995. "Media Performance in Malaysia's 1990 General Election: Lessons and Predictions". Seminar on Media and Politics. Petaling Jaya: School of Mass Communication and Bureau of Research and Consultancy, ITM.
3. *New Straits Times*, 27/4/1995.

*Others:

- 1 USNO was expelled from the *Barisan Nasional* coalition in May 1993 and de-registered as a political party in August 1993.
- 2 SAPP was formed in February 1994.
- 3 LDP joined the *Barisan Nasional* in 1991.
- 4 AKAR joined the *Barisan Nasional* in 1991.
- 5 Direct candidates, i.e., non members of *Barisan Nasional* component parties who directly represented *Barisan Nasional*, did not contest in the 1990 General Elections.
- 6 IPF withdrew from the Opposition Coalition and declared its support to the *Barisan Nasional* after the 1990 General Election. However, IPF did not contest in the 1995 General Elections.

Findings and discussion

The results of the content analysis using the methodology described in Chapter 1 is shown in Table 5.2. From the table, the total number of news articles favourable to the *Barisan Nasional* (800) is significantly different from those favourable to the Opposition Parties (217). In addition, the total number of news unfavourable to the *Barisan Nasional* (38) is much less than those unfavourable to the Opposition Parties (324). A number of 435 news was deemed neutral by the researcher for not being pre-judgmental towards election issues.

This quantitative approach to analyse the stance taken by four Chinese dailies during the campaign period shows that out of 838 news articles on the *Barisan Nasional*, only 4.53 per cent was unfavourable to the coalition. However, out of 541 news articles on the Opposition Parties, 59.89 per cent was deemed unfavourable. Despite the fact that the Opposition Parties were given considerable coverage by the Chinese dailies, they were reported in a more negative manner as compared with the *Barisan Nasional*.

Table 5.2 - Total Frequency of Election News Favourable to the *Barisan Nasional* in comparison with News Favourable to the Opposition Parties in Four Chinese Dailies During the Campaign Period (Percentages in parentheses)

	Barisan Nasional		Opposition Parties			
	F	U	F	U	N	T(100)
SCJP	146 (33.80)	13 (3.01)	63 (14.58)	90 (20.83)	120 (27.78)	432
NYSP	111 (32.84)	7 (2.07)	51 (15.09)	56 (16.57)	113 (33.43)	338
SMDN	154 (53.10)	5 (1.72)	18 (6.21)	54 (18.62)	59 (20.35)	290
KWYP	389 (51.59)	13 (1.72)	85 (11.27)	124 (16.45)	143 (18.97)	754
Total	800(44.10)	38 (2.10)	217 (11.96)	324 (17.86)	435 (23.98)	1814

Note:

F = Favourable

U = Unfavourable

N = Neutral

T = Total

It is interesting to note that despite the vast difference ranging from 290 to 754 in the total election news published, four Chinese dailies can be compared in groups of two, namely, SCJP-NYSP and SMDN-KWYP. The first group, NYSP and SCJP accorded similar coverage of news favourable to the *Barisan Nasional*, falling in the narrow range of 32.85 per cent to 33.80 per cent respectively. News favourable to the Opposition Parties in SCJP and NYSP were also identical in the narrow range of 14.58 to 15.09 per cent. However, news unfavourable to the *Barisan Nasional* and Opposition Parties are significantly different from one another, with a difference of 1.39 per cent for the former and 4.26 per cent for the latter. SCJP's relatively high percentage of unfavourable news to the *Barisan Nasional* helps to account for the comparatively low coverage of those of NYSP, SMDN and KWYP.

The second group, SMDN and KWYP were almost identical in the percentages of news favourable and also unfavourable to the *Barisan Nasional*. Both dailies accorded 51.59 per cent and 53.10 per cent of favourable news to the *Barisan Nasional* respectively, and 1.72 per cent of unfavourable news. However, it is also noted that the percentages of coverage were not identical with the total number of news. In fact, there was a vast difference of total news between KWYP and SMDN. For instance, despite the same percentage accorded by these two dailies, KWYP published 2.6 times more articles than SMDN. The data reveal

little similarity in articles deemed neutral in all dailies, ranging from 18.97 per cent to 33.43 per cent. Data also indicate that NYSP allotted most articles deemed neutral (33.43 per cent), compared to SCJP (27.78 per cent), SMDN (20.34 per cent) and KWYP (18.97 per cent).

Table 5.3 shows another quantitative approach based on the size or space allocated to the *Barisan Nasional* and the Opposition Parties. It is quantified that the dailies had reported a total of 210,138.75 centimeter square of election news during a period of ten days. Of this amount of space, 41.72 and 10.85 per cent were allocated to news favourable to the *Barisan Nasional* and the Opposition Parties respectively. There was only 1.96 per cent of space allocated to news unfavourable to the *Barisan Nasional* as compared to 15.27 per cent of news unfavourable to the Opposition Parties. Besides, there was near to one-third (30.20 per cent) of space allocated to news deemed neutral to all parties.

Table 5.3 also shows that among four Chinese dailies, KWYP had given the most space in centimeter square to election news (80997.25), followed by SCJP (52668.75), NYSP (43678.50) and SMDN (32794.25).

Table 5.3 - Total Size (in cm²) of Elections News Favourable to the BN in comparison with News Favourable to the Opposition Parties in Four Chinese Dailies during the Campaign Period (Percentages in parentheses)

Daily	Barisan Nasional		Opposition Parties		Neutral	Total
	F	U	F	U	N	T(100)
SCJP	16883.00 (32.60)	1542.00 (2.93)	7228.00 (13.72)	8018.25 (15.22)	18997.50 (36.07)	52668.75
NYSP	13783.00 (31.56)	698.50 (1.60)	5703.75 (13.06)	5510.50 (12.61)	17982.75 (41.17)	43678.50
SMDN	16317.75 (49.76)	601.25 (1.83)	1696.50 (5.17)	5587.25 (17.04)	8591.50 (26.20)	32794.25
KWYP	40679.75 (50.22)	1286.00 (1.59)	8179.75 (10.10)	12967.00 (16.01)	17884.75 (22.08)	80997.25
Total	87663.50 (41.72)	4127.75 (1.96)	22808.00 (10.85)	32083.00 (15.27)	63456.50 (30.20)	210138.75

Note:

F = Favourable

U = Unfavourable

N = Neutral

T = Total

Data in Table 5.3 shows that KWYP allotted the most space to news favourable to the *Barisan Nasional* (50.22 per cent), followed by SMDN (49.76 per cent). SCJP and NYSP were identical in providing space for news in favour of the *Barisan Nasional*. On the contrary, all dailies published less than 3 per cent news unfavourable to the *Barisan Nasional*, a figure which indicates their partisan coverage and support for the ruling coalition.

SMDN had the least coverage of news favourable to the Opposition Parties with only 5.17 per cent of total space allotted to election news during the campaign period. Furthermore, SMDN published considerable news unfavourable to the Opposition Parties with a total of 17.04 per cent compared to KWYP (16.01 per cent), SCJP (15.22 per cent) and NYSP (12.61 per cent).

NYSP unsurprisingly recorded the highest percentage of news deemed neutral (41.17 per cent). Given its nature of a commercial press since its establishment in 1912, the relatively high percentage of news that are neutral seems to suggest its preference to be viewed as non-partisan in the local political arena. SCJP, the rival of NSTP, on the other hand allotted 36.07 per cent of news deemed neutral, while SMDN recorded 26.20 per cent and KWYP 22.08 per cent.

All dailies gave favourable reportage to the *Barisan Nasional* but of different degrees and to certain extents. SCJP had relatively more news

coverage on Opposition Parties in size, but it was still far from non-partisanship or balanced reporting. In conclusion, the dailies placed much emphasis on the *Barisan Nasional* campaign as well as issues favourable to the ruling political parties, a move which indirectly toned down the news of the opposition or even deprived them from being heard by the Chinese electorate.

Issues highlighted during the 1995 General Elections

There were a number of issues raised by the Chinese dailies during the 1995 General Elections which varied from other language newspapers as they targeted at different groups of readers. In this research, ten daily issues and five themes have been identified as the most significant electoral issues heavily emphasized in the Chinese dailies throughout the ten-day campaign period. Below are the tables and discussion on issues highlighted daily by four Chinese dailies for the period from 16 until 25 April 1995. Five themes will be discussed in detail to show the stance of Chinese dailies towards the ruling coalition during the same period.

Table 5.4 - Issue Highlighted on 16 April:
The Tanjong 3 Battle between Lim Kit Siang and Koh Tsu Koon

	SCJP		NYSP		SMDN		KWYP	
Date	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news
16 Apr	12	49	1	48	6	25	10	30
	24.5%		2.1%		24.0%		33.3%	

One day after the nomination day, on 16 April, all four dailies highlighted on their front pages that the *Barisan Nasional* won 11 seats uncontested. KWYP was the only daily which highlighted in the front page the straight fight in Tanjong Bunga between Koh Tsu Koon and Lim Kit Siang. Reports on Lim's decision to challenge the state seat held by the popular Chief Minister of Pulau Pinang, Koh Tsu Koon, were given considerable coverage in KWYP (10 out of 30 news), SCJP (12 out of 49 news) and SMDN (6 out of 25 news). However, judging from NYSP's relatively small ratio (1 out of 48 news), the daily took care steps to tone down the straight fight between Koh and Lim, Tanjong 3 issue, as the most interesting battle between two main actors of event, that is, with the *Barisan Nasional*'s Koh Tsu Koon representing the status quo, and DAP's Lim Kit Siang representing the voice of the opposition and the minority.

Table 5.5 - Issues highlighted on 17 April:
DAP Inciting Racial Tension

	SCJP		NYSP		SMDN		KWYP	
Date	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news
17 Apr	1	38	1	35	2	19	3	79
	2.6%		2.9%		10.5%		3.8%	

On 17 April, SCJP and NYSP published only one news on Mahathir Mohamad's warning against the DAP and its Secretary General, Lim Kit Siang for inciting tension by provoking racial sentiments in the latter's campaign. SMDN highlighted two reports on its front page that if the DAP succeeded in its attempt, the Malays and Chinese would be antagonistic towards one another. In another report on page two, SMDN reported that the Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim urged the people to ignore Lim Kit Siang's nonsense regarding the acquisition of Malay Reserve land. On the other hand, KWYP published three news on the same topic, it only comprised 3.8 per cent of a total of 79 news published on the election. Apart from that, it is the only daily which carried Lim Kit Siang's clarification on page two, stating that the 'more liberalized policies' and 'Chief Minister with power' was not being racist.

Table 5.6 - Issue Highlighted on 18 April:
The DAP's Plan to Rule the State of Penang

	SCJP		NYSP		SMDN		KWYP	
Date	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news
18 Apr	0	24	2	33	0	17	2	53
	0%		6.1%		0%		3.8%	

On 18 April, NYSP and KWYP each had two news regarding the DAP's plan to rule Penang if the party obtained a two-thirds majority. The main slogans of DAP, 'Chief Minister with Power', 'Full Liberalization for a Malaysian Malaysia', 'Try Five Years' were given considerable coverage by NYSP and KWYP. The number of news regarding the issue showed that NYSP had two out of 33 news whilst KWYP had two out of 53 news respectively. On the contrary, SCJP and SMDN did not publish any news regarding DAP's plan to democratize the country's political, economic, cultural and education policies, or to restrain the concentration of power in the hands of the executive. The non-reportage of SMDN and SCJP could be a result of ownership and control due to the following reasons. First, NSTP, the owner of SMDN, was closely interfaced with UMNO in business. Second, SCJP might have taken precaution not to offend the executives for fear of revocation of its publishing licence and printing permit.

Table 5.7 - Issue Highlighted on 19 April:

Kit Siang's Image as Arrogant, Extreme, Abusive and Acting out of Law

	SCJP		NYSP		SMDN		KWYP	
Date	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news
19 Apr	4	37	1	26	3	32	4	92
	10.8%		3.8%		9.4%		4.3%	

On 19 April, SCJP and KWYP both published four news articles respectively, on Lim Kit Siang's arrogant actions and extreme behaviour. However, these dailies also published Lim Kit Siang's refutation and the reason why he burnt the English daily, *The Star* in protest. SMDN highlighted this issue in three news reports, which constituted 9.4 per cent of its total coverage. NYSP, which published only one news article had taken a careful approach not to play up issues raised by Lim Kit Siang. Except for SMDN, the other three dailies reported Lim Kit Siang's refutation against Mahathir's accusation. However, only KWYP published Lim Kit Siang's refutation as headline in the front page, whilst NSTP published on the second page. It was likely that the two dailies tried to be impartial or merely to appeal to reader's curiosity and to increase sales.

Table 5.8 - Issue Highlighted on 20 April:
The Opposition Parties Protested to Have More Access to Media

	SCJP		NYSP		SMDN		KWYP	
Date	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news
20 Apr	2	48	1	38	0	32	0	73
	4.2%		2.6%		0%		0%	

On 20 April, only SCJP and NYSP reported that DAP ordered journalists to leave a DAP political *ceramahs*. This action was clarified by Lim Kit Siang as a protest to distorted reporting by the national television broadcast stations, RTM and TV3, and an MCA-controlled newspaper, *The Star*. In another issue, *Semangat 46* accused the government for controlling the access to television broadcasts, a medium which was owned by the people. SCJP reported both incidents while NYSP only highlighted the latter. SMDN and KWYP did not publish any news on the opposition's access to media. However, on the following day, SMDN published that Lim Kit Siang ordered journalists to leave a DAP *ceramah* as a reaction and defiance towards the media's bias and prejudiced reporting.

Table 5.9- Issue Highlighted on 21 April: BN's Plan to Develop Kelantan and to Lash Criticism Against PAS

	SCJP		NYSP		SMDN		KWYP	
Date	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news
21 Apr	3	50	2	35	2	31	2	80
	6.0%		5.7%		6.4%		2.5%	

On 21 April, four dailies reported strong criticism against PAS for the latter's inability to develop the state of Kelantan. SCJP published three articles on the *Barisan Nasional* leaders' criticism against PAS while the other three dailies published two reports carrying the same topic. SCJP, SMDN and NYSP had allotted 5.7 per cent to 6.4 per cent of their daily news respectively to lash criticism against PAS. SMDN highlighted two news which were published on the third and fourth pages, compared to NYSP, which put them on the ninth and twenty-eighth pages. KWYP did not give much coverage to criticism against PAS because the opposition party's stronghold was in Kelantan, and gained little attention in the Chinese based constituencies such as Penang and Perak. Among four dailies, SCJP published the most news -- one on the second page and the other two on the eleventh page. Except for KWYP, all dailies showed partial stance towards PAS, with news articles not about the party but against the party.

Table 5.10 - Issue Highlighted on 22 April: BN's Critique Against the DAP

	SCJP		NYSP		SMDN		KWYP	
Date	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news
22 Apr	5	56	2	30	3	36	7	54
	8.9%		6.7%		8.3%		13.0%	

On 22 April, there were 17 news and articles containing criticism against the DAP in four Chinese dailies. Among others, the Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad labelled DAP's Malay members as 'Ali Babas' for willingly being manipulated by DAP leaders to secure public office for themselves. There was personal attack directed to Lim Kit Siang for acting above the law, threatening the electorate and 'a sinner to the Chinese' for challenging Koh Tsu Koon, the one and only Chinese Chief Minister in Malaysia. KWYP published seven out of 54 news unfavourable to the DAP in general and Lim Kit Siang in particular. SCJP published five out of 56 news which were unfavourable to the DAP, SMDN published three out of 36 news and NYSP only two out of 30 news.

Table 5.11 - Issue Highlighted on 23 April: Tanjung 3 Manifesto and DAP's Plans to Develop Penang

	SCJP		NYSP		SMDN		KWYP	
Date	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news
23 Apr	2	37	3	39	0	27	11	108
	5.4%		7.7%		0%		10.2%	

Towards the polling day, as the need to disseminate election news became acute, there was an increase in the number of news published every day. DAP's supplementary manifesto for Penang, Tanjung 3 was announced three days before the polling day. Despite this announcement at the eleventh hour which failed to capture the attention of the electorate nationwide, the manifesto was given coverage except for SMDN. It is interesting to note that KWYP's election news shot up to 108, while SMDN had only 27 news on 23 April. SMDN which had a relatively small circulation totally omitted DAP's newly drafted manifesto and the party's pledge to the people to support the party.

Table 5.12 - Issue Highlighted on 24 April: The Opposition's Hostility and Violence towards Journalists

	SCJP		NYSP		SMDN		KWYP	
Date	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news
24 Apr	4	50	5	39	2	45	4	162
	8.0%		13.2%		4.4%		2.5%	

On 24 April, two incidents classified as anti-media were reported. In the first incident, the focus was on TV3 journalists being viciously assaulted by the supporters of PAS, and later admitted to hospital. In the second incident, DAP supporters smashed a television set during a *ceramah* as a protest against the *Barisan Nasional*-controlled media. NYSP published 5 out of 38 news reporting the anti-media incidents. SCJP, NYSP and KWYP each published four news, but the percentages varied mainly because of the difference in total news.

Table 5.13 - Issue Highlighted on 25 April: Predictions regarding the BN's victory

	SCJP		NYSP		SMDN		KWYP	
Date	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news	No. of news	Total news
25 Apr	7	43	4	16	0	26	2	23
	16.3%		25.0%		0%		8.7%	

The total number of news in KWYP shows a drastic decline, from 162 news to 23 news towards the polling day for Peninsular Malaysia on the 25 April. On the polling day, three dailies -- SCJP, NYSP and KWYP made speculations regarding the *Barisan Nasional's* victory. NYSP published a total of 16 reports on election and four news predicted a landslide victory for the ruling *Barisan Nasional*. SCJP published seven out of 43 news predicting the *Barisan Nasional's* victory, and KWYP published two out of 23 news on the same topic. It is surprising to find that SMDN, unlike its partial stance in the previous issues, did not show support for the *Barisan Nasional* via predictions on *Barisan Nasional's* victory.

Data on the daily issues highlighted by four Chinese dailies shows that each daily emphasized certain issues and de-emphasized some other issues, as a final result of editorial decisions or newsroom consensus of the journalists working with these dailies. For example, SMDN, constrained by its owner and pro-establishment stance, predictably did not give reportage to DAP's plan or manifesto to avoid conflict of interest with UMNO. On the other hand, SCJP gave considerable coverage to news related to Lim Kit Siang to attract readership.

Judging from various issues since 16 April, NYSP tried its best to keep a balanced reportage by providing both favourable and unfavourable news to DAP. On the other hand, KWYP with the most news published everyday gave a more detailed report of DAP and its Secretary General, Lim Kit Siang. The difference in coverage among the four Chinese dailies cannot be deduced to one single factor, nor can the findings be attributed to a result of ownership. This is because each news output had gone through various stages of editing, selection, censorship, gate-keeping and filtering, before it was finally printed in the form of a newspaper. It is not to be denied that various factors such as self-restraint, newsroom practice, governmental pressurizing technique and more significantly, the effects of ownership and editorial control had had an effect in the process of news selection.

It is also observed that despite different types amount of news coverage, none of these dailies could afford to overlook the importance to report the DAP's Tanjung 3 battle. The straight fight between Lim Kit Siang and Koh Tsu Koon was widely reported by all dailies. The reasons for high reportage on Lim Kit Siang vary from one daily to another, but the issue had attracted readers of the Chinese dailies throughout the election campaign period.

Below are five important issues which had become the media agenda for Chinese dailies:

- The BN leaders' attack on the DAP
- The DAP's counter-attack and clarification
- The opposition parties' access to media
- The BN's support for Chinese education
- The non political organizations' public endorsement for the BN

Issue 1. The BN Leaders' Attack on DAP

The *Barisan Nasional* campaign began and ended with an attack on DAP and its Secretary General, Lim Kit Siang during the campaign period in the dailies. This was not surprising as many Chinese still regarded Lim as the charismatic opposition leader who could safeguard the rights of the Chinese and voice the views of the minority in this country. Lim Kit Siang had also earned the respect of the Chinese for his outspoken manner, especially in revealing scandals in which *Barisan Nasional* leaders were involved.

In the Tanjung Bunga state constituency, Lim Kit Siang challenged the incumbent Penang Chief Minister, Koh Tsu Koon who took over the post from Lim Chong Yew after the latter was defeated by Lim Kit Siang in the 1990 general election. In 1990, the DAP managed to win 14 of the 33 state seats in Penang. However, in the 1995 General Election, the DAP could retain only one state seat, Batu Lintang, with a margin of only 62 votes.

The DAP's losses were also extensive at the parliamentary level with a decline in total votes from 17.7 per cent in 1990 to 12.1 in 1995. The support for the ruling coalition was seen even in constituencies where the DAP had a strong base, such as Rasah, Pontian and Lumut. The Chinese-based opposition party lost a substantial 5.6 percentage of electoral support for parliamentary seats and 3.2 per cent popular voter at

the state level. Even the traditionally opposition strongholds were swept by the *Barisan Nasional*.

Content analysis on this issue shows that there were 79 articles which focused on the BN leaders' criticism towards DAP. The Chinese dailies successfully portrayed DAP as the opposition party which attempted to provoke sentiments among the Chinese community by using the name of a multi-ethnic party. This was proved by the slogan 'Chief Minister with Power' which implied that Koh Tsu Koon was deprived of his 'real power' by the Malay leaders. The MCA President, Ling Liong Sik said DAP was not only racist in its attack on Koh Tsu Koon, but also "a sinner" to the Chinese community for challenging Koh (*Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 22/4/1995).

The President of Gerakan, Lim Keng Yaik regretted the DAP's decision to challenge Koh Tsu Koon, describing the act as 'using Chinese to subdue Chinese', which would gain nothing for the entire Chinese community (*Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 16/4/1995; *Kwong Wah Yit Poh*, 20/4/1995). Lim Keng Yaik satirized the DAP's slogan 'Try Us For Five Years' as 'Die For Five Years', and argued that there was no need for the Penang people to vote for the DAP just to fulfill Lim Kit Siang's wish to be Chief Minister with Power (*Shin Min Daily News*, 18/4/1995). For both Ling Liong Sik and Lim Keng Yaik, they argued that since Koh Tsu Koon was the only Chinese chief minister in Malaysia and if Koh were to lose in

the Tanjung state election while the DAP could not obtain a two-third majority, there would not be a Chinese chief minister in the future.

The Prime Minister and his deputy were among those who strongly condemned Kit Siang for provoking racial sentiments among the people. The Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad strongly criticized the personality of Lim Kit Siang as acting beyond legal constraints, suppressing freedom of local media and forever condemning the efforts of the government. Mahathir issued a warning to Lim Kit Siang to stop playing up racial issues and suggested that the DAP change its name to 'Party of Lim Kit Siang' since Lim was so keen on having his son, Lim Guan Eng carry on his cause (*Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 24/4/1995). Anwar Ibrahim attacked Lim Kit Siang as being arrogant, irrational and playing with fire when provoking racial issues such as that of the Malay reserved land (*Shin Min Daily News*, 17/4/1995). The Minister of Information, Mohammad Rahmat speculated that Lim Kit Siang's dictatorship would cause factionalism to DAP (*Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 23/4/1995).

Koh Tsu Koon described his antagonist Lim Kit Siang as 'a dictator who wears the coat of democracy' (*Kwong Wah Yit Poh*, 20/4/1995). Koh also blamed Lim for threatening the electorate by bringing up the issue of May 13 Tragedy a total of 27 times during a seminar held on 21 April. Koh also said that in order to make excuses for its failure, the DAP had created all sorts of untruthful statements and even

burnt a local English newspaper (*Shin Min Daily News*, 24/4/1995). While commenting on the DAP's manifesto, Koh Tsu Koon said that the DAP had no proper plan for the development of Penang and criticized its slogan 'Try Five Years' as following the path of social opportunists (*Kwong Wah Yit Poh*, 20/4/1995).

Issue 2: The DAP's Counter-Attack and Clarification

The DAP's counter-attack to BN leaders' criticism was generally given more coverage by the Chinese dailies compared with the national language and English language dailies. KWYP gave considerable space to publish a total of 10 articles on the DAP's counter-attack, while SCJP, NYSP and SMDN published seven, six and two articles respectively.

In the above mentioned articles, Lim Kit Siang responded to Mahathir Mohamad's criticism by urging his counterpart to stop making untruthful statements and attacks on the DAP. Karpal Singh's rebuttal also claimed that the Prime Minister had over-reacted to Lim Kit Siang's campaign strategy. Three DAP candidates were reported to have lodge a police report about the Prime Minister's "seditious statements" against their party leader, Lim Kit Siang.

Lim Kit Siang clarified in a seminar held in Penang that he did not challenge the police to arrest him. In fact, he said that cooperation between both parties (the police and DAP) was satisfactory. KWYP also highlighted Kit Siang's denial of provoking racial sentiments.

On the other hand, the DAP candidate for Kepong parliamentary constituency and a prominent leader of DAP, Tan Seng Giaw clarified that *Utusan Malaysia* had misinterpreted his words. Tan denied that DAP was facing a problem of factionalism and that he would leave DAP to run his own business as a professional.

SCJP highlighted Lim Kit Siang's response to an article in NYSP claiming that Lim Kit Siang was determined to be "Chief Minister with power", as envisioned in his dream. Lim Kit Siang responded that it was a mere distortion by NYSP. In response to the statement by Lim Kit Siang, on the following day, NYSP published another article clarifying that the daily had no vicious intentions by saying that Lim Kit Siang "dreamed to be Chief Minister with power". NYSP also quoted Lim Kit Siang as accusing the *Barisan Nasional* for "buying over" DAP members during the campaign.

Issue 3. Media and Political Parties

On 8 April 1995, Lim Kit Siang was reported as saying he believed the local media would try to build up credibility in the early part of the election campaign and then throw away all journalistic ethics in the last few days of the election campaign. Lim described this kind of irresponsible journalism as conforming itself to be “part of the dirty tricks campaign department” by the *Barisan Nasional* to ensure its victory in the election (*New Straits Times*, 8/4/1995). With great dissatisfaction, the Secretary-General of DAP criticized the BN-controlled media as “most dishonest, dishonourable, irresponsible and mischievous” towards the DAP and the Opposition all these years.

There was indeed a high incidence of deliberately misleading or confusing campaign rhetorics published in local vernacular newspapers which went uncorrected or undiscovered in the 1995 General Election. These incidents were closely related to the opposition parties that claimed that their access to media was denied even before the nomination day. On 19 April 1995, *The Star* reported that even a DAP candidate’s mother would not support DAP because the party failed to fulfill what they promised. However, on the following day, mother of Chow Kon Yeow, the DAP candidate for Pengkalan Kota state seat, denied what was quoted in the report. This was the misleading report that resulted in the burning of the English language daily and the boycott by DAP members. The hidden

agenda behind the protest, however, was not justified by all Chinese dailies, thus giving the impression that DAP was the party that provoked, and therefore to be blamed for that incident.

On 22 April 1995, *Utusan Malaysia* highlighted in the front page quoting Tan Seng Giaw as saying the DAP was facing a crisis of fractionalism. Tan Seng Giaw later denied another news statement that he intended to leave DAP. However, his clarification was published in only two Chinese dailies, SCJP and KWYP.

Another distortion by the local print media was an article published in NYSP on the eve of the polling day, portraying Lim Kit Siang in a humiliating manner. The article reported that the Secretary General of DAP, Lim Kit Siang, desired to be "Chief Minister with power", and was so determined that he even thought of this in his dream. It was reported that while openly criticizing Koh Tsu Koon as never to have had dreamt to be the Penang Chief Minister when he first took over Lim Chong Eu's chief minister post, Lim admitted that he was the one who dreamt to be "Chief Minister with power" (*Nanyang Siang Pau*, 24/4/1995). Although upset by such distortions, Lim Kit Siang did not have the opportunity to make any clarification through other Chinese dailies because the election campaign was supposed to end before the polling day on 25 April 1995. Since publication of political articles and all campaign materials in local newspapers was prohibited by the Election Committee after 12 midnight

on 24 April, it would have been a risk for the dailies to publish such a clarification.

In protest to these 'unfair news reporting' to DAP, Kit Siang reacted vigorously by burning *The Star* and urged for a boycott among supporters, claiming that *The Star* had the right to support the Barisan Nasional, but had no right to slander DAP members and distort DAP news. Lim ordered crews from TV3 and *The Star* to leave a DAP political seminar. His supporters crashed a television set in protest of the biased reports by television channels. In the past general election, news unfavourable to the opposition parties just before the polling day had a negative impact on *Semangat 46*, a Malay-based opposition party which proclaimed to have been victimized by the media controlled by UMNO.³

Purposeful distortion was a form of subservience towards hegemony which would further strengthen the status quo and jeopardize the minority. Realizing the disadvantages of not having access to the BN-controlled media, the opposition parties turned to political *ceramahs*, party press and other communication channels to disseminate their political ideologies. However, the attempts of the opposition parties to reach the

³ In the 1990 General Elections, Razaleigh Hamzah, the President of *Semangat 46*, was reported in most major newspapers as wearing a headgear with a Christian cross during his visit to Sabah. Razaleigh who challenged the Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad for the UMNO presidency in 1987 and lost, was defeated in the 1990 General Elections due to reports in the national language dailies which led to a general belief that Razaleigh had sold out the Malays as well as the Islamic faith in order to win in the election. See Tan Chee Beng (1990) for more information.

people have not been successful since majority of the electorate depended heavily on the mass media for election information.

In February 1995, the Deputy Minister of Home Affairs, Megat Junid issued stern warnings to three Chinese dailies -- *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *China Press* -- which had published articles deemed detrimental to the nation's peace and harmony. According to the National Chairman of the DAP Socialist Youth, Lim Guan Eng, since then there had been an almost complete blackout of DAP news in the newspapers (*New Straits Times*, 7/4/1995). In the same press statement, he attributed the inaccessibility of public opinions to the 'BN-controlled press' and claimed that the press took a partisan stand favouring the *Barisan Nasional*. The Malaysian mass media, according to Lim Guan Eng, had become part of the Government's Information Ministry to propagate for the *Barisan Nasional*. Lim urged the DAP's Central Executive Committee to boycott the media during the general election for 'the party had no choice but to let the people know that it was fighting for its survival with its hands tied behind its back and its mouth gagged'.

Commenting on Lim Guan Eng's suggestion to boycott the BN-controlled media, Lim Kit Siang speculated that the local media would "throw all journalistic ethics in the last few days of the election campaign"

to publicly declare their support and ensure the victory of the *Barisan Nasional* (*New Straits Times*, 8/4/1995).

On 17 April, before addressing the crowd outside a coffeeshop in Penang, the Secretary-General of DAP and the Opposition Leader, Lim Kit Siang burnt copies of *The Star* in protest of unfair treatment of news by the *Barisan*-controlled media. The following day, *The Star* published an editorial titled "In the Name of Freedom" to clarify and justify its stance. The leading English daily argued that despite criticism by the West, the Malaysian media were positive and constructive, capable of making their very own observations and evaluations. The newspaper would not jeopardize the well-being and the development of this country and would ensure continued harmony, stability and growth. On the same day, Lim Guan Eng and supporters set fire to copies of *The Star* in front of its headquarters in protest against the newspaper's 'biased reporting' against the DAP (*The Star*, 19/4/1995).

On 20 April, commenting on the DAP's symbolic burning of *The Star*, the Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad was reported as saying, "If DAP is the Government, there will not be the *New Straits Times*, *The Star*, the *Utusan*; instead we will have Rocket One, Two, Three, Four" (*New Straits Times*, 20/4/1995).

After the general election, Lim Kit Siang and Razaleigh Hamzah, the President of *Semangat 46* attributed their parties' failure to "a media

blackout" by the local media (*The Sun*, 29/4/1995). DAP's Tan Seng Giaw attributed the DAP's poor performance to five Ms: Mass Media, Money, Machinery, Manipulation and Monopoly.⁴ In fact, issue regarding the inaccessibility of the opposition parties to media had been raised even before the election was announced by opposition leaders as a reminder to electorate about their denial to access in terms of media coverage.

⁴ Tan Seng Giaw's speech. "Seminar on the 1995 General Election". Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya. 18 May 1995.

schools were left with the dilemma of whether to shift to another area or to have a physical extension

- the role and influence of Chinese school committees in the decision-making processes of education policies including the amendment of Education Act of 1961.
- insufficient allocation of funds for Chinese primary schools
- benefits for teachers were not improved
- insufficient Mandarin teachers in national secondary schools, causing a decline in number of Chinese classes
- many problems facing Chinese schools such as teaching staff and management.

In January 1995, three months before the election, members UCSCA and UCSTA visited *Sin Chew Jit Poh* and *Nanyang Siang Pau* to publicize a fund-raising project for Chinese national-type primary schools. This project was targeted at students of Chinese primary schools, urging each of them to donate one ringgit to the fund. Loot Ting Yee, a senior Chinese educationist and the then Vice President of *Jiao Zong* estimated that if 600,000 students in Chinese primary schools throughout Malaysia could donate RM1 each, then the project would acquire RM600,000. Since the amount of RM1 was affordable for most parents, and if they donated

more than one ringgit, the campaign would be able to achieve its target of RM1 million within three months, from January to March 1995.

In the meantime, another fund-raising project was expected to raise RM10 million to build an education centre for *Dong Zong* and *Jiao Zong* in Kajang. The theme used in both projects was "to remember those who fought to make the present possible for us". The act of canvassing for financial support away the public has always been a common practice among the Chinese community, and many do find it an exhaustive burden even though the amount requested was reasonable. The fund-raising campaign did not succeed in capturing the commitment and the attention of the Chinese parents who sent their children to Chinese primary schools.

On 22 January 1995, SCJP and NYSP highlighted the campaign with the aims to raise more funds and to show concern over Chinese education as they usually did. The dailies reported on how Chinese primary schools faced serious problems especially with reference to the shortage of qualified Chinese primary school teachers, and insufficient funding from the government to assist the development of Chinese primary schools. On 26 January 1995, a freelanced writer wrote in the *China Press* urging the public to support the campaign. The writer commented that Chinese schools had no official status, and that the government had been showing more concern over issues regarding the national primary schools, although the advancement of these national

schools had surpassed that of the national-type primary schools. The success of fund-raising campaigns, according to the same writer, would enable the Chinese primary schools to make a breakthrough and to be more independent.

According a senior editor of NYSP in an interview, these dailies' concern over Chinese education had a destructive effect and a negative impact on the *Barisan Nasional* government. Various problems of the Chinese primary schools highlighted in these dailies also indicated that the government had neglected the advancement and growth of Chinese education in this country. The reports mentioned above might have raised dissatisfaction among the Chinese community despite some other liberal policies towards Chinese schools. To some, this was the reason three Chinese dailies, *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, *Nanyang Siang Pau* and *China Press*, were warned by the Minister of Home Affairs, Megat Junid Megat Ayub a few weeks before the election.

Chinese education has always been a great concern to Chinese Malaysians due to a general belief that proper education that encompasses traditional values would ensure a good life in future. The most effective way to teach a child about these values is probably through the learning and usage of the Chinese language. Realizing the Chinese needs, the *Barisan Nasional* government has allowed Chinese education to flourish by subsidizing 1289 national-type Chinese primary schools throughout

Malaysia. It was reported that approximately 85 per cent Chinese were educated in Chinese primary schools while the other 15 per cent study in national primary schools. There is an increasing demand for Chinese education when even non-Chinese parents opted to send their children to Chinese schools. In 1995, there were 25,508 non-Chinese studying in Chinese primary schools (*Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 16/8/1996).

At secondary school level, Chinese students are allowed to study the Chinese language as a subject in the government schools with some conditions.⁵ There are 60 Chinese Independent Secondary Schools which receive no subsidy from the government. On the contrary, these schools are subsidized by the Chinese community and managed by school committee boards.

Two Chinese educational bodies, *Dong Zong* (UCSCA) and *Jiao Zong* (UCSTA) enjoyed immense grassroots support and used to be assiduously courted by Chinese-based political parties such as the DAP, MCA and Gerakan. However, in the 1995 General Election, the two bodies decided to be apolitical by taking a neutral stand and keeping a low profile during the campaign period. On the eve of the nomination day, *Dong Zong* and *Jiao Zong* declared to remain strictly neutral in the 1995

⁵ To set up a Pupils' Own Language (POL) class, there should be not less than 15 pupils in number. Parents usually write in or appeal to support the establishment of a class, however it is subjected to other external factors such as the availability of qualified language teachers and the accessibility of classrooms.

General Election (*New Straits Times*, 15/4/1995). The decision made by these politically influential Chinese education groups had indirectly helped MCA by minimizing pressure from Chinese electorate.

On the other hand, the Prime Minister had openly called on Malays to learn Mandarin for its commercial value, and the Deputy Prime Minister did likewise, stressing the significance of Confucian teaching and cultural values. The fact that Malay parents began to send their children to Chinese primary schools indicated the confidence of the Malays in accepting a more plural education system. The Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim with his popular slogan in Mandarin "*Wo men dou shi yi jia ren*" ("We're one big family") had often been quoted to portray the image of a peaceful and amicable relationship between the Chinese and Malay communities.

The *Barisan Nasional* government implemented more liberal education policies in the 1990s, which resulted in more private tertiary education opportunities. For instance, the liberalization policies encouraged the use of English language in institutions of higher learning. Such policies also enabled Chinese parents to send their children to private colleges for twinning programmes with foreign universities. Students who were disappointed with or turned down by the quota system by the Central University Unit that enrolled students based on ethnicity were now given the opportunity and the alternative to pursue a degree or professional

course in one of the many local private colleges. This was seen as a removal of the Chinese community's major grievances (*Aliran Monthly*, 1995:15(4)). In relation to Chinese cultural development, steps were also taken by the government to further liberalize the cultural policies to win the support from the Chinese community. These include complete removal of travel restrictions to China, the open encouragement of the learning of Mandarin, the introduction of the abacus as a tool for mathematics in all government primary schools, and a more lenient policy towards lion dances performance.

The Tunku Abdul Rahman College fund-raising project launched by MCA since 1991 was a long term plan to capture the hearts and commitment of the Chinese electorate who supported the DAP in the previous general election. Meanwhile, the MCA also organized the Langkawi Project to help school children from poor families regardless of race. In addition, the *Barisan Nasional* government increased funds allocation in the Federal Government budget for the 1289 Chinese national type primary schools and 60 Chinese independent secondary schools in the Sixth Malaysia Plan.

There was perhaps only one drawback on Chinese education which was unfavourable to the *Barisan Nasional*, that is, when the Bill for Education Act of 1961 was raised by Chinese educationists for fear of stricter regulations towards Chinese school committee boards. The

Chinese educational organizations also pushed for the abolition of Article 21(2) that enabled the Education Minister to abolish all Chinese primary schools when necessary. In short, the Chinese dailies played an active role to draw the attention of the Chinese community by carrying news regarding the Bill and highlighting the viewpoints of reputed Chinese educationists. The MCA from time to time also reassured the Chinese community of its role in the growth of Chinese education in the Amendment for the 1961 Education Act.

From the result of content analysis, KWYP published most news showing the governmental support for Chinese education with the highest average length. KWYP carried 17 news compared with 13 news articles in SCJP, 10 in NYSP and only five in SMDN. There were four statements supporting the government's liberal education policy towards Chinese education in KWYP. The daily carried lengthy articles on Tunku Abdul Rahman College's branch campus in Penang and its ground-breaking ceremony which was timely officiated by the former educationist and the incumbent Chief Minister of Penang. This new campus was expected to cater to the needs of Chinese students in Penang for higher education opportunities without having to move to Kuala Lumpur. The daily carried three news on the Langkawi Project launched by MCA to help rural pupils advance in their studies as well as on the MCA's effort in setting up education fund for 60 Chinese independent schools throughout Malaysia.

SCJP gave a high coverage to the government's liberal policy towards Chinese schools and also its allocation to help finance these schools. The daily also carried news on the government's approval to establish more Chinese schools in new residential areas. The *Barisan Nasional* candidate for Lanang parliamentary seat, Tiong Thai King, who is the younger brother of SCJP's owner, Tiong Hiew King was reported as being enthusiastic towards Chinese education as to have donated RM200,000 to Chinese independent schools in Sibu.

NYSP carried two news on the growing importance of Mandarin as emphasized by the *Barisan Nasional* leaders, Anwar Ibrahim, the Deputy Prime Minister and Fong Chan Onn, the Deputy Education Minister. The daily also published Kerk Choo Ting, a leader of Gerakan as self-commenting on the former Chinese educationists' decision to join the *Barisan Nasional* in order to change the ruling parties from inside. The daily also carried news article about the government's sincere respect towards Chinese education by encouraging the use of abacus, a traditional counting tool of the Chinese community. Fong Chan Onn announced that the government would invite abacus experts from China to teach in the local teachers' training colleges.

SMDN, however, did not focus on Chinese education throughout the election campaign period. It published only five news, three of which were on various efforts to develop Chinese schools. The daily highlighted

the Langkawi Project launched by the MCA published an article urging the government to approve a permit for the establishment of a college using Chinese language as its medium of instruction.

Issue 5: The Public Endorsements of Non Political Organizations for BN

The Chinese dailies published 40 articles on the public endorsements and support of non political organizations for the *Barisan Nasional* government. SMDN and NYSP each published 12 articles, while SCJP published 11 articles and KWYP only five articles. Analysis of headlines in four dailies (see Appendix F) shows that the public endorsement for the *Barisan Nasional* government issued by the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia (ACCCIM) was highlighted in most of the dailies. An interesting finding in this analysis was that Chinese dailies were very concerned over the feedback, whether in the form of praise or criticism towards the endorsement, by providing considerable coverage as follow-up news. This was evident when news containing MCA's criticism towards DAP's criticism over ACCCIM became a newsworthy issue. Generally, the selection of news during campaign period was crucial as news editors were usually bombarded by election news more than usual. News space in the dailies was indeed very precious to the editors and would result in unworthy news being omitted and remained unreported.

In response to the public endorsement by ACCCIM, more Chinese organizations issued statements to support the *Barisan Nasional* government. A highly respected Chinese social organization, the Union of Chinese Assembly Halls in Malaysia, represented by its president, Ng

Teck Fong, also alleged its support for the *Barisan Nasional*. Other Chinese organizations, such as culture and arts associations, praised the *Barisan Nasional* for its liberal policies towards Chinese culture. This particular act of endorsement was questioned by some members of these organizations who claimed that they did not give permission to a few persons to speak on their behalf during the general election.

Peranakan Kelantan, a group of businessmen who were originated from Kelantan gave a public endorsement to the *Barisan Nasional*, and this was published on the front page of SCJP and on the tenth page of NYSP. Nevertheless, endorsement by *Peranakan Kelantan* and its promise to invest in Kelantan if BN ruled (that is, by winning a majority of the state seats) was not given any reportage in SMDN and KWYP.

Unlike its stance towards issues discussed earlier, SMDN had a relatively high coverage on articles or news supporting the *Barisan Nasional* government. SMDN which was then owned by a Malay-dominated media group, the New Straits Times Group and controlled by the close associates of the Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, did not provide any reportage of the DAP's criticism on the ACCC's public endorsement. The overall stance of SMDN was comparatively more biased against the DAP and was, on the other hand, supportive to the *Barisan Nasional* as indicated by the selection of news in this daily.

NYSP accorded 12 news, out of which two were favourable to DAP. The President of DAP, Chen Man Hin, was reported as strongly criticizing the ACCC as being impartial in its stand while Liew Ah Kim, Member of Parliament for Seputeh described the endorsement as a challenge to the DAP. NYSP carried two news on DAP's criticism towards ACCC's endorsement, but did not carry any articles commenting on DAP's criticism. Besides, NYSP was the only daily carrying the endorsement made by the Union of Malaysian Insurance Agents to support the *Barisan Nasional*.

SCJP published only one news article on ACCCIM's endorsement, compared to SMDN's five, NYSP's three and KWYP's three. SCJP highlighted *Peranakan Kelantan's* endorsement on the front page, emphasizing the role of Bumiputera entrepreneurs in the development of Kelantan. In addition, SCJP published the endorsement by the Malay Chamber of Commerce in both Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan. SCJP gave a balanced coverage to the *Barisan Nasional* and to the DAP in particular, and the opposition parties in general. This shows that SCJP was trying to provide more news concerning the Malays and their political affiliation to give a wider perspective to its Chinese readers, and to show support to the ruling coalition.

KWYP carried three news on ACCCIM's endorsement, one on the Union of Chinese Assembly Halls and another news on the National

Teachers' Union Council. KWYP did not publish criticism and counter-criticism between DAP and MCA on the debatable topic of whether the public was given freedom to express their political affiliation via the media in Malaysia. KWYP also ignore the endorsement of *Peranakan Kelantan* and the alleged support by Chinese culturalists and artists. This was probably due to its regional set-up that gave emphasis to events in Penang as compared to other states. The non-reportage may also due to the inaccessibility of news that are circulated in the central region or the Klang Valley.

At a glance, SMDN published the most favourable news supporting the *Barisan Nasional*. NYSP gave considerable coverage to economic and social organizations such as ACCCIM, the Union of Chinese Assembly Halls and the Union of Malaysian Insurance Agents. SCJP tried to be non- partisan by giving the DAP considerable coverage. KWYP did not carry much news on coverage on the Bumiputera's affiliation most probably because its targeted Chinese readers in the Northern states of Peninsula, were not interested in those news.

Conclusion

The extensive support given to the *Barisan Nasional* in the 1995 General Elections suggested that many of the Malaysian electorate depended heavily on 'issues' reported in the mass media before the polling day. Political apathy and disinterest in direct participation in political activities among electorate in urban and rural areas attributed to the increasingly important role of the mass media as a means of political communication.

Looking at the interactive state-press relationship, one cannot make definite claims about what determines media output, nor can one maintain that the output or the content has any social consequences. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the media agenda was set as a kind of suggested agenda for the public's thoughts, discussions and actions. How these images originate, and what kinds of use are subsequently made out of the agenda set by the media, remain to be investigated by other research studies.

Using the approach of content analysis, this research has shown that readers of Chinese dailies were given a constructed reality about what happened during the election campaign. Presuming all four dailies had obtained the same amount of information from their news sources, the differences in their news content should be explained as the selection made by the respective editors. In this research, the frequency and size of articles have suggested something worthy of discussion. As the content of

media always reflects the interests of those who finance them, the significant differences, if any, should then be attributed to the influence exerted by the owners of these dailies.

In the five issues discussed above, it is evident that election news were reported from different angles pertaining to the event; some of these have been decontextualized, dramatized or trivialized by these dailies, thus obscuring any ideological issues that may be at stake (Wasburn, 1995:655-6).

Decontextualization of events involves their separation from the social contexts in which they occur. Events that may be interrelated are reported as discrete occurrences. For instance, on 19 April 1995, KWYP and SCJP each reported only one news article on the event of Lim Kit Siang burning *The Star* in protest. The former highlighted the news on the front page together with a coloured picture of Lim Kit Siang watching on while his supporters were in action. However, there was only a 91-word caption in that article explaining the reason why such aggressive action was taken by the Opposition Leader. Although SCJP reported the event in a more detailed manner on page 12 by giving the background information or the context, the daily simultaneously published a translation of the editorial of *The Star* entitled "In the Name of Freedom". This form of presentation was used by the English-language daily to reject Lim Kit Siang's claim that he had been victimized by the *Barisan Nasional*-

controlled media throughout the election campaign. Only two days later, SCJP reported on Lim Kit Siang's protest, "*The Star* may support the government but it should not distort the news of the DAP" (*Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 21/4/1995). Three other Chinese dailies, NYSP, SMDN and KWYP, however, did not publish such news in favour of the DAP. Thus, distortion of the opposition's news -- what happened, how and why it happened -- was subsequently undermined and remained unknown to the public after the decontextualization, whether intended or unintended.

On the contrary, on 24 April 1995, when the Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad accused the Australian Broadcast Company for distorting what he said, three Chinese dailies (except KWYP) gave contextual reportage to the news. This showed that even if the opposition was given access to the dailies, the treatment of news might not have been the same as that given to the ruling coalition. In fact, the act of decontextualizing a report or news by omitting context of a news story has been a common practice in the Chinese dailies during non-campaign periods because that is the convenient way of writing a report, and the economic way to publish it. However, this could also be a means to de-emphasize news which offend the owners' political sensibilities. In Bagdikian's words,

Modern media are complex, and the need to capture and keep large audiences inhibits propaganda that is too obviously propaganda. The major media carry much that

their owners personally disagree with, but this does not prevent propagandic use by emphasizing certain issues and de-emphasizing others, by pursuing some subjects relentlessly and quickly abandoning others.⁶

Dramatization of events involves a dramatic scenario on events which, when presented as discrete occurrences, hold little interest for mass audiences. The use of character portrayal, vivid terminology, striking imagery and other stylistic devices in campaign coverage helps attract audiences. Irresponsible reporters and editors would also attract and mislead their readers by all means, such as emphasizing drama over depth, actor over fact, human interest over social consequences and most undesirably, truth over falsehood.

On 24 April 1995, content analysis showed that when supporters of PAS assaulted journalists from TV3, a privately-owned television station, the dailies made full use of the 'drama' on the eve of the polling day. Dramatization of the event began with a warning by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the police's announcement to investigate into the matter and to take action against the offenders, followed by the Prime Minister's criticism against PAS members' indecency. This episode was further dramatized by a picture showing the Prime Minister, his wife, Siti Hasmah and the *Menteri Besar* of Kedah, Osman Arop, visiting the hospital in Alor

⁶ Ben Bagdikian. Summer 1985. "The U.S. Media: Supermarket or Assembly Line?". *Journal of Communication*, p. 97-119.

Setar to express sympathy and solicitude for the TV3 crews (*Sin Chew Jit Poh*, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, *Kwong Wah Yit Poh*, 24/4/1995). In addition, NYSP published the comment by the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) to condemn the violent act of PAS members. It is known to many that the same event, if it had happened during the non-campaign period, would not have captured so much interest and attention by the Prime Minister. In other words, the event would not have been so dramatized.

Trivialization of events involves reporting events of little importance, redirecting the readers' attention to other matters beside the election process. Focus on matters such as levels of candidate support, crowd responses to candidate appearances, speculations on party's performance, securing public endorsements are among events that trivialize the election process. In the content analysis, prediction on the *Barisan Nasional*'s victory and the opposition's losses were found in most of the analysis, while public endorsement favourable to the *Barisan Nasional* was overwhelming, ranging from unions to cultural institutions.

The content analysis of daily issues and campaign issues, despite different owners' intervention, showed that patterns of coverage in Chinese dailies reflected high support for the *Barisan Nasional* government by portraying a negative image of the opposition parties throughout the 1995 election campaign period from 16 to 25 April 1995.

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