

# **MALAYSIAN CHINESE**

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# MALAYSIAN CHINESE

*Recent Developments and Prospects*

EDITED BY

LEE HOCK GUAN • LEO SURYADINATA



INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

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*E-mail:* [publish@iseas.edu.sg](mailto:publish@iseas.edu.sg)

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# PREFACE

On 10 July 2008, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) and Chinese Heritage Centre (CHC) jointly organized an international seminar on the Chinese in Malaysia. It was the second one in the series on “Ethnic Chinese Communities in Southeast Asia”.

The first joint seminar was held in 2007 on “The Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia in the Era of Globalization”. In this second seminar, we chose the topic, Malaysian Chinese, as there had been new developments in Malaysia, especially after the momentous outcome of the March 2008 general election, when the ruling coalition lost its two thirds parliamentary majority for the first time since Malaysia attained Independence. This seminar, therefore, was topical and timely. We invited leading scholars on Malaysia to discuss “Malaysian Chinese: Recent Developments and Prospects”. We selected most of the papers from the seminar and put them together as a book so that they can reach a wider audience. We would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to the writers for their kind cooperation in revising their papers for publication.

*Lee Hock Guan, ISEAS*  
*Leo Suryadinata, CHC*





# CONTRIBUTORS

**Beh Chun Chee** is Lecturer at the Faculty of Creative Industries, Department of Mass Communication, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia.

**James Chin** is Professor of Political Science and Head of the School of Arts and Social Sciences, Monash University, Sunway Campus, Malaysia.

**Ho Khai Leong** is Professor and Dean of the Institute of Chinese Studies, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaysia.

**Khor Yoke Lim** is Associate Professor and Head of the Persuasive Section of the School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia.

**Lee Hock Guan** is Senior Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore.

**Lee Kam Hing** is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of China Studies, University of Malaya.

**Lim Lai Hoon** is Lecturer at the School of Social Science and Humanities Courses, Tunku Abdul Rahman College, Penang.

**Rosey Ma** is Research Fellow at the Department of Islamic History and Civilization, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

**Leo Suryadinata** is Professor and Director of the Chinese Heritage Centre, Singapore.

**Tan Chee-Beng** is Professor of Anthropology at The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

**Toh Kin Woon** was a former leader of the Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia — the Malaysian People's Movement Party — and former Senator, Malaysian Upper Chamber of Parliament.

**Wong Chin Huat** is Lecturer in Journalism at the School of Arts and Social Sciences, Monash University, Sunway, Malaysia.

# GLOSSARY

BA	Barisan Alternatif (Alternative Front)
BCIC	Bumiputra Commercial and Industrial Community
BERSIH	Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections
BN	Barisan Nasional (National Front)
CMS	Cahaya Mata Sarawak
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
DAP	Democratic Action Party
EC	Election Commission
FDI	foreign direct investments
GCC	Group of Concerned Citizens
Gerakan	Parti Gerakan Malaysia
GM	<i>Guang Ming</i>
HINDRAF	Hindu Rights Action Force
ICSS	Independent Chinese Secondary Schools
IMP	Independence of Malaya Party
INSAP	Institute of Strategic Analysis and Policy Research
IPTA	public institutions of higher learning
IPTS	private institutions of higher learning
ISA	Internal Security Act
JAWI	Federal Territory Department of Religious Affairs
KEADILAN	Parti Keadilan Nasional
KLSCAH	Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall
KOSATU	Koperasi Belia Bersatu
KTHCF	Kudat Thean Hou Charitable Foundation
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
MAFREL	Malaysians for Free and Fair Elections
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MCKK	Malay College Kuala Kangsar
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MIMOS	Malaysian Institute of Microelectronic Systems
MK	<i>Malaysiakini</i>

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MMM	Malay/Melanau/Muslims
MR	<i>Merdekareview</i>
NDP	National Development Policy
NEA	New Economic Agenda
NEP	New Economic Policy
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NHEFC	National Higher Education Fund Corporation
NMB	Non-Muslim Bumiputra
NOC	National Operations Council
NSTP	New Straits Times Press
NUS	National University of Singapore
NVP	National Vision Policy
OEM	Original Equipment Manufacturer
OSA	Official Secrets Act
PAS	Parti Islam Semalaysia (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party)
PBB	Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu
PBS	Parti Bersatu Sabah
PGCC	Penang Global City Centre
PGRM	Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia
PKR	Parti Keadilan Rakyat
PPPA	Printing Presses and Publications Act
PR	Pakatan Rakyat (People's Pact or People's Alliance)
PRS	Parti Rakyat Sarawak
ROS	Registrar of Societies
SAPP	Sabah Progressive Party
SC	<i>Sin Chew</i>
SDC	Special Delegates Conference
SEAPA	Southeast Asian Press Alliance
SELCAT	Select Committee on Competency, Accountability and Transparency
SIB	Sidang Injil Borneo
SJKCs	Sekolah Kebangsaan Jenis Cina
SMEs	small and medium enterprises
SPDP	Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
STPM	<i>Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia</i> (Malaysian Higher School Certificate)
SUPP	Sarawak United People's Party
UEC	United Examinations Certificate

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UM	University of Malaya
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
UPSR	<i>Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah</i> (Primary School Evaluation Test)
Y4C	Youth for Change



# INTRODUCTION

The results of the 8 March 2008 election stunned both the ruling coalition and opposition parties (Ooi et al. 2008). The Barisan Nasional were denied a two-third majority in parliament, and five states — Penang, Kedah, Perak, Selangor and Kelantan — were won by the opposition parties. Overwhelmed by the unexpected outcome, some observers characterized the election results as a “political tsunami” and extrapolated that the political landscape of Malaysia has completely changed. Of course, with the benefit of hindsight observers have become more cautious in their assessments of the impact of the March 2008 election. Nevertheless, the momentous March 2008 event is worth further examining, especially its impact on the Malaysian Chinese.

This collection of ten papers, including this introduction, attempts to assess the state of the art in the study of the Chinese community in Malaysia. It examines the nature of Malaysian multi-ethnic society and the position of the ethnic Chinese, the conflation between ethnicity and religion, the 8 March 2008 election and its impact on the community, the similarities and dissimilarities of the Chinese positions in East and West Malaysia, the new developments in the economy, and the media and education in the past few decades under the New Economic Policy that have had major bearings on the 8 March 2008 election, and the post-election Malaysian Chinese community.

## NATION BUILDING AND THE POLITICS OF ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY

Since Independence in 1957, nation building in Malaysia has been bedevilled by the question of how to construct a common nationality that will have

Malay culture as its core and is also inclusive of, and fair to, the non-Malay cultures. Most Chinese naturally prefer an inclusive national identity that embodies the multicultural foundation of Malaysian society. In contrast, most Malays insisted that their language, religion, and culture should be granted a privileged position in the common national identity. Indeed there are Malay leaders who would conflate Malaysian nationalism with Malay nationalism and favour using the term *Melayu* nationality. In the 1960s, because ethnic-bounded identity was omnipotent, the prevailing sentiment was that “the Malay is first of all a Malay, then Muslim and then a Malaysian; and the Chinese first of all a Chinese then a Buddhist or Christian if he is religious and then possibly a Malaysian ...” (Wang 1992, p. 192). Consequently, after the May 1969 ethnic riots, the UMNO-Malay dominated nation essentially abandoned multiracial Malaysian nationalism for a largely Malay-defined common nationality.

In his chapter Tan Chee-Beng argues that nation building in Malaysia has come to be shaped mainly by the politics of ethnicity, which has resulted in entrenching a communal world view and created a nation that is communally divided.<sup>1</sup> UMNO Malay elites aggressively set about creating a Malaysian nation that is Malay in cultural characteristics and Islamic in identity. Indeed, two mechanisms that have further communalized the polity and polarized the communities are the *Ketuanan Melayu* ideology and the New Economic Policy (NEP).

Initially, it was argued that the NEP was needed in order to alleviate the Malay economic handicap, and create a level playing field, and that it would only be for twenty years — from 1971 to 1990. But, over the years, the justification for the continuation of the NEP has increasingly been linked to Article 153, which stipulates the safeguarding of the special position of the *Bumiputra* through a system of quotas. Article 153 was initially meant to be a temporary measure implicitly agreed to by the Alliance elites, but since the 1980s, UMNO leaders have insisted on Article 153 being a timeless “social contract” which endows the Malays with “special rights”. The special rights position, Tan argues, has, in fact become a “political and administrative weapon to promote the interest of the Malays under the Bumiputera ideology”. With the implementation of the NEP, Malaysian society gradually became more ethnically divided, with the Chinese seeing themselves as being discriminated against, while the Malays as a whole are protected and the recipients of state favours.

The NEP and *Bumiputra* ideology have communalized society to the extent that many issues in the country have invariably become interpreted, problematized, and debated in ethnic terms. In the 1970s and 1980s, the



centre of controversy was in the cultural and language arenas, with UMNO Malay nationalists pushing aggressively to expand and entrench Malay culture and language, and the Chinese resisting firmly to defend their cultural and linguistic space. With Islamic resurgence and the increasing Islamization of the Malay identity and the seizure of PAS by Islamists in the mid-1980s, championing Islam became the focal point of the UMNO-PAS political competition. In part to win the Malay Muslims' support, the UMNO-dominated country promoted an Islamization policy which, among other things, resulted in the expanding presence of Islam in the public sector, as well as the bureaucratization of Islam. For example, school curricula and public educational institutions became increasingly Islamized. Tan points out that the increasing Islamization of national schools indeed pushed the Peranakan Chinese of Terengganu to enrol their children in the Chinese schools in town increasingly instead of enrolling them in neighbourhood national schools. Based on his research on the Peranakan Chinese of Trengganu and other studies he has conducted, Tan observes that race and religion were not contentious issues in the past as Malaysians were generally sensitive towards and tolerant of one another's cultural practices and religious beliefs. Race and religion only became problematic issues when they were mobilized to gain the support of the Malay Muslim population. Referring to the political competition between PAS and UMNO, Tan argues that "it is not the presence of diverse religions that causes social tensions; it is the use of religious symbols in communal politics that causes this".

Tan concludes that the Malaysian experience shows how ethnic-based politics and nation building cannot create an inclusive society, but, instead, causes polarization among the ethnic groups. Accordingly, he argues that to redress the economic disparities between ethnic groups, affirmative action policy should be need based rather than ethnic based. Ethnic based affirmative action should only be for small minorities and not for the majority group in a society such as Malaysia. More generally, Tan proposes that the Malaysian nation building project should move away from UMNO's narrow ethnic based vision towards a non-racial policy that is consistent with the multi-ethnic composition and character of the society. The authoritarian statist approach to managing ethnic issues and relations have, Tan claims, worsened ethnic relations in Malaysia in part because UMNO monopolized the definition and interpretation of the ethnic problem by banning alternative non-racial versions. Moreover, UMNO and the bureaucratic elites have manipulated the *Bumiputra* ideology to further their vested interests. Tan insists that a democratic state would enable oppositional views to be debated in society and thus expose the ordinary Malaysians to alternative ways of managing

ethnic relation and nation building. The March 2008 election which has resulted in a two-coalition party system can potentially democratize political space and provide promising possibilities of a Malay-led, but non-racial, or, perhaps, a less racial, model.

Because of the politics of ethnicity and identity in Malaysia, Chinese Muslims find that their multiple and fluid identities are largely ignored by the Malay-Muslim dominated state on the one side, and the Chinese community on the other. Rosey Ma's chapter captures succinctly the identity dilemma of Chinese Muslims, especially converts, who have become a casualty of the Malay-Chinese political rivalry. In particular, Ma points out, Chinese converts encounter a "general belief that being Malay is equivalent to being Muslim, as defined in the Constitution, a notion endorsed by the authorities and accepted by the public at large" so much so that it is difficult to position the identity of Chinese who are Muslims. In Malaysia, "where ethnicity and religion are so entwined in one's social and official identity, the Chinese Muslims are of the ethnicity of one community — the Chinese, while professing the religion of another community — the Malays. In the Malaysian context, this group is reduced to a double-minority: minority Muslim among the majority non-Muslim Chinese, and minority Chinese among the overwhelmingly Malay Muslims". Hence for Chinese converts the "redefining and construction of the new identity takes place within two dimensions, religious and ethnic/cultural".

The conflation of ethnicity and religion in Malaysia in the context of the strained ethnic relations between the Malays and Chinese has deleterious effects on Chinese Muslims such that it is difficult for the latter to maintain both their Chineseness and faith separately. They indeed find that they are not welcomed by either community. On the one hand, many Malays expect Chinese Muslim converts to leave their Chineseness behind as much as possible and adopt the Malay way of life; indeed they should *masuk Melayu* or become Malay — implying complete assimilation. In this sense, the Malays are emphasizing Malay characteristics to manifest their religious identification. If Chinese converts do not *masuk Melayu*, the Malays may suspect that they have become Muslims so as to become *Bumiputra* in order to gain access to all the privileges and perks that come with being *Bumiputra*. Thus becoming Malay is an indication that converts have not just left behind their Chineseness, but also that they now identify, and their loyalty is, with the Malays. On the other hand, Chinese converts find rejection and hostility from families of their ethnic community, who frequently equate their conversion with their becoming Malay. Here the "religious identity of

the convert overshadows his cultural and ethnic identity in the eyes of other Chinese”. Because of the frayed relationship with the Malays, many Chinese would equate becoming Muslim with effectively becoming Malay and thus view such conversion as betraying one’s family and race, and bringing shame to the community.

More generally then, Ma argues that “a Chinese who has become Muslim ... has stepped out of his ethnic boundaries to cross over to the other one”. For both communities, it is difficult to place being Malaysian Chinese and being Muslim in the same identity space. This is because in the Malaysian context,

[o]ne does not cross ethnic boundaries: if you are born Malay or Chinese, you remain Malay or Chinese. One may cross religious boundaries, but officially and subjectively, only by leaving the former religion before stepping onto the other one. [In] Malaysia where one’s religion and ethnicity are spelled in the same breath, how does one cross the religious boundaries when the attached ethnic part bounces back from the other sphere?

Fortunately, in recent years things have started to become better for Chinese Muslims in Malaysia. A major contributing factor is that Malaysians are now more educated and are thus becoming more aware of the two separate identities: Chinese and Muslim. The opening up of Malaysia’s relations with China, and, also, greater exposure to the outside world, have helped to improve the situation for Chinese Muslims in Malaysia. Lastly, Chinese Muslims have mobilized their community to struggle for their space and rights in society.

## THE CHINESE IN MALAYSIAN POLITICS AND ELECTIONS

In his interesting chapter (Chapter 3), Lee Kam Hing proposes to use Wang Gungwu’s quadrilateral model of Malaysian politics to frame and account for the recent political developments in Malaysia.<sup>2</sup> Bearing in mind the complex social and ethnic stratification in Malaysia, Wang posited that there are four major sources of power in Peninsula Malaysia, namely: the Malay rulers, Islam, Malay nationalism, and the plural society, which refers to the non-Malay communities, especially the Chinese. The Malaysian political structure can thus be depicted as a quadrilateral shape with the four sources of power constituting the “legs” which anchor politics in the country. For that reason, if the “legs or four institutions become seriously out of proportion in

relation to one another, then the stability of the table or Malaysian politics is threatened”.

The nature and significance of each of the four sources of power and their relation to one another have obviously changed from colonial times to the present. In particular, Lee claims that since Independence the influence and power of Malay nationalism, or *Bumiputra* nationalism, and Islam have greatly expanded. After the 1969 ethnic riots, the UMNO-led Malay nationalists used the tragedy to entrench Malay hegemony or supremacy — *Ketuanan Melayu* in Malay — in the political, sociocultural, and educational fields, and the state apparatus. Official preferential policies and strategies were implemented to expand Malay participation in various sectors, and also ownership of the economy. At the same time, Islam has also become more influential as a result of the resurgence of Islam since the 1970s, the emergence of Muslim civil society groups, and the Islamists’ control of PAS since the mid-1980s. With the Islamists in control of PAS, the growing intensive UMNO-PAS political competition for Malay-Muslim support became circumscribed by each party trying to outdo one another in championing Islam.

In contrast, Lee argues that the Malay rulers and Chinese “legs” of the quadrilateral model have lost significant influence and powers since Independence. During the Mahathir administration, the Malay rulers’ powers were to some extent clipped by two successive constitutional amendments in 1983 and 1993 that deprived the rulers of some of their legal immunity. He however pointed out that since the “Malay rulers have largely retained their powers as defined by the 1957 constitution”, it is possible that “in a situation where the ruling coalition and opposition are more evenly balanced, they can play a critical role”. In the aftermath of the March 2008 election where UMNO political dominance was considerably weakened, Malay rulers, especially in Kedah, Perak, and Selangor, have tried to regain some of their powers.

For Lee, the most important political development, since Independence, has been the greatly diminished power of plural society, especially the Chinese and Indians. Several factors have contributed to the weakening of the non-Malay communities’ political position, such as: non-Malay elites’ acceptance of “constitutional compromises which conceded political pre-eminence to bumiputra nationalism”; and “a relative decline of the Chinese in the total population because of lower birth rate, and consequently [a] decreasing number of Chinese-majority seats in parliament”. Among the Chinese, their influence and power were further weakened by deep divisions “between those in opposition and in government”, within the ruling coalition between Gerakan and MCA”, and “intra-party splits that occur at regular intervals

such as those in the MCA and these sap the energy and resources of the largest Chinese-based party”.

Until the March 2008 election results, power was concentrated around Malay nationalism and Islam, with the Chinese politically marginalized. To make matters worse, the Chinese are “increasingly sandwiched between a Malay nationalism [that] has been usurped by UMNO’s *Ketuanan Melayu*, and [a version of] Islam [shaped] by PAS’s conservative Islamic state outlook”. In the past, because the Chinese fear a PAS’s Islamic state more than UMNO’s *Ketuanan Melayu*, UMNO could count on winning a majority of the Chinese support. In the March 2008 election, the opposition won more than a third of the parliamentary seats in part because when PAS downplayed its Islamic state goal, it led a large number of Chinese to reject UMNO’s *Ketuanan Melayu* and vote especially for the DAP and PKR. Does March 2008 mark “a temporary setback for the UMNO brand of Malay nationalism or [does it] mark the emergence of an alternative Malay nationalism led by PKR and a moderate leadership faction from PAS”? If the Malay constituency remains fragmented, then winning Chinese support will be critical to both the BN and PR. And for PR to maintain its advantage over BN in winning a majority of the Chinese, PAS must restrain its Islamic state demands. Thus for now UMNO’s Malay nationalism has lost considerable credibility while the “emergence of a two-party system in the parliament has given the Malay rulers and, to an extent, non-bumiputra a chance to return to a situation resembling the old quadrilateral model” before the ascendance of Malay nationalism and Islam. In a succession of by-elections since March 2008, UMNO remained incapable of regaining the support of the majority of the Chinese (see Chapter 5) who continue to support the opposition coalition.

Ho Khai Leong’s chapter focuses on the pattern of the Chinese vote in, and the implications for Chinese-based parties after, the March 2008 election. While most analysts predicted correctly that Indian and Chinese votes would swing in favour of the opposition, none anticipated the huge size of the swing; more than 70 per cent of the Chinese and 60 per cent of the Indians voted for the opposition. Combined that with a more fragmented Malay vote, the BN lost its two-third parliamentary majority and as well as five state governments to the opposition coalition PR. The MCA, the largest Chinese-based party in the BN, lost half of the thirty-one parliamentary seats it won in the 2004 election. Gerakan, another Chinese-based party in BN, fared even worse, losing eight out of the ten parliament seats it won in the 2004 election, as well as the Penang state government. In contrast, the DAP increased the number of seats it won from twelve in the 2004 to twenty-eight in 2008. The best performance was recorded by the PKR which bolstered

its one parliamentary seat won in 2004 to thirty-one seats in 2008. The performance of the DAP and PKR, and to some extent PAS, would indicate that there was cross-ethnic voting in their favour.

What prompted the Chinese to vote overwhelmingly for the opposition, especially the DAP and PKR? Several factors, according to Ho, contributed to the general vote swing against the BN, such as the negative impact on the local economy of the American sub prime crisis and the rising cost of living, corruption and cronyism, the worsening crime and security situation, election fraud and gerrymandering, and various forms of power abuse by the BN government. UMNO's racist posturing and its demands not just to continue the NEP, but to claim an even larger share of the economic pie further alienated the non-Malay voters. The Anwar Ibrahim factor also played a key contributing factor to the excellent performance of the opposition. Finally, another factor was the important role played by the alternative media in providing the opposition with the means to broadcast its message to the voting public and thus counter the pro-BN mainstream media's monopoly of the news.

Chinese voters were disillusioned with the MCA and Gerakan because the two parties had failed to speak out, defend, and advance their interests. Indeed, they were perceived as weak and dominated by the UMNO-Malay party in the BN coalition. In addition, the MCA was also considered to be rife with corruption, with the party, especially its leaders, viewed as being more interested in looking after its own vested interests than the interest of the community it allegedly stands and fights for. It also did not help that the MCA was driven by intraparty factional fighting, not over principles, but over the spoils of the incumbent. In the case of Gerakan, it lost the Chinese support in Penang because the Chief Minister of Penang, Koh Tsu Koon, and the Penang Gerakan leaders were generally perceived as weak, and had given in to UMNO in the administration of the state. In contrast, the DAP was outspoken and stood up in many instances for the Chinese and thus won over their support, especially among the younger Chinese voters. The PKR also attracted much support from the Chinese community as its New Economic Agenda advocates moving away from a race-based to a more need-based policy.

Can the Chinese-based parties in the BN, MCA, and Gerakan, remain relevant? What are the implications of the March 2008 election results for the Chinese, the Chinese-based parties in the BN and, more generally, for ethnic-based politics? Because of the fragmented Malay vote, and if this situation were to persist, winning the majority of Chinese votes would be necessary in order to win in ethnically mixed constituencies. Thus a fragmented Malay

vote would empower the Chinese and Indians. The future of Chinese-based parties in the BN, MCA and Gerakan, will very much depend on UMNO. If UMNO persists in playing up race-based politics and fails to address the various issues that have alienated the Chinese, then the MCA's and Gerakan's support among the Chinese will continue to diminish. On the other hand, Chinese support for the DAP and PKR will also be negatively impacted if the more conservative elements in PAS and PKR were to succumb to the urge to play up ethnic and religious politics. Hence, for Ho, whether the two-coalition party system and more democratic politics will consolidate depends on many tangible and intangible factors.

Wong Chin Huat observes that Malaysian politics has shifted from being "United Malays vs Divided Chinese" towards a new situation of "Divided Malays vs United Chinese". In a nutshell, while the overwhelming Malay vote used to support the BN, in the March 2008 election there was a significant Malay vote swing to the opposition, especially for PAS and PKR, which means that the Malay bloc is now divided. Meanwhile, the March 2008 election saw an almost wholesale Chinese vote swing in favour of the opposition, so much so that one can conclude that the Chinese bloc is now united in its opposition to the UMNO-led BN. The fundamental question here is whether this "Chinese united against the UMNO" pattern is here to stay. Wong attempts to answer this question by looking at the factors that led to the Chinese voting *en masse* for the opposition, and whether those factors have been reinforced or weakened since the March 2008 election.

In strategic terms, the Chinese are caught between a politics of negotiation through representation within the government and a politics of pressure through voting for the opposition. Up until the March 2008 election, the Chinese bloc was divided between the negotiation and pressure camps. However, the failure of the Chinese-based parties in the ruling coalition to obtain concessions from the BN government gradually withered Chinese support for the BN to the extent that in the March 2008 election a huge majority of Chinese rejected the BN and voted in unison for the opposition. In uniting behind the opposition, the Chinese appear to have overcome their three traditional fears, namely; fear of ethnic violence, fear of losing representation in the government, and fear of instability or uncertainty. In the states of Penang, Perak, and Selangor, Wong provides empirical evidence and explanations to show how the Chinese in those states overcame the three fears and voted for the opposition in droves.

The intriguing question then is whether Chinese voters have consigned to history their fear of ethnic violence, losing representation in the government, and instability or uncertainty since the March 2008 election. For the two

years since the March 2008 election, UMNO and its various affiliated groups have tried to raise the spectre of ethnic violence, but thus far they have not managed to terrify Malaysians, especially the Chinese, “to bow to violence and modify their political preferences”. Instead, their playing up of racial and religious issues was roundly condemned and delegitimized by civil society and opposition parties, especially Malay Muslims. The MCA and Gerakan claim that, if the Chinese do not strongly support them, the community will be marginalized in the government, has lost credibility since the DAP and Chinese PKR politicians were not only allocated places in the Penang, Selangor and Perak state governments, but, in fact, appear to have more parity in their relationships with their Malay counterparts. Moreover, the Chinese are no longer constrained by their fear of instability or uncertainty, given the stability — despite the occasional intra and interparty bickering — of the state governments of Penang, Selangor and Perak (before UMNO’s usurped control of it). As such, Wong concludes that for the BN to make gains in the next general election, it would have to depend on Malay votes.

To what extent is Chinese politics in Sabah and Sarawak similar and different from that in Peninsular Malaysia? James Chin’s chapter provides a succinct picture of Chinese politics in the East Malaysian states and shows the limited applicability of Wang’s quadrilateral model to those states. While Chinese politics in East Malaysia has also undergone increasing marginalization, especial in electoral politics, there is however a “key difference between Chinese politics in the peninsula and East Malaysia [with] the continued pre-eminence of the local-based parties in Sabah and Sarawak”.

The majority of Sarawakian Chinese have consistently voted for the Sarawak United People’s Party (SUPP), a party in the Sarawak BN, and that has not changed even up to the most recent state election in 2006. The main argument that the SUPP has used to win Chinese support is that the latter need representation in the local government to look after the community’s interests. This argument, in spite of the pro-*Bumiputra* federal policies, has convinced a majority of the Sarawakian Chinese to throw their support behind the SUPP. However, over the years, gerrymandering and malapportionment in the delineation of constituencies have drastically reduced the proportion of Chinese majority seats to far below their demographic percentage. As such, the Chinese vote has been gradually marginalized electorally while Malay-Muslim majority seats have increased faster than their population growth. Nevertheless, Chin argues that a growing number of Chinese, especially those of the younger generation, have become disillusioned with SUPP for failing to protect and advance the community’s interests. The increasing abuse of