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TRADITIONALISM AND ELECTORAL POLITICS

IN THE LAND OF THE HORNBILLS, SARAWAK

This article discusses traditionalism as an issue in electoral politics by analyzing Sarawak 2006 State Legislative Assembly Election. Traditional politics is based on communal differences and on ethnic-based framework; it focuses on the existence of ethnic divisions that constitute the basis of more traditional politics. In 2006 we saw the revival of Traditional Politics and processes which challenge traditional politics to engage a new way of looking. The results of the 2006 State Legislative Assembly Election of Sarawak were a shock to both the government and the opposition parties. The election results also showed that especially among the Malay voters, traditional politics still persist as they do not favour political change. On the other hand Chinese voters were more calculative and rational in their choice of party and candidates- more pragmatic and in favour of change. This article stresses external and internal issues raised by the Chinese-based parties, Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) and Democratic Action Party (DAP), in Sarawak State Elections of 2001 and 2006; and the effects on the election results. In 2001, the main campaign issue was on external issues such as the 9/11 incident and the racial conflicts in other countries. On the other hand, in 2006, domestic issues such as the increase of petroleum price, land lease and land premium were predominant.

Keywords: Election, Campaign, Political Parties

Artikel ini membincangkan aspek tradiditionalisme dalam politik pilihanraya Dewan Undangan Negeri Sarawak 2006. Politik tradisional adalah berasaskan kerangka etnik dan perbezaan kaum fokusnya pula ialah kewujudan pemisahan etnik yang membentuk politik tradisional. Pada tahun 2006 kajian ini mendapati wujudnya perubahan politik dari bentuk tradisional kepada yang baru namun keputusan dalam pilihanraya ini juga mengejutkan ramai pihak. Pilihanraya tersebut menunjukkan masih kedapatan ciri-ciri politik tradisional di kalangan pengundi Melayu. Walau bagaimanapun, pengundi Cina lebih rasional, peka dan pragmatik terhadap perubahan. Artikel ini membincangkan isu-isu luaran seperti Peristiwa 9/11 dan konflik luar serta dalaman seperti kenaikan harga minyak, cukai dan premium tanah yang dibangkitkan oleh parti SUPP dan DAP dalam pilihanraya 2001 dan 2006.

Katakunci: Pilihan Raya, Kempen, Parti Politik

Introduction

Traditional politics always not in favour of change. Some currents of traditionalist thought have been appropriated not to promote political change. The vast majority of Traditionalist authors have remained aloof from political life, and see fascism, communism, socialism, and democracy, as so many modern deviations and parodies of traditional doctrines and social structures.¹ Martin Lings (1987) explains that “In politics, a traditionalist is someone who accepts tradition as authoritative. Traditionalism is politically rational when we are dealing with things that cannot be demonstrated and reduced to clear rules. Those include basic things like political attitudes, practices and ideals that define our way of life”. Terry King (1986) describes Sarawak’s politics as following: “In Sarawak, a way of life is too close especially to the society and too comprehensive to be reduced to rule or judged wholly by external standards. Ones have to live the life to understand it. As a result, every way of life including politics is traditional”. Traditional politics in Sarawak is based on communal differences. It is reflected in the voting as such. This article will discuss the following:

1. The ethnic-based framework of traditional politics
2. Ethnic divisions that constitute the basis of more traditional politics.
3. Revival of Traditional Politics
4. External and internal issues challenging traditional politics to engage a new way of looking.

The Ethnic-based Framework of Traditional Politics

Ethnicity is a primordial affiliation, in the sense that it is connected to the things people cannot live without, among them, traditionality, the persistence of the past into the present, and a sense of collective self-consciousness (Shils 1957: 130-45, Geertz 1963, Isaacs 1975). A sense of community of this kind may generate awareness about the importance to continue certain political values and interest. However, we do not have a satisfactory explanation as to why traditional politics is not prone to political change. Scholars have identified the phenomenon, but most have not gone beyond it. Ethnicity therefore is a powerful force in the politics of many countries, profoundly affecting political process, but there is less agreement on why traditionalism which adhere to ethnicity, not favouring political change.

¹ Examples include Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, “The Bugbear of Democracy, Freedom and Equality,” in his *The Bugbear of Literacy* (Bedfont: Perennial Books, 1979), pp. 125–150; Titus Burckhardt, “A konzervatív ember,” *Arkhé* (Budapest), No. 1 (1996), pp. 27–33; Marco Pallis, “Do Clothes Make the Man?” in his *The Way and the Mountain* (London: Peter Owen, 1991), pp. 141–159; Martin Lings, “The Political Extreme,” in his *The Eleventh Hour: The Spiritual Crisis of the Modern World in the Light of Tradition and Prophecy* (Cambridge: Quinta Essentia, 1987), pp. 45–59.

The importance of ethnicity is a central factor when discussing almost any issue in Sarawak. The influence of this approach is strong because this state is a multi-ethnic and most of the political parties were established based on ethnic lines. It is not only questions of leadership, election and voting behaviour that are based on ethnicity, but the policy of the ruling party is also affected.

The question of ethnicity and politics has been discovered mostly by scholars such as K.J. Ratnam (1969), Milne and Ratnam (1974), Enloe (1970), Karl Von Vorys (1975) and Kua Kia Siong (1987). They have examined important aspects of ethnicity and politics based on published documents and their own survey. However, their study has not adequately examined the role of traditionalism in politics. While the influence of ethnicity is acknowledged, the traditional political values, which had important influence on politics, have been not sufficiently explored. Further, there is a noticeable absence of examination and discussion of traditional politics in Sarawak. Other scholars such as Nidzam Sulaiman (2003 and 2006), Leigh (1983) and Chin (1997) though discuss about politics in Sarawak but not to deeply focus on traditionalism in politics.

Cultural differences, and the political form of the plural society whereby one cultural segment dominates over others, could also lead to conflict. In a situation where culturally divergent groups together form a common society, the structural imperative for maintaining this inclusive unit involves a type of political order in which one of these cultural segments is subordinated to the other. Smith (1986) argues that the process of nation-building was preceded by or coincided with the cultural process of collective identity formation that was grounded in ethnicity. If and when ethnicity forms the basis of nationality, the construction of a national culture/identity is almost always based on the dominant ethnic group's culture (Smith 1986). The monopoly of power by one cultural segment is the essential precondition for the maintenance of the total society in its current form. The dominant segment controls the apparatus of power and force (Smith 1965: 62-86).

However, Gomez (1999) argues that the plurality of ethnic groups with particular cultural identities and practices does not necessarily lead to social conflict; what matters is the reification of these communities into neatly defined and separate races or ethnicities that affirm primordial notions. With this in mind, he stresses that the radicalization of the colonial and postcolonial era has taken particular shape in this country. The privileging of racial social and political constructions has been significant in particular ways but not totalizing. Gomez also notes that the root of the security problem is not necessarily ethnicity but a condition when the ethnic threat itself is used for political purposes (Gomez 1999). Even Fenton suggested that ethnicity as a concept is used as a means of political hegemony (Fenton 2003: 25-50).

Ethnic Divisions and Political Parties: a Background

Sarawak is the largest state in Malaysia. It covers an area of 124,000 square kilometres and has a coastline of some 800km facing the South China Sea. Lying on the northwest coast of Borneo, the third largest island in the world, Sarawak shares its boundaries with Kalimantan (Indonesia Borneo) in the south, Brunei and Sabah in the north. Sarawak is also known as "The land of many

rivers'. The rivers provide natural means of transportation and communication. The 590 km long Sungai Rejang is the longest river in the country.

In Sarawak, certain ethnic's privilege had been institutionalised in the Constitution as it appears in article 153 relating to the special privileges of the Malays and the Sabah and Sarawak natives. Leigh (1983) stresses that this form of ethnicity is important to understand political development in Sarawak. Leigh's statement is also supported by King (1982), Milne dan Mauzy (1992: 194-195) and Yaakop (2002). They all agree that the party candidates may receive supports from each ethnic group. The traditional obedience towards the leadership of each group is still strong at the same time traditional institutions and organization exist in line with modern political process. The Melanouse for instance is still strongly adhering to their traditional political organization (Yaakop dan Dollah 2005).

In the early days, the population of Sarawak was different from those in the Peninsula. Sarawak's population between 1963 to 1965 was 800,000 (Tilman: 1963). According to National Census 2000 the number increased to 2,009,893 (National Concensus 2000). There are around 25 ethnic groups which can be categorised into Malays, Chinese and Dayak. The native or Bumiputra (Malays/Melause and Dayak) are more than half of the total population.

In terms of political organization, the Malays started to form *Malay National Unity* (MNU) during the Japanese occupation in the 1940s. During the British administration, a group of leaders from MNU had formed *Barisan Raya'at Jati Sarawak* (BARJASA). Various political parties were created with the help and encouragement of Malayan political leaders who spent much time explaining how Malaya's ruling party (the Alliance) was the creature of a political union between three communal parties. Thus, five parties (PESAKA, SCA, SNAP, PANAS and BARJASA) formed the pro-Malaysia Sarawak Alliance, leaving only SUPP lined up against Malaysia (*Sarawak Tribune*). As a reaction to the growth of the SUPP, the Government officials privately encouraged the formation of rival political parties. As a result, more communal parties existed. Thus, in Sarawak SUPP was very largely lower-class and Chinese-educated Chinese, the Sarawak Chinese Association was upper-class Chinese, Party Negara Sarawak (PANAS) was largely Malay, as was BARJASA (Barisan Ra'ayat Jati Sarawak), the Sarawak National Party (SNAP) was largely Land Dayak and Iban (Sea Dayak), and PAPAS (Party Pesaka Anak Sarawak) was almost completely Iban, Kayan and Kenyah primarily in the Third Division (Malaysia: Department of Information).

Ethnic affiliation and identification of ethnic groups with parties and leadership is a form of traditional politics which still persist. It is reflected in 2006. *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported: "The National Front has won all the previous elections in Sarawak, whether they were state or national, and it was repeated in the 2006 state election. However it was not a surprise as The Malay voters are the biggest supporters of National Front and always not in favour of political change. In 1999, where else in Peninsula Malaysia, National Front faced difficulties in defending many seats; the opposition candidates found it was very difficult to win seats in either 1999, 2001 or 2006 elections" (*Far Eastern Economic Review*).

The 2006 State Election: Revival of Traditional Politics

Sarawak, held the ninth state legislative election on the 20 May 2006. The National Front has won all the previous elections in Sarawak, both at state or national, levels and it was anticipated

that it would win again in the 2006 state election. However it was not expected and surprising to many that the National Front could not defend many seats; that was National Front biggest loss so far. As it is shown in Table 1 below, the opposition candidates had won nine seats in 2006 compared to the only two in the 2001 election.

Table 1: 2001 and 2006 Sarawak State Legislative Election:

Number of Seats won by Political Parties

Parties	Number of seats won in	
	2006	2001
National Front:	63	60
PBB	36	
SUPP	11	
PRS	8	
SPDP	8	
DAP	6	1
PKR	1	-
SNAP	1	-
Independent	1	1
Total	72	62

Source: Suruhanjaya Pilihanraya Malaysia (SPR) 2006

What was interesting here was that out of the nine seats that the National Front had lost, eight of them were contested by candidates from the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), that is the party representing Chinese in the Sarawak politic. The candidate from the Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS) or Sarawak People's Party contested another lost seat. On the other hand, the other two parties from the National Front, the Parti Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) or United Bumiputera Party and the Sarawak People's Democratic Party (SPDP) won all of their 44 seats contested.

Of the nine seats won by the opposition, six were won by the Democratic Action Party (DAP), while the Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) or People's Justice Party (in the 2001 election, this party was known as Parti KeADILan or Justice Party), the Sarawak National Party (SNAP) and an independent candidate won one seat each. Therefore all constituencies lost by the National Front are contested by the Chinese-base political parties namely the SUPP and the DAP.

Meanwhile, in the constituencies where there is a majority of voters other ethnics, the National Front did not face any problem. In other words, there are changes of support only among Chinese voters. They supported the National Front in the 2001 election but now, in the 2006 election, voted the opposition especially the DAP in. Why such a change happened? Why there was a shift in support by the Chinese voters but not the voters from other ethnics? Based on our observations and interviews carried out during the said two elections, it was found that the situation of the day and the issues raised had affected to the pattern of the election by the Chinese with a big bang. This is the question, which we are trying to discuss in this paper.

Before discussing the issues and effects of the voting, it would be wise that we first discuss the result of the election especially the degeneration of the SUPP votes and gain in votes by the opposition parties especially the DAP. For this purpose, we shall first look at the results in the constituencies where both the SUPP and the DAP were contesting.

SUPP vs. DAP

To see how the obvious swing of votes from the government party to the opposition in the 2006 election, it is wise to compare the voting results of both parties which represent the Chinese namely the SUPP and the DAP. In the 2001 election, there were eleven constituencies which were both contested by the SUPP and the DAP. However four of those eleven seats were also contested by the KeADILan and independent candidates (Table 2).

In the 2006 election, there were also eleven constituencies contested by the SUPP and the DAP. Ten of those eleven seats were direct contests between the SUPP and DAP. Only one seat saw another independent candidate among them. However, those eleven constituencies were not the same in both elections as there were newly formed constituencies and the electorates who went to vote in other constituencies. As an example, the constituency N12 Kota Sentosa is a new constituency in the 2006 election. The DAP, which contested at the N8 Padungan in the 2001 election, agreed to abandon it for sake of the PKR in 2006.

Table 2: The 2001 Sarawak State Election:

Number of Votes for SUPP and DAP

Constituencies	Number of votes		
	SUPP	DAP	Others
N1 Tanjung Datu	5605	394	1328
N8 Padungan	8402	7369	
N9 Pending	11918	3937	3150
N33 Meradong	7391	3770	
N34 Repok	8421	1516	2652
N39 Bukit Assek	6289	5414	
N40 Dudong	9679	3364	1141
N41 Bawang Assan	9465	2369	
N42 Pelawan	14129	5684	
N53 Kidurong	7408	7551	
N56 Piasau	10237	2564	
Total	98944	43932	8271
Percentage	65.46%	29.06%	5.47%

Sources : *New Straits Times* 8 September 2001

The results of the eleven constituencies show that there is an obvious swing of the votes from the SUPP to the DAP (Tables 2 and 3). In the 2001 election, the DAP won only one seat that is the N53 Kidurong constituency with a majority of only 143 votes. On the contrary, in the 2006 election, the DAP not only has defended the Kudurong seat with a bigger majority but has captured five more seats from the SUPP.

Table 3: The 2006 Sarawak State Legislative Election:

Number of Votes for SUPP and DAP

Constituencies	Number of votes		
	SUPP	DAP	Others
N10 Pending	7260	11632	
N11 Batu Lintang	5399	8806	
N12 Kota Sentosa	6048	6579	
N39 Repok	5502	4926	
N40 Meradong	2412	5990	1289
N45 Bukit Assek	5629	10380	
N46 Dudong	7359	6951	
N47 Bawang Assan	6804	4300	
N48 Pelawan	7375	7112	
N59 Kidurong	6853	8517	
N64 Pujut	6493	5123	
Total	67134	80316	1289
Percentage	45.13%	54.0%	

Sources : *New Sunday Times* 21 May 2006.

On the total number of votes obtained by the two parties, there was also an obvious change. In the 2001 election, the SUPP obtained 65% of the popular votes in the said eleven constituencies. But in the 2006 election, the popular votes falls to 45.13%, that is a staggering 20.33% loss. On the contrary, the DAP gained by 24.94% that is from 29.06% in the 2001 election to 54.0% in 2006.

Besides the loss of six seats and the total number of the popular votes, the SUPP also suffered a drop in majority in the seats they won (Tables 4 and 7). Three constituencies where majorities were less than 1000 are the N39 Repok (576 votes), N46 Dudong (408 votes) and N48 Pelawan (263 votes).

The DAP has claimed that the SUPP won in Dudong because of postal votes. The chairman of the Sarawak DAP claimed that his party has in fact won in the Chinese majority areas of the constituency but the loss was due to the 1185 postal votes from which the DAP had only obtained 22. Therefore the DAP suffered a loss in this constituency by 408 votes (See Wong Ho Leng statement to the 2 June 2006 *Malaysiakini*). The drop in majority should take into consideration the drop in the number of registered voters in 2006 compared with that of the 2001 (See Appendix 1). In some constituencies, the drops in the registered voters were very significant, for example in the N27 Simanggang, N48 Pelawan and N65 Senadin constituencies.

The big swing to the opposition parties involved only the Chinese communities but not other communities. The PBB, which represents the interest of the Malays, contested and won all seats contested in the constituencies with Malay majority, in both the 2001 and 2006 elections. Thus there were no big changes in the voting pattern of the peribumi (sons of the soil).

Therefore the question arises as to why the swing of the voting patterns happened only to the Chinese communities. What made them not satisfied and made the decision to reject and penalize candidates from the ruling party and chose the opposition in stead? Based on our observations and interviews in the said two elections, the daily development and issues raised had greatly affected the voting patterns of the Chinese in 2001 and 2006.

There were also big differences between the issues raised in the 2001 and 2006 elections. In 2001, the main issues were those related with the current developments inside and outside the country. While in 2006 local issues were more predominant. In the next following part of this paper we discuss the issues, which were brought about in the 2001, and 2006 elections and their effects to the Chinese communities.

Table 4: The 2001 and 2006 Sarawak State Legislative Election:

Majority of Votes of the Winning Parties

Constituencies	Winning Parties and Majority of votes			
	2001		2006	
N1 Tjg. Datu	SUPP	5337	PBB	4136
N9 Padungan	SUPP	1033	PKR	1417
N10 Pending	SUPP	7981	DAP	4372
N11 Batu				
Lintang	SUPP	7388	DAP	3407
N12 Kota	New seat		DAP	531
Sentosa				
N39 Repok	SUPP	5769	SUPP	576
N40 Meradong	SUPP	3621	DAP	3578
N45 Bukit	SUPP	875	DAP	4571
Asek				
N46 Dudong	SUPP	6315	SUPP	408
N47 Bawang				
Assan	SUPP	7096	SUPP	2504
N48 Pelawan	SUPP	8445	SUPP	263
N59 Kidurong	DAP	143	DAP	1664
N63 Piasau	SUPP	7673	SUPP	3918
N64 Pujut	New seat		SUPP	1370

Source: *New Straits Times* 28 September 2001

and *New Sunday Times* 21 May 2006 reports.

External Issues in the 2001 Election

Religious and ethnic issues were very sensitive in Malaysian politics. They were used by political actors for their own political benefits. In the 2001 election, there were two issues, which were supposed by the Sarawakians as external issues. First, the involvement of DAP in the Alternative Front, which is a loose collaboration of parties from the peninsula Malaysia, and second, the religious and ethnic issues which happened outside the country at that time.² The developments which happened before and at the eve of the 2001 election were very well exploited by the National Front, especially the SUPP to attack the DAP and rally the sentiment of the Chinese voters to reject the DAP. At that time, the DAP was in the merger of the opposition parties, the KeADILan Party, the Parti Rakyat Malaysia and the PAS forming the Alternative Front. The cooperation between DAP and PAS, which wanted to form an Islamic state has made the Sarawakians Chinese to go against the DAP. The DAP also did not succeed in convincing the voters that the collaboration with the opposition parties merely involved the party at central level and did not involve the Sarawak DAP.

The collaboration between the DAP and PAS in the Alternative Front was apparently not beneficial to the party in terms of support and the number of seats won. The 2001 election showed that the Chinese did not accept the collaboration with the party, which promotes Islam. If the conspiracy were not accepted in the Peninsula, it would be even more unacceptable among the Sarawakian Chinese because they were more dominant in the state politic. The SUPP understood the phenomenon and has made full use of the opportunity. The step taken by the DAP in withdrawing from the collaboration with the Alternative Front on the eve of the 2001 election was considered as fishing for votes. The election results showed that the steps taken by the DAP failed to obtain the support of the Chinese.

We should look at the 2001 election from the perspective of the 1997 economic recession, the reformation movements in Indonesia and Malaysia coupled with the sentiment and anti-Chinese riot in Indonesia. The continuous exposure in mass media about the events and their developments have taught the Chinese the need to have a stable and strong government which was able to maintain the harmony among the ethnics.

In the atmosphere in which Islam and its followers were to be blamed for violence and riots everywhere, then happened the September 11, 2001 in the USA. Muslim fighters were said to be responsible for the attack. The images of the airplanes striking the World Trade Center were repeatedly shown on television screens. The repeat airings of the event were intended to bring forward the message that the extremist actions were based on religion or groups of people who are inclined to violence; therefore it must be totally rejected. On the other hand, peace, stability and harmony among members of the communities of various faiths and religions and descendents in this country can be reached through moderate approach as practiced by the

² For further details about the 2001 election, see special issue of *Jebat* (30) 2003. About the Chinese politics in the 2001 election, see Ghazali Mayudin & Nidzam Sulaiman article in the same edition.

National Front, which is now governing. Therefore it is observed that many events, which occurred inside or outside the country since 1998 were made to become issues by the National Front in the 2001 Sarawak State Assembly Election. However, issues, which were beneficial to the Sarawak National Front in the context of 2001 election, became no more relevant to the 2006 election. On the contrary, there were some issues, which will be discussed in the following part, were used by the oppositions to garner support in the 2006 election. If 2001 external issues were more beneficial to the governing party, internal issues more prominent in 2006 were more beneficial to the opposition parties.

Internal Issues in the 2006 Election

In the context of election in Malaysia, economy is one of the factors, that plays a major role in determining the support given to a certain contesting party, in a more certain term, the governing party compared with the opposition. The rapid economic growth, many job opportunities, a controlled inflation and a low rate of unemployment are good economic signs, which would benefit the governing party. The comfort and happiness of the people, from the economic point of view, will be the stronghold, which hinders other issues from influencing the people choice in an election.³

Both parties, the governing and opposition parties understood the importance of the economy factor, which would influence voters. As usual, the National Front depended on its successes in achieving, as governing party, especially in the aspect of maintaining political stability, which brings forth the economic, social and infrastructure development. The voters were always reminded that the successes achieved are the result of the effort of the National Front government and its leaders; and only the National Front was said to be able to bring more developments in the future. On the other hand, the opposition party was made to be seen as not being able to deliver any thing and must be rejected. These are some of messages, which the National Front government tried to bring forward in its campaign through posters, flyers, talks and mass media. In the cities, where the majorities of voters are Chinese, the National Front also stressed on services provided by their representatives, the parties and the government especially in the last 5 years. Based on the services, which were given, and the development, which were carried out by the National Front, the National Front strongly believed that the people will give the winning votes to its candidates.

The opposition parties especially the DAP and PKR which contested in the cities constituencies also stressed on issues related to the people's economy. Among the issues were the raises in gas and diesel prices of 30 cents a liter from 28 February 2006, which is the highest increase in recent times. This increase in price was too steep and should not happened especially in Sarawak as she is a petroleum producer. The opposition's argument was that supporting the

³ As an example, even though there were many issues related to malpractices, corruption and abuses of power raised in the 1990 and 1995 elections, the National Front continuously won those elections. The rapid economic growth around those two elections had made other issues irrelevant to the voters. See for example Ghazali Mayudin 2006: 61-62.

National Front means supporting the raise in petrol price. Therefore, voters were requested to voice out their rejections towards the raise of petroleum price by voting the opposition in. Without such rejection, it was as if the people do not care and give the wrong impression to the National Front that raising petroleum price would not burden them. Among the flyers distributed by the DAP during the election campaign are as follows:

“Send the right message with your vote”

“A vote for BN is a yes to fuel hike

“The more seats BN wins in this election, the higher will the government increase the fuel prices next year

“Show your disapproval, SEND the correct message to BN

“Say no to fuel hike. VOTE DAP”

Indirectly the petroleum issue gave the impression that the government leaders including the SUPP leaders did not do enough to protect the interest of the Sarawak people given that Sarawak is a petroleum producer state. To counter the opposition campaign about the raise in petroleum price the National Front leaders explained that it cannot be avoided as the world price of the crude oil has increased.

Other than the petroleum issue, the opposition party also raised the issue of land lease. There were certain areas in Sarawak where the leases will soon end. The request by the people and the opposition party that the leases, which soon end, be renewed automatically was not acceptable by the government. In another word, the government argues, the renewal of the leases be given or not would depend on the consideration, the need and the approval of the government. This issue made people nervous as the land premium of the new lease will increase by 25% to 75%.

As for the business community, the negative effect which will be felt or expected to happen as a result of the above two issues will worsen by the lack of the opportunities to obtain projects and other economic opportunities. This was because the government projects were given to some companies said to be having good relation with government leaders. The practice of cronyism and nepotism also was said to have happened during the tenures held by chief ministers, which are said to be too long.

Activities and election campaign in Malaysia showed that there exist elements of exchange or give and take between two parties, the voters and the candidates. If a candidate was from the governing party, thus the people were asked to give votes to them as reciprocation to the government effort and its leaders who has brought development and progress to the society and the country.

The leaders gave or promised some thing to the people and as reciprocation the people must give support and votes. Therefore, in an election, the voters must be made to believe that they had and will obtain advantages as recompense as to their support to the candidates and the governing party.

Therefore, in the context of 2006 Sarawak election, the raise in petroleum price and the land lease issues brought forward by the opposition parties especially the DAP, apparently succeed in convincing voters that the SUPP leaders fail to fight for the interested of the Chinese as a reciprocation to their support in the earlier election. The SUPP, which represents the Chinese in the government, was expected to fight for and solve the interest of the community. The failure to do so would disappoint the Chinese especially those in the cities. They punished the party by rejecting the SUPP candidates and vote the opposition in.

In terms of voting, the voters were said to have made the rational choice when they refused to support the leaders who cannot fulfill their hopes and needs. In this context, their votes were not attached to one party only. The SUPP argued that the party should be given the mandate thus should have more representatives in the state assembly so that it will be in a strong position when it comes to political dealings within the National Front. The raise in petroleum price and the land lease issues had shown that even though with its previous big mandate, the SUPP failed to fight for the Chinese interest.

Therefore, the next step to be taken was to teach the leaders a lesson if they failed to fulfill the hope and the need of the voters. In this context, the Chinese voters were ready to accept the fact that their representatives in the government will be lesser following the losses of the SUPP candidates. What was interesting is that they had given a strong message to the leaders who disappointed them. This approach was different from that of other ethnics who are bigoted to their parties and also to the number of their representatives in the government although they do not clearly represented their interests. Therefore, there was a difference between those who voted based on their realistic and pragmatic judgment in the context of serving their own self-interest and those who are more emotional and sentimental.

Conclusion

Sarawak is always a vanguard of National Front ruling coalition in Malaysia as it contributes to the biggest parliamentary seats won in a single election. The voters were traditionally identified and loyal to their ethnic groups. Affiliation with ethnic group and resistance to political change are two important element of traditionalism in politics. On the other hand, 'New Politics' refers to non-affiliation to ethnic group and non-resistance to political change. New politics could be observed as many more voters tend to vote parties which are non-communal such as SUPP, DAP or PKR. It could also be observed with how voters reacted to various issues during the campaign and then requested for a political change. Studies show that the Malays are more conservative and tend to support the *status quo* governing parties. However, in 2006 some of the Malays and Chinese were in favour of change and broke away from their traditional stand.

In 2006 election, we observe a revival of traditional Politics in Sarawak as the voters tend to disengage themselves with their own ethnic groups. The Chinese were comfortable to support multi-ethnic party of DAP and the Malays also shown the same trend as they supported the PKR (Parti Keadilan Rakyat). This phenomenon could be explained by looking at external and internal issues challenging traditional politics to engage a new way of looking. Given that contested issues in 2006 were mainly domestic they were mostly related to rising petrol fuel and land lease. However, related to both issues the domain was to criticize the government accountability and how democracy was practiced.

The 2006 Sarawak State Assembly election surprised many because there were changes in the supports of the Chinese especially those living in towns and cities, from the National Front to the oppositions especially the DAP. If this election is seen in the context of the 2001 election and issues, which were brought forward in the 2006 election, it was not beyond expectation. Internal and current issues, which directly affected the interest of the Chinese especially their economic interest, showed that they influenced their decision in choosing their representatives.

Issues highlighted in the two elections played important roles in ascertaining the Chinese choice. Other than their sensitivity and scrupulousness toward ethnic and religious issues, the Chinese voters were also scrupulous in taking into consideration issues, which directly affect their interest in the process of their final choice of a candidate thus, vote in a governing party or an opposition candidate.

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