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EDUCATION MOVEMENT IN MALAYSIA: THE ROLE
OF LIM FONG SENG**

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ABSTRACT

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND THE CHINESE EDUCATION MOVEMENT IN MALAYSIA: THE ROLE OF LIM FONG SENG

Since the 1950s, the Chinese educationists relied on internal negotiations within the ruling coalition government to resolve issues relating to Chinese education. But in the 1980s, the need for a new political strategy began to emerge following difficulties to safeguard the interests of Chinese education within the ruling coalition government. It is against this backdrop that the role of Lim Fong Seng as a leader of the Chinese education movement has become significant. In early 1980s, he advocated the political collaboration between the Chinese educationists and the Chinese-based political parties in the ruling coalition as well as in the opposition to strengthen the Chinese education movement through the fostering of Chinese political unity. He subsequently supported a group of Chinese educationists to join a Chinese-based political party in the ruling coalition to facilitate this collaboration. But such a move failed to bring about the desired outcome. However, this did not deter him from seeking a political solution to the Chinese education movement. Following his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement in the mid 1980s, he was deeply committed to the formation of an opposition front to counter Malay political dominance within the ruling coalition government. This political dominance was seen by him as detrimental to the securing of the basic rights of the Chinese, including equality for mother tongue education. Together with a group of civil rights activists, he joined a Chinese-based opposition political party in 1990 to work towards the formation of an opposition front. But this political endeavor did not yield the intended results. While Lim Fong Seng's efforts to strengthen the Chinese education movement through political participation are certainly commendable, it is unfortunate that due to a host of mutually uncompromising factors, these efforts could not live up to his high expectations.

KEYWORDS: Political participation; Chinese education movement, Lim Fong Seng

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Chinese education movement in Malaysia has been closely linked to political mobilization since the 1950s. This political mobilization was spearheaded by the Chinese educationists affiliated to the United Chinese School Committees' Association (UCSCA or Dong Zong) and the United Chinese School Teachers' Association (UCSTA or Jiao Zong) (collectively known as the Dong Jiao Zong). The Dong Zong was formed on 22 October 1954, while the Jiao Zong was formed much earlier on 25 December 1951. As a pressure group, the Chinese educationists affiliated to these two associations have been seeking the much needed political support to advance the cause of Chinese education in this country. However, efforts in this area have not been successful despite the adoption of different political strategies by the Chinese educationists. It is within this context of political mobilization that the role of Lim Fong Seng, a prominent Chinese educationist who served as the President of the Dong Zong from 1973 to 1990, is particularly worthy of note. Lim has been actively involved in the political mobilization of the Chinese education movement as a response to the impasse faced by the Chinese education movement since the 1950s. He was instrumental in charting two different political strategies to strengthen the Chinese education movement: one in the 1980s and the other in the 1990s. The two political strategies were in marked contrast to the earlier strategy adopted by the Chinese educationists, i.e., political collaboration with the Malayan/Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) through a special joint committee. This political collaboration involved internal negotiations with the MCA to address problems faced by the Chinese education movement within the ruling coalition government – initially the Alliance and subsequently the Barisan Nasional (BN) (National Front). The Alliance is a tripartite coalition comprised three ethnic-based political parties, i.e., the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the MCA and the Malayan/Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). It was expanded to become the BN in 1974 to include more component parties.¹

Lim Fong Seng's strategies were underpinned by the need to seek a political solution to the Chinese education movement. He believed that since the Chinese education movement is inextricably intertwined with politics, a political solution is therefore inevitable. In the 1980s, he advocated the 3-in-1 strategy (三结合) to strengthen the

1. See Diane K. Mauzy, *Barisan Nasional: Coalition Government in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Marican & Sons, 1983.

Chinese education movement within the ambit of Chinese political unity. This strategy culminated in a group of Chinese educationists joining the Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan) – a Chinese-based political party in the ruling coalition in order to safeguard the interests of Chinese education from within the government. But this political strategy failed to bring about the desired outcome, forcing Lim to advocate another strategy, the Two-Front System (两线制) in the 1990s. This new strategy was underpinned by the formation of an opposition front to counter the political dominance of the UMNO in particular and the BN ruling coalition government in general. This political dominance was seen by him as not in tandem with a democratic polity that could guarantee the basic rights of its people, including educational rights. The new strategy had its genesis in the Civil Rights Movement launched by the Chinese guilds and associations (华团), including the Dong Jiao Zong, in the mid-1980s. It resulted in a group of Chinese educationists cum civil rights activists, including Lim, joining the Democratic Action Party (DAP) – the main Chinese-based opposition political party. Again, this strategy failed to bring about the desired outcome. This paper examines the role of Lim Fong Seng in charting the two political strategies as well as reasons for their failure. It begins with a brief overview of the impasse faced by the Chinese education movement prior to the 1980s. It then discusses the 3-in-1 strategy advocated by Lim in the early 1980s and problems in implementing the strategy. Finally, it goes on to discuss Lim's effort to initiate the Two-Front System in the 1990s and emerging problems that forced him to abandon the initiative.

2. THE CHINESE EDUCATION MOVEMENT: AT AN IMPASSE

Efforts to strengthen the Chinese education movement through political mobilization began in the 1950s when the Chinese educationists collaborated with the MCA to oppose the recommendation of the British to replace the vernacular school system with a national school system teaching in English and Malay.² This political collaboration involved internal negotiations with the MCA through the MCA Chinese Education Central Committee (MCACECC). Despite a promising start driven by the strong commitment of the then President of MCA, Tan Cheng Lock, to safeguard the interests of Chinese education in Malaya, the political collaboration began to show sign

² See Tan Yao Sua, "Decolonization, educational language policy and nation building in plural societies: The Development of Chinese education in Malaysia, 1950-1970", *International Journal of Education Development*, doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2012.01.009; Tan Liok Ee, *The Politics of Chinese Education in Malaya 1945-1961*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1997.

of fissures after the Alliance coalition won the 1955 Federal Legislative Election and formed the first local transitional government entrusted to seek independence from the British.³ Being part of the multiracial Alliance coalition government, the MCA began to adopt a cautious and consensual stand on issues pursued by the Chinese educationists. This was because the MCA had to adhere to an “elite accommodation system”⁴ upheld by the Alliance coalition government. Such a system was based on limiting and controlling ethnic hostility, depoliticizing tense ethnic issues and compromising at the elite level. It required considerable pragmatism and moderation, ambiguity, gradualism combined occasionally with the technique of *fait accompli*, and a carefully controlled feedback system so that the elites did not find themselves estranged from the masses.⁵ Constrained by this elite accommodation system, the MCA could only safeguard the Chinese primary schools within the ambit of the national educational system but not the Chinese secondary schools when the Alliance coalition government promulgated the Razak Report in 1956.⁶

The political collaboration between the Chinese educationists and the MCA was given a new lease of life when a group of young Turks headed by Dr. Lim Chong Eu managed to wrest control of the MCA leadership from Tan Cheng Lock in 1958. But this new lease of life was short-lived. Dr. Lim’s open collusion with the Chinese educationists (and his demand for more seats to be allocated to the MCA in the 1959 General Election) had clearly deviated from the elite accommodation system advocated by the Alliance coalition government and incurred the wrath of the UMNO. This subsequently resulted in a political crisis within the MCA that led to his resignation as the President of MCA. This unexpected turn of event was a huge blow to the Chinese education movement as the new MCA leadership headed by Tan Siew Sin soon distanced itself from the Chinese education movement by adhering to the elite accommodation system of the Alliance coalition government. The MCA was thus reluctant to defend the Chinese education movement which had been viewed apprehensively by the UMNO. In the early 1960s, the MCA supported the promulgation of the 1961 Education Act which empowered the Minister of Education to change the medium of instruction of the Chinese primary schools. This power was stipulated by clause 21(2) of the Act.⁷ The

³ Dong Zong Chubanzu 董总出版组 (ed.), *Dong Zong Sanian* (董总卅年), Vol. III, Kuala Lumpur: United Chinese School Committees’ Association Malaysia, 1987, pp. 573-578.

⁴ Gordon P. Means, *Malaysian Politics: The Second Generation*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 2.

⁵ Diane K. Mauzy, *Barisan Nasional: Coalition Government in Malaysia*, p. 23.

⁶ See Federation of Malaya, *Report of the Education Committee 1956*, Kuala Lumpur: Government Press, 1956.

⁷ Federation of Malaya, *Education Act, 1961*, Kuala Lumpur: Acting Government Printer, 1961, p. 230.

1961 Education Act also enforced the conversion of Chinese secondary schools into national-medium secondary schools as a pre-requisite for state funding, failing which they had to operate as Independent Chinese Secondary Schools (Duli Zhongxue 独立中学 or Duzhong 独中).⁸ Despite strong opposition from the Chinese educationists, the MCA's support for the 1961 Education Act remained firm. Meanwhile, the Chinese educationists' attempt to establish a Chinese-medium university, i.e., the Merdeka University, beginning in 1967 was also not well received by the MCA. The establishment of this university was deemed necessary by the Chinese educationists as a replacement to the Nanyang University in Singapore following the separation of Singapore from Malaysia.⁹

However, the MCA had to pay a heavy price for not supporting the Chinese education movement. The party suffered a huge setback in the 1969 General Elections, losing the support of the largely urbanized Chinese electorate.¹⁰ The political position of the MCA was further eroded by the emergence of Malay political dominance following the May 13 racial riots in the wake of the hotly contested 1969 General Election.¹¹ The racial riots were a wake-up call to the UMNO leaders who had failed to address the grievances of the Malays with regard to their lack of socioeconomic mobility as compared to the non-Malays, especially the Chinese. The subsequent implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and a new educational policy was a clear indicator that the UMNO was using its political strength to safeguard Malay interests.¹² The NEP was implemented to redress economic disparity between the Chinese and the Malays,¹³ while the new educational policy was implemented to enforce Malay as the main medium of instruction in the national educational system in stages.¹⁴ Alarmed by these developments, Tan Siew Sin began to lobby for Chinese unity in February 1971 as a means to strengthen the position of MCA against the political dominance of UMNO. But the Chinese community leaders were not overly convinced by this sudden change of

⁸ Ibid., pp. 222-223.

⁹ Tan Yao Sua, *Politik Dongjiaozong dalam Pendidikan Vernakular Cina di Semenanjung Malaysia (1960-1982)*, Pulau Pinang: Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2005.

¹⁰ R.K. Vasil, *The Malaysian General Election of 1969*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1972.

¹¹ For detailed account of the racial riots, see Goh Cheng Teik, *The May Thirteenth Incident and Democracy in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1971; National Operations Council, *The May 13 Strategy: A Report of the National Operations Council*, Kuala Lumpur: Government Press, 1969; Tunku Abdul Rahman, *May 13: Before and After*, Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Melayu Press, 1969; Leon Comber, *13 May 1969: A Historical Survey of Sino-Malay Relations*, Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Asia, 1986.

¹² Heng Pek Koon, *Chinese Politics in Malaysia: A History of the Malaysian Chinese Association*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 254.

¹³ See Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara, *Dasar-Dasar Utama Kerajaan Malaysia*, Ampang Jaya: Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara, 1988.

¹⁴ See Asmah Haji Omar, *The Teaching of Bahasa Malaysia in the Context of National Language Planning*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1976.

political stand. They instead launched their own Chinese unity movement. However, this Chinese unity movement was unable to take off as it was construed by the MCA as a potential political threat since its leaders decided to form a non-party political society on 14 April 1971 instead of accepting the MCA as their political patron. The detention of its leaders by the authorities pointed to some kind of political interference on the part of the MCA, though denied by its leadership.¹⁵

The MCA subsequently launched its own reform movement to resuscitate its political position through the incorporation of young reformists. It revamped its organization to allow the young reformists to play a bridging role to the Chinese community. It is within this reform movement that the MCA revived its political collaboration with the Chinese educationists. But this collaboration was short-lived following the demise of the reform movement arising from strong oppositions by the MCA old guards who were worried that the reform movement would jeopardize their political positions within the party. Thus, the Chinese education movement was again deprived of the much needed political support. Consequently, the Chinese educationists' attempt to re-establish the Merdeka University (halted in the aftermath of the May 13 racial riots) beginning in 1974 was rejected outright by the government with the MCA playing the lead role in blocking this attempt. It was probably at this stage that Lim Fong Seng began to realize that the Chinese education movement should be strengthened through other political means as he was then the Chairman of the Merdeka University Berhad – a private company formed in 1969 and entrusted to establish the Merdeka University. However, the impetus that eventually drove Lim to advocate a new political strategy came in the early 1980s when the Chinese educationists faced extreme difficulties to seek redress over the curriculum reform undertaken by the government. This curriculum reform was to enhance the basic reading, writing and arithmetic (3Rs) skills of the primary school students through the implementation of the *Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah* (KBSR) (New Primary School Curriculum).¹⁶ The implementation of the 3Rs curriculum reform was construed by the Chinese educationists as an attempt by the government to change the character of the Chinese primary schools. It is within these extreme difficulties faced by the Chinese education movement that Lim advocated the 3-in-1 strategy. However, this strategy failed to strengthen the Chinese education movement, forcing Lim to advocate another strategy in the 1990s, i.e., the formation of

¹⁵ Loh Kok Wah, *The Politics of Chinese Unity in Malaysia: Reform and Conflict in the Malaysian Chinese Association 1971-73*, ISEAS Occasional Paper No. 70, Singapore: Maruzen Asia, 1982, pp. 13-14.

¹⁶ Cheah See Kian 谢诗坚, *Malaixiya Huaren Zhengzhi Sichao Yanbian* (马来西亚华人政治思潮演变). Pulau Pinang: S.K. Cheah, 1984, p. 440.

an opposition front to push for a Two-Front System within the political landscape of the country. Again, this strategy was unable to deliver the intended result.

3. LIM FONG SENG'S POLITICAL STRATEGIES AND PROBLEMS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

3.1 THE 3-IN-1 STRATEGY

The 3-in-1 strategy involves the political collaboration between the Chinese educationists and the Chinese-based political parties in the ruling coalition as well as in the opposition to strengthen the Chinese education movement within the ambit of Chinese political unity. The main architect of this political strategy was Lim Fong Song, the President of Dong Zong. While chairing a meeting of the Dong Zong in Sungai Petani, Kedah on 12 April 1981, he called for the fostering of Chinese unity, especially political unity, as a concerted effort to redress the many predicaments faced by the Chinese in the economic, political and educational spheres of the country (among the problems cited by him was the threat posed by the 3Rs curriculum reform to the Chinese primary schools). He stressed that the fostering of this political unity had immense practical relevance and benefits to the Chinese in resolving the above predicament.¹⁷ The call for Chinese unity was one of the resolutions adopted by the meeting.¹⁸ With this, it was hoped that the Chinese educationists would be able to exert greater political pressure on the government, forcing it to adopt a more conciliatory stand on issues affecting the Chinese education movement.¹⁹

Lim's call for Chinese political unity was subsequently transformed into the 3-in-1 strategy which was adopted by the Dong Jiao Zong. It was the Deputy President of Jiao Zong, Loot Ting Yee, who had shown strong support to such a political strategy. He maintained that the introduction of this strategy was timely and should be embraced by the Chinese. He argued that the strategy was designed not to serve narrow vested interests but the larger interests of the Chinese. He appealed to the Chinese-based political parties to forsake their political differences to work toward a common cause for

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Dong Zong Chubanzu (ed.), *Dong Zong Sanian*, Vol. II, p. 322.

¹⁹ Ngeow Yin Ngee 饶仁毅, "Linhuangsheng: Cong sanjiehe dao liangxianzhi (林晃升: 从三结合到两线制)", in Dong Zong 董总, ed., *Dong Zong 50nian Tekan 1954-2004* (董总50年特刊 1954-2004), Kajang: United Chinese School Committees' Association Malaysia, 2004, p. 555.

the Chinese education movement. He believed that this could be achieved through mutual tolerance and respect guided by the spirit of political cooperation.²⁰

The 3-in-1 strategy was mainly targeted at three Chinese-based political parties, i.e., the MCA, the DAP and the Gerakan. The MCA and the Gerakan are Chinese-based political parties in the ruling coalition, while the DAP is a Chinese-based opposition political party. It was indeed a daunting task for the Chinese educationists to pull the three Chinese-based political parties together given that they not only differed in their political positions but also ideologies. Being part of the ruling coalition government, the MCA and the Gerakan had to adhere to the elite accommodation system in resolving ethnic issues. But the Gerakan differs from the MCA in that it is a multiethnic party that subscribes to cultural pluralism, while the MCA is a pure Chinese political party that vows to serve the interests of the Chinese since its inception. On the other hand, apart from being an opposition political party, the DAP upholds the ideology of Malaysian Malaysia that transcends ethnicity and special rights. The difficulty to foster political collaboration among the three Chinese-based political parties was most evident when they opted not to collectively defend the Chinese educationists' stand on the 3Rs curriculum reform in the early 1980s. Instead, they opted to do it on an individual party basis by releasing three separate joint statements with the Chinese educationists condemning the 3Rs curriculum reform.²¹ By right, if they had embraced the 3-in-1 strategy advocated by the Chinese educationists, they would have ignored their political differences by adopting a single and unitary stand over the 3Rs curriculum reform.

Sensing that political collaboration between the three Chinese-based political parties was not immediately possible and with the 1982 General Election looming, the Dong Jiao Zong decided to seek an alternative means to realize the 3-in-1 strategy. This alternative means involved the participation of a group of Chinese educationists in political parties. But negotiations with the MCA and the DAP to facilitate this political participation did not bear fruit as both parties refused to accept the Chinese educationists into their fold. The DAP, which had developed a close rapport with the Dong Jiao Zong since its early days,²² preferred the Dong Jiao Zong to remain as an

²⁰ Cheah See Kian, *Malaixiya Huaren Zhengzhi Sichao Yanbian*, pp. 440-441.

²¹ Jiao Zong 33nian Bianjishi 教总33年编辑室, *Jiao Zong 33nian* (教总33年), Kuala Lumpur: United Chinese School Teachers' Association Malaysia, 1987, pp. 593-594.

²² See Liew Ah Kim 廖金华, *Minzhu Xingdongdang: Angshou Zougouo Huajiao Fenyulu* (民主行动党: 昂首走过华教风雨路), Kuala Lumpur: Democratic Action Party, 2011.

external support group for the party.²³ Meanwhile, the MCA refused to accept the three conditions imposed by the Dong Jiao Zong, i.e., to allocate two seats to the Chinese educationists who joined the party in the coming 1982 General Election, to propose the appointment of a Chinese educationist as the Deputy Minister of Education after the 1982 General Election and to include Chinese educational issues in the party's 1982 General Election manifesto.²⁴

This left the Dong Jiao Zong with no other options but to rely on the Gerakan. The negotiation with the Gerakan did not encounter any problems. The Gerakan was willing to accept the three conditions imposed by the Dong Jiao Zong but with minor amendment to the second condition, i.e., the Gerakan would only propose the appointment of a Chinese educationist as a deputy minister but not specifically as the Deputy Minister of Education.²⁵ With this, the Gerakan opened its doors to the Chinese educationists. Altogether 18 Chinese educationists joined the Gerakan – eight joining on 31 March 1982 with another ten on 4 April 1982. Prominent Chinese educationists who joined the Gerakan included Koh Tsu Koon, Kerk Choo Ting, Kang Chin Seng, Toh Kin Woon and Ong Ting Kim. But these Chinese educationists had to resign from their positions in the Dong Jiao Zong to abide by the principle of “transcending political parties but not politics” (超越政党, 但不超越政治) upheld by the Dong Jiao Zong. To the Dong Jiao Zong, such a principle would ensure its neutrality amidst the participation of its members in political parties. With this neutrality, the Dong Jiao Zong hoped that it would be respected by the Chinese-based political parties in the country as an autonomous as well as independent organization that has no other ulterior motives except that of safeguarding the interests of Chinese education in this country.²⁶ But as we shall see, such a principle has its inherent weaknesses and did not work in the favor of the Dong Jiao Zong as far as political participation is concerned.

The Gerakan had thus become the platform through which the Dong Jiao Zong attempted to realize the 3-in-1 strategy. The Dong Jiao Zong hoped that the Chinese educationists who joined the Gerakan would serve as its proxies to safeguard the interests of Chinese education from within the government. This political participation

²³ Foo Wan Thot 胡万铎, “Dong Jiao Zong ying you de yuanze: Baochi chaoran de lichang (董教总应有的原则: 保持超然的立场)”, in Zhang Jingyun 张景云, ed., *Dangdai Mahua Wencun: Zhengzhi Juan 90niandai* (当代马华文存: 政治卷 90年代), Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Chinese Cultural Society, 2001, p. 146.

²⁴ Zhu Keli 朱可立, *Malaixiya Huashe zhi Mi* (马来西亚华社之谜), Seri Kembangan: Syarikat Kebudayaan Gunung Tahan, 2006, p. 70.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 72.

²⁶ Lee Ban Chen 李万千, *Cong Tou Yue* (从头越), Kuala Lumpur: Oriengroup, 1995, p. 73.

was supported by political slogans such as “Enter BN, Rectify BN” (打进国阵, 纠正国阵), “Seek Solutions from Within the Government” (内部争取) and “Complement Internal Efforts through External Pressures” (里应外合). These slogans were particularly apt and appealing. But not all Dong Jiao Zong leaders concurred with such a manner of political participation. The President of Jiao Zong, Sim Mow Yu, for instance, regarded this alternative means to realize the 3-in-1 strategy as too idealistic and simplistic. He was worried that the Dong Jiao Zong might not have the required political stature to deliver the strategy. He also warned that it might not be an easy task to seek a political solution to the Chinese education movement from within the government since the government had its own political mechanism to deliberate on educational issues. More importantly, he singled out the difficulty to unite the Chinese-based political parties as a possible stumbling block to the 3-in-1 strategy.²⁷ But since Lim Fong Seng was determined to see through the strategy, he had no choice but to give his support in order to adopt a common stand for the sake of unity within the Chinese education movement.²⁸

Unfortunately, the decision by the Dong Jiao Zong to facilitate the 3-in-1 strategy through the Gerakan backfired. The main opposition came from the DAP. The DAP viewed this decision as detrimental to its political interests. The party accused the Dong Jiao Zong of betraying its long-standing support for the Chinese education movement by colluding with the Gerakan to safeguard the interests of Chinese education from within the government. It even went to the extent of accusing the 3-in-1 strategy as a 3-against-1 strategy purportedly planned by the Dong Jiao Zong, the MCA and the Gerakan against the party.²⁹ Undoubtedly, the DAP was the main loser in this political move by the Dong Jiao Zong as it could no longer exploit issues relating to Chinese education as it used to do with considerable success in the past.³⁰ It is then not surprising that the DAP had taken the decision to challenge two Chinese educationists, i.e., Koh Tsu Koon and Kerk Choo Ting, who contested the 1982 General Election under the banner of Gerakan. Koh was challenged by Chian Heng Kai in the parliamentary constituency of Tanjung, Penang, while Kerk was challenged by Tan Seng Giaw in the parliamentary constituency of Kepong, Federal Territory. Despite the Dong Jiao Zong’s active

²⁷ Zhen Gong 甄供, *Huajiao Chunlei: Lin Huangsheng* (华教春雷: 林晃昇), Kuala Lumpur: United Chinese School Committees’ Association Malaysia, 2006, p. 201.

²⁸ Cheong Yuen Keong 张荣强, “Shen Muyu de lingdao fengge ji dui huajiao de yingxiang (沈慕羽的领导风格及对华教的影响)”, in Ho Khai Leong, ed., *Lishi Muyu* (历史慕羽), Kuala Lumpur: LLG Cultural Development Centre, 2011, p. 136.

²⁹ Cheah See Kian, *Malaixiya Huaren Zhengzhi Sichao Yanbian*, pp. 442-443.

³⁰ Hew Kuan Yau 丘光耀, *Chaoyue Jiaotiao yu Wushi: Malaixiya Minzhu Xingdongdang Yanjiu* (超越教条与务实: 马来西亚民主行动党研究), Batu Caves: Mentor Publishing, 2007, pp. 396-397.

involvement in the election campaign to garner electoral support for both Koh and Kerk, only Koh managed to secure a narrow victory, while Kerk was defeated by the DAP candidate. The defeat of Kerk was used by the DAP to attack the 3-in-1 strategy as a miscalculated political move on the part of the Dong Jiao Zong.³¹

As the architect of the 3-in-1 strategy, Lim Fong Seng was certainly disappointed with the failure of his political initiative. He attributed this failure to the reluctance of the DAP to embrace the underlying principles of the strategy. To him, the DAP had put its own political interests above the larger interests of the Chinese. For one thing, the strategy was not well-received by the DAP from the onset. The DAP wanted the Dong Jiao Zong to adopt a stronger stand against the government over issues pertaining to the Chinese education movement instead of resolving the issues from within the government. But Lim Fong Seng was not convinced that such a confrontational approach would bring about the desired results.³² This led to the Secretary General of the DAP, Lim Kit Siang, to accuse the Dong Jiao Zong of compromising the interests of Chinese education by working with the government.³³ The clash between the DAP and the Dong Jiao Zong in the Tanjung and Kepong parliamentary constituencies was most unwarranted in view of the dire need for Chinese political unity to strengthen the Chinese education movement. The DAP had even adopted slogan such as “Topple Dong Jiao Zong, Safeguard Chinese Education” (打倒董教总，维护华文教育) that seriously smeared the integrity of Dong Jiao Zong as the vanguard of Chinese education in this country during the campaign leading to the 1982 General Election.³⁴ However, the DAP should not be entirely blamed for opposing the 3-in-1 strategy. Indeed, the 3-in-1 strategy was not well conceived and it was saddled with shortcomings. Lim Fong Seng personally admitted that the strategy was over-zealously subsumed by slogans such as “Enter BN, Rectify BN”, “Seek Solutions from Within the Government” and “Complement Internal Efforts through External Pressures” without being guided by a detailed implementation plan that included the roles of the DAP and other Chinese guilds and associations.³⁵ In other words, the 3-in-1 strategy was driven more by political rhetoric than a comprehensive working plan. It is perhaps for this shortcoming that instead of a 3-in-1 partnership, the strategy had evolved into a 2-in-1 partnership, deviating from its original intention.

³¹ Liew Ah Kim, *Minzhu Xingdongdang: Angshou Zouguo Huajiao Fenyulu*, p. 120.

³² Zhen Gong, *Huajiao Chunlei: Lin Huangsheng*, p. 192.

³³ Lee Ting Hui, *The Chinese Schools in Peninsular Malaysia: The Struggle for Survival*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011, p. 163.

³⁴ Jiao Zong 33nian Bianjishi, *Jiao Zong 33nian*, p. 598.

³⁵ Zhen Gong, *Huajiao Chunlei: Lin Huangsheng*, p. 192.

Meanwhile, the Chinese educationists who joined the Gerakan also failed to live up to the high expectations of the Dong Jiao Zong. They were unable to resolve emerging issues affecting the Chinese primary schools in the 1980s let alone long-standing issues. Among the emerging issues were the establishment of the integrated schools³⁶ and the imposition of the Malay language as the language of official functions hosted by the Chinese primary schools³⁷ – both issues had serious implications on the maintenance of the character of the Chinese primary schools. Also, the Chinese educationists who joined the Gerakan were co-opted by the party.³⁸ This co-optation led to the President of Jiao Zong, Sim Mow Yu, lamenting that they were increasingly playing their roles for the Gerakan than for the Dong Jiao Zong and some had even distanced themselves from their parent association.³⁹

More importantly, the political dominance of UMNO within the BN had not provided much political leeway to the Chinese educationists who joined the Gerakan to safeguard the interests of Chinese education. Although Malay political dominance had become a political reality since the 1970s,⁴⁰ it was under the tenure of Dr Mahathir Mohamad as the Prime Minister beginning in 1982 that Malay political dominance had reached new heights to the extent that the Malaysian state was dubbed “semi-authoritarian”,⁴¹ “quasi-democratic”,⁴² “semi-democratic”⁴³ and “pseudo-democratic”.⁴⁴ In fact, Lim Fong Seng admitted that the political dominance of UMNO was one of the reasons for the failure of the 3-in-1 strategy. He maintained that the strategy could only have taken off if there was mutual dependence among the component parties within the BN.⁴⁵ Such mutual dependence did not exist within the BN. Instead, the UMNO was the dominant force with other component parties seeking its political patronage for their survival. It is certainly an oversight on the part of Lim Fong Seng for not considering

³⁶ See Dong Zong Chubanzu (ed.), *Dong Zong Sanian*, Vol. III, pp. 718-751.

³⁷ See Dong Zong, ed., *Dong Zong 50nian Tekan 1954-2004*, p. 946-950.

³⁸ Thock Ker Pong, *Ketuanan Politik Melayu: Pandangan Kaum Cina*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya, 2005, p. 159.

³⁹ Zhen Gong, *Huajiao Chunlei: Lin Huangsheng*, p. 201.

⁴⁰ Heng Pek Koon, *Chinese Politics in Malaysia: A History of the Malaysian Chinese Association*, p. 254.

⁴¹ Harold Crouch, “Authoritarian trends, the UMNO split and the limits to state power”, in J.S. Kahn and Loh Kok Wah, eds., *Fragmented Vision: Culture and Politics in Contemporary Malaysia*, North Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992.

⁴² Zakaria Haji Ahmad, “Malaysia: Quasi democracy in a divided society”, in L. Diamond, J.J. Linz and S.M. Lipset, eds., *Democracy in Developing Countries: Asia*, Colodaro: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989.

⁴³ William Case, “Semi-democracy in Malaysia: Withstanding the pressure for regime change”, *Pacific Affairs* 66(2), 1993; William Case, *Elites and Regimes in Malaysia: Revisiting a Consociational Democracy*, Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, Monash University, 1996.

⁴⁴ William Case, “Testing Malaysia’s pseudo-democracy”, in Edmund Terence Gomez, ed., *The State of Malaysia: Ethnicity, Equity and Reform*, London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004.

⁴⁵ Zhen Gong, *Huajiao Chunlei: Lin Huangsheng*, p. 203.

Malay political dominance as a possible intervening factor when he advocated the 3-in-1 strategy. In the main, this strategy was underpinned by efforts to safeguard the interests of Chinese education through the fostering of Chinese political unity. It was certainly not a strategy specifically designed to counter Malay political dominance. It is perhaps for this oversight that some political analysts criticized the strategy as naïve.⁴⁶ The criticism is directed at the manner in which the Dong Jiao Zong attempted to seek a political solution to the Chinese education movement within the UMNO dominated BN government by merely relying on a small number of Chinese educationists who served as their proxies.⁴⁷ However, subsequent developments showed that Lim Fong Seng had realized the need to counter the political dominance of BN/UMNO to safeguard the interests of Chinese education within a broader context of civil rights and through the formation of an opposition front that would lead to a Two-Front System in the political landscape of the country.

3.2 THE TWO-FRONT SYSTEM

The Two-Front System advocated by Lim Fong Seng had its genesis in the Civil Rights Movement launched by major Chinese guilds and associations, including the Dong Jiao Zong, in the mid-1980s. The Chinese Cultural Congress held in 1983 in Penang provided the initial impetus to the Civil Rights Movement. The Congress was hosted by the Penang Chinese Assembly Hall and attended by 15 major Chinese guilds and associations, including the Dong Jiao Zong. The announcement by the government in 1981 that it would review the National Culture Policy promulgated in 1971 formed the underlying basis for the hosting of the Congress. The National Culture Policy was not well received by the Chinese guilds and associations primarily because it only prescribed a peripheral role to non-Malay cultures. The main thrust of the policy is to uphold the indigenous culture as the core of the national culture with Islam (the official religion of the country) as an important element in the formation of the national culture.⁴⁸ Among other things, the Congress adopted the resolution to form a special committee to prepare a memorandum for submission to the government and the result of which was

⁴⁶ Thock Ker Pong, *Ketuanan Politik Melayu: Pandangan Kaum Cina*, p. 149; Lin Zhenmu 林振慕, "Canzheng, shi weihu minzu jiaoyu de liliang quanyuan (参政, 是维护民族教育的力量源泉)", in Zhang Jingyun, ed., *Dangdai Mahua Wencun: Zhengzhi Juan 90niandai*, pp. 173-174.

⁴⁷ Thock Ker Pong, *Ketuanan Politik Melayu: Pandangan Kaum Cina*, p. 149.

⁴⁸ Kementerian Kebudayaan, Belia dan Sukan, *Asas Kebudayaan Kebangsaan*, Kertas Kerja Kongres Kebudayaan Kebangsaan, 16-20 August, Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya, 1971, p. vii; Sumit K. Mandal, "The national culture policy and contestation over Malaysian identity", in J.M. Nelson, J. Meerman and Abdul Rahman Embong, eds., *Globalization & National Autonomy: The Experience of Malaysia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and Bangi: Institute of Malaysian & International Studies, 2008, p. 278.

the *Joint Memorandum on National Culture* (国家文化备忘录) which sought to defend non-Malay cultural rights.⁴⁹ The Congress also adopted the resolution to establish a national body to oversee and promote Chinese cultural activities, culminating in the formation of the Pan-Malaysian Chinese Associations Working Committee (全国华团文化工作委员会) in 1984. On 15 September 1985, the working committee established the Chinese Resource and Research Centre (华社资料研究中心) to act as its think tank.⁵⁰ The centre, popularly known by the acronym of Hua Zi (华资),⁵¹ was headed by Kua Kia Soong – a political and social activist. It was initially managed by the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall and subsequently by the Dong Jiao Zong.⁵² The release of the *Joint Declaration of the Malaysian Chinese Guilds and Associations* (马来西亚全国华团联合宣言) by the Hua Zi on 12 October 1985 provided the final impetus to the Civil Rights Movement.

The joint declaration was unanimously endorsed by 27 major Chinese guilds and associations, including the Dong Jiao Zong. It expressed the grievances, aspirations and democratic demands of the Chinese in the political, economic, cultural, linguistic and educational spheres based on common universal aims of civil liberties, equality and fundamental democratic rights.⁵³ With regard to Chinese education, among other things, it expressed a deep concern over the lack of government support and the adoption of a monolingual policy that deprived the Chinese of their basic rights to undergo mother tongue education. A National Civil Rights Committee was subsequently established on 28 December 1985 to seek redress to the many issues raised by the joint declaration. It was through this committee that Lim Fong Seng played a key role in the Civil Rights Movement. He was appointed the Deputy Chairman of a Joint Council of the Civil Rights Committee. The Civil Rights Movement picked up pace in early 1986 when the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall, on behalf of the National Civil Rights Committee, released a first-phase action plan which comprised nine major objectives that were crystallized from

⁴⁹ See Kua Kia Soong, ed., *Malaysian Cultural Policy and Democracy*, Kuala Lumpur: The Resource and Research Centre, 1990, pp. 209-255.

⁵⁰ Voon Phin Keong, *"Malaysian Chinese Studies": Some Observations on Progress and Prospects*, CMCS Research Papers Series No. 1, Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, 2003, p. 8.

⁵¹ In 1996, Hua Zi was transformed into the Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies (华社研究中心 or 华研). See *ibid.*

⁵² In 1996, Hua Zi came under the management of the Federation of Chinese Associations of Malaysia (马来西亚中华大会堂总会 or 华总). See *ibid.*

⁵³ Kua Kia Soong, *The Malaysian Civil Rights Movement*, Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information Research Development, 2005, p. 63.

the earlier joint declaration.⁵⁴ As far as Chinese education was concerned, the action plan called for the fair treatment of all schools regardless of their media of instruction and in particular, the repeal of clause 21(2) of the 1961 Education Act.⁵⁵

It was during his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement that Lim Fong Seng advocated the idea of the Two-Front System by calling for the formation of an opposition front that could counter the political dominance of BN in general and UMNO in particular. He was convinced that the Two-Front System in which the BN coalition and the opposition front possessed equal political strength and had the capacity to outbid each other to form the ruling government would augur well for the civil rights of the people and help to fulfill the nine major objectives outlined by the National Civil Rights Committee. The forthcoming 1986 General Election was seen by him as an ideal testing ground for the Two-Front System.⁵⁶ To begin with, he conducted dialogue sessions with both the Chinese-based political parties in the ruling coalition as well as in the opposition to explain the underlying rationale of the Two-Front System and the nine major objectives outlined by the National Civil Rights Committee. His political aspirations were given a boost when the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party), the main political rival of UMNO, supported the Two-Front System. The significance of this support lies in the fact that PAS is the strongest Malay opposition political party in the country. PAS had even invited Lim (and other Dong Jiao Zong leaders) to visit its party headquarters. Similarly, the Dong Jiao Zong had also invited PAS's representatives to its meetings.⁵⁷

Such a favorable response from PAS to the Two-Front System was not too surprising because since early 1985, PAS had attempted to woo the Chinese electoral support to widen its political base in order to challenge the UMNO for the national leadership. This attempt to reach out to the Chinese electorate resulted in the party adopting a more liberal stand towards the Chinese. For instance, at a symposium on *Islam and National Unity* held on 11 February 1985 in Kuala Lumpur, PAS's leader, Haji Hadi Awang, commented that under Islam, a Chinese could become the Prime Minister of Malaysia provided that he was a Muslim who was pious and had the qualities of being a Muslim leader. In a dialogue session with the Chinese of Kuala Terengganu held on 14

⁵⁴ Dewan Perhimpunan Cina Selangor (雪兰莪中华大会堂), *Guanche Huatuan Lianhe Xuanyan Diyi Jieduan Jiuda Mubian* (贯彻华团联合宣言第一阶段九大目标), Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Perhimpunan Cina Selangor, 1986.

⁵⁵ Kua Kia Soong, *The Malaysian Civil Rights Movement*, p. 65.

⁵⁶ Zhen Gong, *Huajiao Chunlei: Lin Huangsheng*, p. 208.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 204

September 1985, the same PAS leader reportedly declared that Islam does not set out special rights for the Malays.⁵⁸ Efforts by PAS to woo Chinese electoral support reached new heights when the party established the Chinese Consultative Council (CCC) in April 1986. Meanwhile, Lim Fong Seng was particularly impressed by PAS's liberal attitudes toward the language and educational issues despite being an Islamic party. He noted that this was the first time that a major Malay political party had adopted such a position.⁵⁹ PAS's support for the Chinese education movement convinced Lim that its inclusion in the Two-Front System would serve the interests of the Dong Jiao Zong, though such a support was also driven by its own political ambition.

However, Lim had to convince the Chinese over the inclusion of PAS in the Two-Front System with regard to its aspirations to establish an Islamic State in the country. He tried to alleviate their fear by stressing that PAS could never realize this grand vision given the immense difficulty to acquire a two-third majority in the parliament to amend the constitution. He, therefore, urged the Chinese to embrace PAS within the Two-Front System as this would guarantee a healthy democratic political system in the country and the government would be more responsive towards the needs of the people.⁶⁰ But it was certainly a daunting task for Lim to alleviate the Chinese's fear over PAS's Islamic orientation. More importantly, the DAP rejected the inclusion of PAS in the Two-Front System. This was announced by its Secretary General, Lim Kit Siang, in Miri, Sarawak on 22 June 1986.⁶¹ Thus, the Two-Front System aspired by Lim Fong Seng failed to take shape in the 1986 General Election. The DAP contested the election on its own. On the other hand, although PAS formed an opposition pact with political parties such as the Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM) (Malaysian Peoples' Party), the Socialist Democratic Party, the Parti Nasionalis Malaysia (NASMA) (Malaysian Nationalist Party) and the Parti Pekerja Malaysia (Malaysian Workers' Party),⁶² this largely Malay opposition pact could not satisfy Lim Fong Seng who envisaged a strong Sino-Malay opposition front.

The Two-Front System advocated by Lim Fong Seng made unexpected headway prior to the 1990 General Election. The struggle for party leadership within the UMNO in 1987 had subsequently resulted in the forging of an electoral alliance among the opposition political parties. Tengku Razaleigh who narrowly lost to Dr Mahathir

⁵⁸ Khoo Boo Teik, *Paradoxes of Mahathirism: An Intellectual Biography of Mahathir Mohamad*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 226.

⁵⁹ Zhen Gong, *Huajiao Chunlei: Lin Huangsheng*, p. 208.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 209-210.

⁶¹ Lee Ban Chen, *Qiu Shi Ji (求是集)*, Kuala Lumpur: Oriengroup, 2001, p. 254.

⁶² Thock Ker Pong, *Ketuanan Politik Melayu: Pandangan Kaum Cina*, pp. 171, 179.

Mohamad in his quest for the UMNO leadership left the party and formed the Semangat 46 (Spirit of 46 Party) to revive his political career. It was Tengku Razaleigh who initiated the electoral alliance that encompassed two opposition fronts to accommodate PAS and DAP with Semangat 46 playing the mediating role. The two opposition fronts were the Gagasan Rakyat (Peoples' Coalition) and the Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah (Muslim Community Unity Movement). The former comprised the DAP, the PRM, the All Malaysian Indian Progressive Party and the Malaysian Solidarity Party, while the latter comprised PAS, the Barisan Jemaah Islamiah Se-Malaysia (BERJASA) (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Front) and the Hizbul Muslimin Malaysia (HAMIM) (Malaysian Hizbul Muslimin).⁶³ The formation of two opposition fronts was inevitable given the DAP's refusal to work with PAS within a unitary opposition front. The forging of this electoral alliance spurred Lim Fong Seng and other prominent Chinese educationists cum civil rights activists such as Kua Kia Soong, Lee Ban Chen, Ngeow Yin Ngee, Ng Wei Siong, Lim Wan Show and Zhang Yongqing to join the DAP on 18 August 1990 prior to the 1990 General Election.⁶⁴ In accordance with the principle of "transcending political parties but not politics" upheld by the Dong Jiao Zong, they resigned from their positions in their parent association. This decision to join the DAP was driven by their commitment "to strengthen the opposition political parties and to realize the Two-Front System" (壮大反对党，促成两线制). The President of Jiao Zong, Sim Mow Yu hailed this decision as symbolizing "a civil rights uprising and a democratic revolution" (民权的起义，民主的革命).⁶⁵ But he did caution Lim Fong Seng over the DAP's internal problems and the tendency of its leaders to put personal interests above the larger interests of the Chinese.⁶⁶

While Lim Fong Seng's decision to join the DAP was driven by the successful forging of an electoral alliance among the opposition political parties, his detention under the Internal Security Act (ISA) in 1987 provided the added impetus to arrive at the decision. His detention was the result of his involvement in the protest over the appointment of Chinese primary school administrators who did not have the required qualifications in the Chinese language. This appointment was construed by him as an attempt by the government to change the character of the Chinese primary schools.

⁶³ Ong Kok Chung 王国璋, *Malaixiya Zuqun Zhengdang Zhengzhi* (马来西亚族群政党政治), Kuala Lumpur: Oriengroup, 1998, pp. 167-168.

⁶⁴ Kua Kia Soong, *Inside the DAP 1990-1995*, Kuala Lumpur: Potensi Serentak, 1996, p. 3; Hew Kuan Yau, *Chaoyue Jiaotiao yu Wushi: Malaixiya Minzhu Xingdongdang Yanjiu*, p. 283.

⁶⁵ Chiam Yan Tuan 詹缘端, "Lin Huangsheng: Malaixiya huawen jiaoyu de wuming yingxiong (林晃升: 马来西亚华文教育的无名英雄)", in Lim Chooi Kwa, ed., *Malaixiya Huaren Lishi yu Renwu: Rushang Pian* (马来西亚华人历史与人物: 儒商篇), Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, 2003, p. 361; Hew Kuan Yau, *Chaoyue Jiaotiao yu Wushi: Malaixiya Minzhu Xingdongdang Yanjiu*, p. 283.

⁶⁶ Zhen Gong, *Huajiao Chunlei: Lin Huangsheng*, p. 213.

Despite strong opposition from the Chinese educationists, the government refused to budge. This forced the Chinese educationists to work with the Chinese-based political parties to stage a mass protest. But this mass protest fueled intense ethnic tensions when the UMNO decided to host its own mass gathering to counter the Chinese educationists, forcing the government to invoke the ISA to defuse the tension.⁶⁷ This was seen by the Chinese educationists as an arbitrary use of political power to suppress the Chinese education movement and it bolstered their decision to counter the political dominance of the BN/UMNO through an opposition front.⁶⁸

However, the Chinese educationists cum civil rights activists who joined the DAP prior to the 1990 General Election did not make a head-start in their new political endeavors, despite electoral results showing that a Two-Front System had emerged out of this election with the opposition electoral alliance securing 45.5 percent of the popular votes against 51.95 percent secured by the BN – a result of the 1-against-1 strategy deployed by the electoral alliance.⁶⁹ Four civil rights activists, i.e., Kua Kia Soong, Lee Ban Chen, Ng Wei Siong and Lim Wan Show, were selected as the DAP's candidates in the 1990 General Election. Out of the four, only two, i.e., Kua Kia Soong and Lim Wan Show, managed to secure a victory. This was a huge disappointment to the major Chinese guilds and associations. In fact, prior to the election, 15 of them, including the Dong Jiao Zong, released a list of demands through an official statement to serve as the underlying basis for the participation of the civil rights activists in the DAP. The official statement was prepared by the Selangor Civil Rights Committee and entitled *Demands of the Chinese Guilds and Association in the 1990 General Election*.⁷⁰ In addition, the Dong Jiao Zong also released a declaration entitled *In Search of a Democratic Society (追求民主社会宣言)*⁷¹ in support of the civil rights activists who joined the DAP.

Despite initial hiccups, the civil rights activists who joined the DAP were appointed to important positions in the party's 1991 General Assembly. Lim Fong Seng was appointed the party advisor while Lee Ban Chen was appointed the Vice Chairman. Meanwhile Kua Kia Soong was tasked to lead the party's education bureau and Zhang Yongqing was appointed the Deputy Chairman of the Youth section. Of the four positions, Lim's position is certainly the most esteemed. This was because the DAP

⁶⁷ Goh Cheng Teik, *Racial Politics in Malaysia*, Petaling Jaya: FEP, 1989, pp. 9-11.

⁶⁸ Thock Ker Pong, *Ketuanan Politik Melayu: Pandangan Kaum Cina*, pp. 193-194.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 192; Lee Ban Chen, *Qiu Shi Ji*, pp. 155-156.

⁷⁰ Thock Ker Pong, *Ketuanan Politik Melayu: Pandangan Kaum Cina*, pp. 185, 196.

⁷¹ Thock Kiah Wah 祝家华, *Jiegou Zhengzhi Shenhua: Dama Liangxian Zhengzhi de Pingxi (1985-1992)* [解构政治神话：大马两线政治的评析 (1985-1992)]. Kuala Lumpur: Huazi Resource & Research Centre, 1994, p. 282.

intended to draw the support of the Chinese community through his high social status.⁷² But subsequent developments showed that the civil rights activists began to doubt the DAP's commitment to the Two-Front System advocated by them. Prior to the 1995 General Election, the DAP announced its withdrawal from the Gagasan Rakyat.⁷³ The main reason cited was that the electoral alliance which included PAS had become a political liability to the party.⁷⁴ Although the DAP did not form a unitary opposition front with PAS, its involvement in the electoral alliance was attacked by its political rivals as an indirect collusion with PAS to establish an Islamic State in the country. Indeed, the DAP found itself in a dilemma as it was unable to mediate its roles within the electoral alliance to disassociate itself from PAS.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, the electoral alliance was also threatened by the exodus of the Semangat 46 members to the UMNO as well as the quitting of several top leaders from the party. This eventually led to the dissolution of the party. In a way, the Semangat 46 leaders were not fully committed to the Two-Front System advocated by the civil rights activists. The electoral alliance initiated by them was mainly to serve their interests to topple Dr Mahathir Mohamad so that they could regain their positions in the UMNO.⁷⁶ Clearly, this electoral alliance was initiated not to embrace the grand vision of the Two-Front System but to safeguard the vested interests of the Semangat 46.

The decision by the DAP to withdraw from the electoral alliance was one of the key reasons the civil rights activists left the party a few months after the 1995 General Election. They were disappointed that the DAP had regarded PAS as a political liability to the party. To be fair, the DAP did not suffer from the backlash of the electoral alliance that included PAS. Although the party had won less parliamentary seats as compared to the previous election (20 seats against 24 seats), this was not because of declining electoral support but because the party contested less parliamentary seats (57 seats against 64 seats). The DAP had also done fairly well in state constituencies. It had won 45 out of a total of 87 seats contested by the party. This was a huge improvement to the 37 seats (out of 118 contested seats) won by the party in the previous election.⁷⁷ Thus, the civil rights activists saw no valid reason for the DAP to withdraw from the electoral alliance apart from its vested interests that stemmed from the fear that PAS's

⁷² Zhen Gong, *Huajiao Chunlei: Lin Huangsheng*, p. 214.

⁷³ Hew Kuan Yau, *Chaoyue Jiaotiao yu Wushi: Malaixiya Minzhu Xingdongdang Yanjiu*, p. 287.

⁷⁴ Lee Ban Chen, *Qiu Shi Ji*, p. 162.

⁷⁵ Ho Khai Leong 何启良, *Dangdai Dama Huaren Zhengzhi Shengsi* (当代大马华人政治省思), Kuala Lumpur: Huazi Resource and Research Centre, 1994, p. 76.

⁷⁶ Guo Rende 郭仁德, "Lixiang' ying you xianshi de jichu ('理想'应有现实的基础)", in Zhang Jingyun, ed., *Dangdai Mahua Wencun: Zhengzhi Juan 90niandai*, p. 264.

⁷⁷ In-Won Hwang, *Personalized Politics: The Malaysian State under Mahathir*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003, pp. 186-187.

propagation of an Islamic State would erode its popular support among the Chinese electorate – a fear that had not been proven by the 1990 General Election results. More importantly, the civil rights activists construed this fear as unwarranted because they were convinced that PAS could never realize its aspirations to establish an Islamic State in the country.

There were also other reasons that forced the civil rights activists to leave the DAP as far as the DAP's commitment to the Chinese education movement was concerned. For one thing, some top leaders of the DAP were not prepared to forgive the Dong Jiao Zong (a main component of the Civil Rights Movement) for adopting the 3-in-1 strategy that culminated in a group of Chinese educationists joining the Gerakan prior to the 1982 General Election. This was most evident when they questioned the need to render financial assistance to the Dong Jiao Zong in a meeting of the central working committee.⁷⁸ In addition, the top leadership of the DAP was controlled by English-educated leaders who did not have a strong commitment to the cause of the Chinese education movement. The suppression of Chinese-educated leaders within the DAP in the 1980s added suspicion over the party's political orientation towards those who were Chinese-educated.⁷⁹ Apart from the DAP's lack of commitment towards the Chinese education movement, the civil rights activists were also disillusioned by Lim Kit Siang's authoritarian control of the party which had resulted in political patronage within the party detrimental to political reforms.⁸⁰

Since the failed attempt to initiate the Two-Front System, the Dong Jiao Zong had decided to quit political participation as a means to strengthen the Chinese education movement. It reverted to its original role as a pressure group. This decision is certainly a miscalculation on the part of the Dong Jiao Zong given that prior to the 1999 General Election, a strong opposition front capable of challenging the BN, i.e., the Barisan Alternatif (BA) (Alternative Front), had emerged in the Malaysian political landscape. This opposition front was subsequently transformed into the Pakatan Rakyat (Peoples' Front) – a crucial transformation that had brought about a huge impact to the political development of the country. The Pakatan Rakyat dealt a severe blow to the BN in the 2008 General Election, wresting the control of four states, i.e., Penang, Kedah,

⁷⁸ Kua Kia Soong, *Inside the DAP 1990-1995*, p. 4-5; Hew Kuan Yau, *Chaoyue Jiaotiao yu Wushi: Malaixiya Minzhu Xingdongdang Yanjiu*, pp. 285-286.

⁷⁹ Hew Kuan Yau, *Chaoyue Jiaotiao yu Wushi: Malaixiya Minzhu Xingdongdang Yanjiu*, p. 282.

⁸⁰ Lee Ban Chen, *Qiu Shi Ji*, pp. 159-165.

Perak and Selangor, from the BN.⁸¹ The Dong Jiao Zong has thus lost a golden opportunity to capitalize on this opposition front to strengthen the Chinese education movement. Lim Fong Seng who passed away in 2002 will certainly regret this missed opportunity if he had been alive then.

4. CONCLUSION

The two political strategies, i.e., the 3-in-1 strategy and the Two-Front System, respectively advocated by Lim Fong Seng in the 1980s and 1990s differed markedly in that the first strategy sought to strengthen the Chinese education movement through Chinese political unity, while the second strategy sought to strengthen the Chinese education movement through the formation of an opposition front that could be traced to the Chinese Civil Rights Movement launched in the mid-1980s. Both strategies involved the participation of a group of Chinese educationists in political parties. In the case of the first strategy, the Chinese educationists joined the Gerakan, a Chinese-based political party in the ruling coalition, while in the case of the second strategy, the Chinese educationists cum civil rights activists joined the DAP, a Chinese-based opposition political party. But both strategies failed to deliver the expected outcomes.

The failure of the 3-in-1 strategy was inevitable in that from the onset, the Dong Jiao Zong was not able to pull the different Chinese-based political parties together for a common cause. Instead of ironing out the differences between the Chinese-based political parties, it had taken a short-cut to achieve the strategy through the participation of a group of Chinese educationists in the Gerakan. Such a measure was doomed to fail. The DAP's challenge to the Chinese educationists who contested under the banner of the Gerakan in the 1982 General Election was thus expected given the intense out-bidding among the Chinese-based political parties. This was even more so when the Dong Jiao Zong had not come out with a strategic plan to include the DAP in the 3-in-1 strategy. Instead, the strategy was merely driven by euphoric slogans. It is, therefore, not fair for the Dong Jiao Zong to put all the blame on the DAP for opposing the strategy. Also, the Dong Jiao Zong had not expected that the Chinese educationists who joined the Gerakan would be co-opted by the party. More importantly, it had not taken into consideration Malay political dominance as a possible intervening factor while coming

⁸¹ Ooi Kee Beng, Johan Saravanamuttu and Lee Hock Guan, *March 8: Eclipsing May 13*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008; Kee Thuan Chye, *March 8: The Day Malaysian Woke Up*, Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2008.

out with the strategy, though Malay political dominance had been a political reality in this country since the 1970s.

The failure of the second strategy could be attributed to the combination of the decision by the DAP to withdraw from the electoral alliance and internal problems within the DAP. The DAP's withdrawal from the electoral alliance was mainly because it perceived the collaboration with PAS as a political liability, though such a perception had not been proven by the 1990 General Election results. Since the civil rights activists regarded PAS as a crucial component of the Two-Front System coupled with their belief that PAS could never establish an Islamic State in the country, it was thus difficult for them to accept the DAP's decision which to them was driven by vested interests. Meanwhile, it is most unfortunate that the civil rights activists were entrapped by the DAP's internal politics and disillusioned with the DAP's commitment towards the Chinese education movement as well as internal reforms.

From the perspective of political participation, the principle of "transcending political parties but not politics" upheld by the Dong Jiao Zong did not augur well for a more effective and decisive political outcome for the Chinese education movement. While this principle was upheld to ensure the neutrality of the Dong Jiao Zong as a pressure group that transcended political parties, it had constrained the political mobilization of the Chinese educationists. By merely relying on a small group Chinese educationist to act as its proxies in a particular political party, this would not bring about the desired outcome since these proxies did not have the numerical strength to influence the political trajectory of the party. Indeed, political participation should not be underpinned by half measures. The political principle upheld by the Dong Jiao Zong certainly lacks the much needed political commitment to strengthen the Chinese education movement through political participation. Also, such a principle could not ensure that the Dong Jiao Zong has fully transcended political parties since it regarded the Chinese educationists who participated in political parties as its proxies. It is perhaps for all these reasons that this principle has often been criticized for its inherent weaknesses, especially its failure to bring about a greater political mobilization that stems from a lack of concerted political leadership on the part of the Dong Jiao Zong.⁸²

In the final analysis, the key question one should ask is whether political participation is a correct option to strengthen the Chinese education movement. Given

⁸² Lin Zhenmu, "Canzheng, shi weihu minzu jiaoyu de liliang quanyuan", pp. 173-174.

the fact that minority rights (as far as the rights to Chinese education are concerned) in this country are still entrapped within the political confines of communitarianism which does not recognize individual rights, there is certainly a need to seek a political solution to the Chinese education movement. This is because communitarians dispute the conception of the autonomous individual since they view people as the products of social practices embedded in particular social roles and relationships.⁸³ Thus, until and unless minority rights are being safeguarded within the liberal framework which recognizes choice and autonomy of individuals,⁸⁴ political participation remains a relevant option to the Chinese education movement in this country. In retrospect and with the benefit of hindsight, the attempt by the Chinese educationists cum civil rights activists to form the Two-Front System in the 1990s was in fact a correct tactical move that could strengthen the Chinese education movement, albeit they had failed in such an attempt. Since the emergence of the Pakatan Rakyat as a formidable opposition front in the 2008 General Election, the Chinese schools had benefited from this political development, especially in terms of financial allocation, though it is still a long way to go for a revamp of policies that discriminated against the Chinese schools. Suffice it to say that it is within these counter-balancing as well as interlocking political forces where the Chinese could play a pivotal political role that their rights would be much more recognized either by the ruling coalition or the opposition front. In contrast, attempt by the Chinese educationists to safeguard the interests of Chinese education from within the ruling coalition government is less effective in that it could not change the political structure of the country and also it could not provide the much needed political maneuvering to strengthen the Chinese education movement.

⁸³ Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and Citizenship*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 19.

⁸⁴ Stephen May, Tariq Modood and Judith Squires, "Ethnicity, nationalism, and minority rights: Charting the disciplinary debates", in Stephen May, Tariq Modood and Judith Squires, eds., *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Minority Rights*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 4.