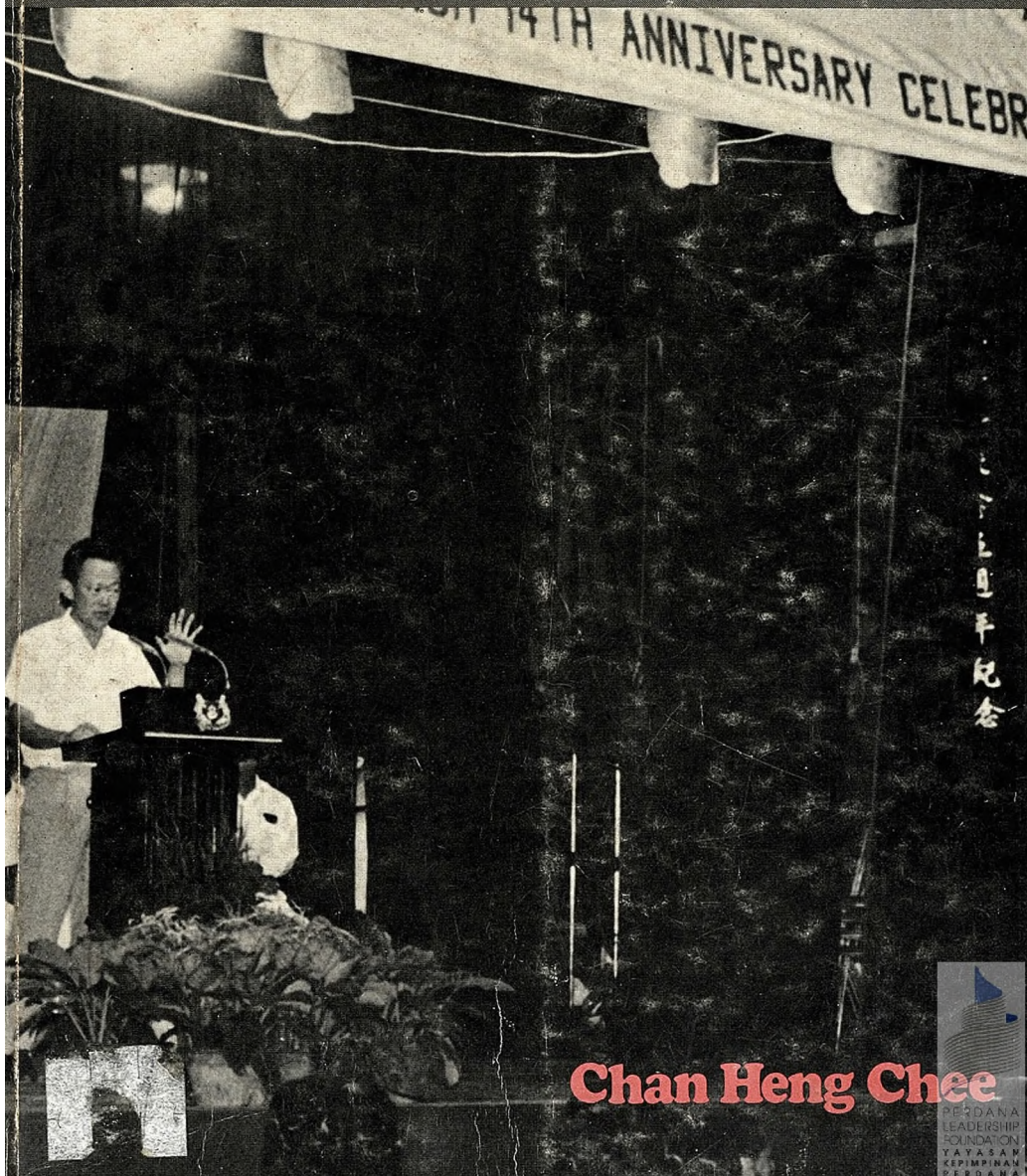


THE DYNAMICS OF ONE PARTY DOMINANCE

The PAP at the Grass-roots



Chan Heng Chee



PERDANA
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PERDANA

This book seeks to understand the workings of national politics in Singapore and the hegemony of the People's Action Party Government through a micro-level analysis of the political system. It represents the first systematic exploration of the relationship between the governors and the governed — of how people are ruled — through an investigation of the local interests, the party organization, local non-party institutions, the local bases of support, and the management of local issues. The dynamics of politics at the grass-roots is then related back to the macro-level development.

The author shows how the base is structured and a petitionary political culture is nurtured to buttress the existing political system.



SINGAPORE UNIVERSITY PRESS



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THE PAP AT THE GRASS-ROOTS**

Chan Heng Chee

PUSTAKA PERDANA



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For Kheng Soon



CONTENTS

FOREWORD	xi
PREFACE	xiii
PART I INTRODUCTION	
Chapter 1 The Problem.....	3
Chapter 2 A Decade of People’s Action Party Rule.....	20
PART II ENVIRONMENTAL PARAMETERS: FIVE CONSTITUENCIES IN FOCUS	
Chapter 3 The Settings and Their Problems.....	41
Chapter 4 Community Activities and Associations.....	79
PART III STRATEGY OF DOMINANCE	
Chapter 5 The Organization Variable: The Party at Constituency Level.....	101
Chapter 6 Non-Party Institutions at Constituency Level	133
Chapter 7 The Performance Variable: The Management of Local Issues	164
Chapter 8 The Opposition Variable: Opposition in a Dominant Party System	188
PART IV CONCLUSION	
Conclusion.....	223
APPENDIX A.....	235
B.....	236
C.....	250
D.....	252
E.....	254
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	255
INDEX	268

LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table</i>	<i>Page</i>
2.1 Date of Entry of 64 Senior Bureaucrats into the Singapore Civil Service.....	23
2.2 Gross Domestic Product by Industrial Origin	25
2.3 Opinion of Changes in General Since Relocation.....	30
2.4 Change in Living Conditions Since Relocation into HDB Flats.....	32
2.5 Miscellaneous Social Statistics.....	33
2.6 Tax Assessments Raised for Years 1959-1969 in Singapore.....	34
2.7 Perceived Chances for Children Getting Ahead by Income Group.....	36
2.8 Perceived Chances for Children Getting Ahead by Ethnic Group.....	37
3.1 Census of Housing Units in Rural Area 2.....	52
3.2 Bukit Panjang People's Requests.....	54
3.3 Telok Ayer People's Requests.....	63
3.4 Crawford People's Requests.....	70
5.1 Socio-Economic Background of PAP Party Leaders in Chua Chu Kang (1970-1971).....	119
5.2 Socio-Economic Background of PAP Party Leaders in Bukit Panjang (1970-1971).....	120
5.3 Socio-Economic Background of PAP Party Leaders in Telok Ayer (1970-1971).....	121
5.4 Socio-Economic Background of PAP Party Leaders in Crawford (1970-1971).....	122
5.5 Socio-Economic Background of PAP Party Leaders in Kampong Kembangan (1970-1971).....	123
5.6 PAP Membership at the Constituency Level and Year of Recruitment.....	128

<i>Table</i>	<i>Page</i>
6.1 Ethnic Breakdown of CCC Members in 5 Constituencies (1970-1971).....	147
6.2 Age Distribution of CCC Members in 5 Constituencies (1970-1971).....	148
6.3 Educational Attainment of the CCC Members in 5 Constituencies (1970-1971).....	150
6.4 Occupational Breakdown of CCC Members in 5 Constituencies (1970-1971).....	151
6.5 CCC Linkages With Organizations and Associations (1970-1971).....	151
6.6 Pattern of Linkages Among CCC Members (1970-1971).....	152
6.7 Overlapping Membership.....	159
6.8 Age Distribution of MC Members in 5 Constituencies (1970-1971).....	160
6.9 Educational Breakdown of MC Members in 5 Constituencies According to Medium of Education (1970-1971).....	160
6.10 Occupational Breakdown of MC Members in 5 Constituencies (1970-1971).....	161

LIST OF MAPS

<i>Map</i>	<i>Page</i>
1 Five Electoral Constituencies in Singapore.....	38
3.1 Chua Chu Kang Constituency.....	44
3.2 Bukit Panjang Constituency	55
3.3 Telok Ayer Constituency.....	59
3.4 Crawford Constituency	66
3.5 Kampong Kembangan Constituency.....	74

FOREWORD

The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies is a regional research centre for scholars and other specialists interested in the advancement and dissemination of knowledge on modern Southeast Asia. Among its various research facilities and activities, is its programme of Research Fellowships. This programme seeks to encourage and support research on the region by Southeast Asian scholars. It was inaugurated in 1969, with the first award going to the Indonesian historian, Professor Sartono Kartodirdjo of the Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta. Since then, the Institute has had more than twenty-five other Fellows drawn from all over the region, including Burma, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Dr. Chan Heng Chee was a Research Fellow at the Institute in 1970/71 whilst engaged in field-work for her doctoral dissertation. Based on this doctoral dissertation, submitted to the University of Singapore in 1973, *The Dynamics of One Party Dominance* forms part of a growing body of literature on the politics of Singapore, particularly the People's Action Party, or PAP as it is more popularly known.

The Dynamics of One Party Dominance focuses on the workings of the PAP and includes detailed micro-level studies of five electoral constituencies of the Island Republic, namely, Chua Chu Kang, Bukit Panjang, Telok Ayer, Crawford and Kampong Kembangan. The wealth of data provided and the accompanying analysis should be of considerable interest to both specialists and others concerned with the political process in Singapore in general and the relationship between the PAP and its constituents in particular.

In promoting publications like the work that follows, the Institute neither seeks nor derives any financial reward or benefits. Its interest is solely to encourage research and publication on the area by scholars of the region. Accordingly, we are pleased to see

Dr. Chan Heng Chee's study in print and would like to thank the Singapore University Press for making this possible. Whilst wishing Dr. Chan and her study all the best, it is clearly understood that responsibility for facts and opinions expressed in the volume that follows rests exclusively with Dr. Chan and her interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Institute or its supporters.

March 1976

Professor Kernial S. Sandhu
Director
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies

PREFACE

In recent years so many writings on the history, society, economy, and politics of Singapore have been published that one must have a good reason to believe that yet another political analysis of Singapore is a worthwhile project to embark on and a worthwhile book to publish.

My main justification is that this study is an attempt to examine Singapore politics from a different perspective leading hopefully to a clearer grasp and clarification of some aspects of our theoretical knowledge of politics. So far all the analyses on Singapore have concentrated on macro-level politics — on political dynamics at the national level, on recent political history, on studies of single political institutions, or some combination of the three. This study represents an attempt to grasp the realities of politics and to comprehend the hegemony of the People's Action Party (PAP) in the Singapore context through a micro-level analysis, to penetrate into the workings of the party and Government in the local environment. At this level it is still unexplored territory. My own reaction to the hitherto available studies is that whilst some have been very illuminating in helping us understand the workings of politics at the national level, there is one area which was never satisfactorily examined, if at all. That area is the relationship between the governors and the governed, looking at politics at the very basic level, that is, at the grass-roots. I have tried to come to grips with this problem, the result of which is a collection of quite an amount of detailed information on the less momentous and dramatic in politics. Those who are interested in high theory will be quite alarmed by the details, but my intention is not to dwell on descriptive detail for its own sake but to deal with a little known but highly significant arena which is crucial if any explanation of political hold and the successful exercise of political power is to be valid. My departure, though not original, is I believe uncommon, especially my efforts to link the micro-level analysis to a macro-

level relevance. There is reason enough then for such a study to be done.

My research, thinking, and writing which began as a doctoral dissertation and led to this book spanned a few years and many people have helped me in the process. I wish to express here my debt of gratitude to all the party bureaucrats, party members, and civil servants who wish to remain anonymous but who have facilitated this study; the Members of Parliament who gave me their time unstintingly; the community leaders who expressed so much political knowledge and wisdom to me in succulent ethnic idioms, and my colleagues both within and without my department who offered me many helpful suggestions and criticisms. Finally, I wish to thank the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies for awarding me a Research Fellowship in 1970-1971 which enabled me to do the bulk of my field work.

CHAN HENG CHEE

Department of Political Science
University of Singapore
1976

PART I
INTRODUCTION



THE PROBLEM

A common pattern of development in new states appears to be the establishment of the primacy of one party over all the other existing parties. The consolidation of party power over state and society can lead to the creation of single party or one-party regimes. It can also stop short at the emergence of a dominant party system.

Distinctions in Definitions

A one-party system differs from a dominant party system in that in the former, a single political party holds an effective monopoly of power and controls access to government office. This may be provided either by law or written into the constitution of the state; even where other parties may exist they have little or no effect on the course of events.¹ In a one-party system, the single party is seen as the sole legitimation of the political system, the major avenue for recruitment to political leadership, and the source of interest aggregation and policy-making. In stating these points one must however distinguish between strong one-party systems and weak one-party systems. In the latter, the principal actor in the system need not be the party but a charismatic leader, the Church, the military, or the bureaucracy. One-party systems may be established for a variety of objectives and may reflect different social interests. The quality they have in common is the tendency to monopolize political action. This is done by anchoring their power on a core of activists who undertake to dominate government, the police, the armed forces, the channels of mass communication, and every form of social organization.² In a dominant party system there is a major party which is capable of governing, and several

1. Samuel P. Huntington and Clement H. Moore, *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society* (London: Basic Books, 1970). Chapter 1 by Samuel Huntington on 'Social and Institutional Dynamics of One-party Systems'. See also Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).
2. Merle Fainsod, 'The Dynamics of One-Party Systems' in Oliver Garceau (ed), *Political Research and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).

parties which the dominant party cannot ignore in its political calculations. The dominant party permits more than one party to compete and is certainly democratic in the procedural sense. In fact it dominates without doing away with the democratic procedures and symbols.

When Maurice Duverger first introduced the term he used it with fine discretion. A dominant party was not to be confused with a majority party or a party with a majority bent, although it would have to be larger than any other. It was a political party whose doctrines, ideas, methods, and style dominated the political atmosphere of a country over a period of time or, to use his words, 'coincide with those of the epoch',³ but in the post-Duverger usage of the term as developed by other scholars it has been used to refer to a situation which implies a departure from competitive politics. The line between a one-party system and a dominant party system can sometimes be very fine and may in fact represent a stage leading to the establishment of single party rule.⁴ But the development may also lead to the decline of dominance and a subsequent period of no-party politics, two-party politics, or multi-party politics.³

A generally acknowledged archetypal example of a one-party system would be the communist states such as the Soviet Union, the Chinese People's Republic, and North Vietnam. Fascist states such as Hitler's Germany, and new states such as Tanzania and Ghana under Nkrumah, may also be said to possess a one-party system. India until 1975, would provide the model of a dominant party system⁶ where politics was still characterized by a high degree of

3. Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties. Their Organisation and Activity in the Modern State*. Translated by Barbara and Robert North (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1962), pp. 307-312.
4. Some scholars have argued however that the dominant party system is *sui generis* and should not be seen as a particular mutant of one of the other systems that results from idiosyncratic features of a specific historical situation. See Alan Arian and Samuel H. Barnes, 'The Dominant Party System: A Neglected Model of Democratic Stability', *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 1974, pp. 592-614.
5. The patterns of subsequent party development after the consolidation of a dominant party in a new state has been studied by Immanuel Wallerstein, 'The Decline of the Party in Single-Party African States' in Joseph La Palombara and Myron Weiner, *Political Parties and Political Development* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966), Henry Bienen 'One-Party Systems in Africa' in S. Huntington & Clement Moore (ed.) *op. cit.* and James S. Coleman & Carl G. Roseberg, *Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964).
6. W.H. Morris-Jones, 'Dominance & Dissent. Their Interrelations in the Indian Party System,' *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1966, pp. 451-466.

'openness'. Between these two typologies the differences are clear, but there is a group of dominant parties which move nearer the one-party typology and where the exercise of power is correspondingly distinct. These parties have only recently received attention from scholars, and in attempting to separate the finer attributes in the development of one party and one party dominant systems in Africa, Coleman and Roseberg have suggested that there are two trends of one-party development. One is the 'revolutionizing-centralizing' trend and the other is the 'pragmatic-pluralistic' pattern. In their words:

(Parties representative of) ... the revolutionising-centralising trend are heavily and compulsorily preoccupied with ideology; the content of which is programmatic and transformative regarding the socio-economic modernisation of contemporary African society.... They tend also to be ultra populist and egalitarian with heavy stress upon direct commitment to and participation in the party and the state. Organisationally the parties tend to be monolithic and strongly centralised, achieving a monopoly over — frequently, indeed a complete fusion with — all other associations, as well as an assimilation of party and government structures throughout the society. In contrast leaders of the dominant parties of the pragmatic-pluralistic type place far less emphasis upon ideology; they are far less concerned over the persistence of traditional elites and structures within their societies and overdependence upon the former colonial power. The degree of popular mobilisation is substantially less than the revolutionising-centralising states and although unitary and hierarchical, the pragmatic-pluralistic states permit a looser relationship between the party and other associations in a climate of "tolerated but controlled pluralism".⁷

Elsewhere George I. Blankstein in trying to come to grips with this phenomenon in Latin America speaks of two varieties of dominant parties. There is the 'dictatorial' party such as that found in the Dominican Republic and Venezuela, and the 'dominant non-dictatorial party' which is the Party of Revolutionary Institutions (PRI) of Mexico.⁸ Thus party systems where the leading parties are

7. Coleman and Roseberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

8. George I. Blankstein, 'Political Groups in Latin America', in John H. Kautsky, *Political Change in Underdeveloped Countries* (New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1967).



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