

# **Understanding China and Chinese Voters' Identities in the Eyes of Malaysian Prime Ministers: Sino-Malaysian Relations as Campaign Strategy**

**Soon, Thean-Bee**

This dissertation adopts the Poliheuristic theory to examine if the Malaysian Prime Ministers had sacrificed the national interests of Malaysia when they exploited the Malaysia-People Republic of China relations to affect the Malaysian Chinese voting behavior in the upcoming elections. Subsequently, this thesis applies the Post-Chineseness theory to study the approaches that the Prime Ministers took to understand China and the Malaysian Chinese identities. The research questions of this dissertation are: 1. Did the Prime Ministers sacrifice the national interest to secure the regime interest when they publicly interacted with the PRC leaders within hundred days before 1974, 1999, 2013 general election was held? 2. How did the Prime Ministers perceive the PRC? A friend, a foe or a frenemy? 3. How did the Prime Ministers perceive China and the Malaysian Chinese? What were the elements that contributed to such an understanding? Existing studies discussed the Malaysia-PRC relations from the aspect of regionalism, economy, strategy, and history. In fact, the understanding of the Prime Ministers toward the Malaysian Chinese was as well affected the development of the Malaysia-PRC relations. Yet, this area has been long neglected, and so did the studies on the formation of such perception. This dissertation relies on documentary analysis and interviews to establish a framework to answer the questions. It discovers that: 1. The Prime Ministers did not entirely scarify national interests to maintain their regime interests. In fact, they endeavored to search for options that could fulfill both interests. 2. When the Prime Ministers viewed China as a peculiar civilization with a subjective will, the PRC is a foe; when they viewed it as an economic resource, the PRC is a friend. 3. The understanding of the Prime Ministers toward the PRC and the Malaysian Chinese were through the lens of Scientific Chineseness, but Najib Razak, the sixth Prime Minister developed an additional understanding on the PRC, namely the Sinology Chineseness. Yet, the understanding of the Prime Ministers on China and the Malaysian Chinese were superficial. And this is the reason that the Prime Minister failed to regain the Malaysian Chinese votes in 2013 although he met the PRC leader before the election.

Keyword: Malaysia; Prime Minister; election; China; Malaysian Chinese