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An International Review of Asia and the Pacific
of economic development which had been accompanied by rampant corruption, nepotism and cronyism.

Since this volume professes to talk about discourses and practices of democracy and includes articles on NGOs, executive dominance over the civil service, Islamic politics and the media, the reader would well expect to find an in-depth analysis of the nature of Malaysian politics after these pivotal 1998 developments. This book, however, disappoints, for the arguments here provide little insight into why profound political changes have not occurred despite the reformasi movement. Nor is there much analysis of the discourses on democracy and accountability that have emerged since 1998, discourses led by the middle class.

The most novel idea in this volume is Francis Loh’s use of the concept of developmentalism, which he argues has emerged as a major discourse theme. Loh adopts a modernization perspective, which contends that the middle class should be in the forefront of the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Loh, however, asserts that since the Malaysian middle class, which benefited appreciably from economic development, is a materialist, self-centered community, they possess little reformist zeal to drive the burgeoning democratization movement. There is, however, little empirical evidence to substantiate his view of the middle class.

This limited new research is a major shortcoming in this volume. The empirical evidence to discuss the new discourses of democracy could have been obtained by Loh, and the other contributors to this volume, if they had done an in-depth study of the post-1998 developments and the 1999 general elections. An analysis of the results of this general election would have provided insights into why the urban middle class had withheld their support for the BA while the electorate in the rural Malay heartland strongly backed PAS. A comparative content analysis of the debates in the mainstream media and the alternative websites may have indicated why the manifestos—or discourse—by the BA failed to capture the imagination of middle-class Malaysians who appeared ready for a change to the political system in 1998. An examination of NGO-involvement in mainstream politics would have shown whether a new trend was emerging among social activists and if this portended well for the development of civil society.

The desire for continued development, which the middle class probably feel only the BN can provide, may be a factor in why Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad retains his hegemony over the Malaysian state. However, until an in-depth analysis of Malaysian politics and society is undertaken, it will remain unclear if developmentalism is the reason why democracy has yet to emerge in Malaysia.

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In this book the author places emphasis on the enigma, about “... how Mahathir has stayed in power through the vision,” and that this vision is based on civil society rather than the state.

Although the above Gramscian assertion of the state as a whole is an extremely lucid, gripping and evolving political climate in Malaysia. Hilley’s decision to channel his efforts is refreshing not only because it is an application of theory but also for sustaining the possibility of change could be easily challenged. Were Hilley’s assertions true, he would have noted the limits in the form of repressive detention laws, and the passing of new electoral laws to fortuitously, even uncannily “legitimated” the system.

How could hegemony have been planed itself is filled with evidence of repressive elements in Malaysian society? Chapters on the state, the instrumentalist and coercive instrumentalist are skillfully describes, the methods are not. Much as the book is a commendable attempt to explain the complexity of consensus and co-optation propounded in the Malaysian case.

The use of the concept “Mahathirism” from Khoo Boo Teik’s definition (Para. 1, Biography of Mahathir Mohamad [Kuala Lumpur: 2001]) for it to mean the complex interplay of nationalism, capitalism, Islam, populism and the jumble of “isms” would be less accurate. Political pragmatism, even “Machiavellian...