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PATH DEPENDENCE AND HISTORY IN THE MALAYSIAN CIVIL SERVICE

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Path Dependence and History in
the Malaysian Civil Service[1]

Abstract

Path dependence' refers to the way in which an industry's or a country's choice of a particular technology or mode of governance is a 'critical juncture' which 'locks in' the choice and closes off alternative paths of development. It implicitly denies that governments can do much to influence long-term direction; donors still less. The article explores similarities and contrasts with the treatment of these questions in mainstream historiography, particularly the work of Braudel. A case study of the Malaysian civil service finds that the consolidation of the civil service in the 1950s was a 'critical juncture', but that its subsequent evolution, in which individual 'agency' was important, has been equally significant in giving it its overall shape. The abiding value of the path dependence view for development studies lies in its insight that history shapes and constrains policymaking. It is an insight that development scholars, leaning on historiography, would do well to develop.

Key words: Path dependence, history, Malaysia, development policy, civil service

PATH DEPENDENCE IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

This article deals with the concept of path dependence as a particular kind of explanation for the development of governance and institutions, and uses the development of the civil service in Malaysia as a vehicle for assessing its value. Since path dependence has a radical or even fatal implication for 'traditional' donor-led development, our discussion is also a discussion of the development of development itself.

Coined by David (1985), 'path dependence', has come to be seen as a key to understanding the way economies, organizations and polities behave. It began as an economic heresy, one of the challenges to neo-classical orthodoxy that emerged in the 1970s and 80s.[2] Neo-classical economics had assumed that rational economic actors would make optimal and unconstrained

choices. David, Arthur (1989) and others, dwelling on episodes in the history of technology like the triumph of the QWERTY typewriter keyboard in the English-speaking countries, of petrol-over steam-driven car engines in the 1890s and of the VHS video format over its Betamax rival, suggested that the choices might be less than optimal. An intrinsically inferior technology might prevail because of a 'founder effect' whereby learning processes and further investment would generate increasing rather than diminishing returns. As well as giving an economic vindication to the English poet and visionary William Blake (1966: 151) who had declared that 'If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise,' this would make the inferior but mature technology seem preferable to a superior but embryonic technology at the point where a choice had to be made.[3]

Thus path dependence in technology boils down to a three-stage process: an initial 'critical juncture' when the path is embarked on (such as the adoption of QWERTY); increasing returns after adoption of the path; and 'lock-in', as each step down the path escalates commitment to the initial choice and increases reluctance to change direction. Since actions in the present are conditioned by decisions in the past, this is a view in which 'History becomes important', as Arthur says (1989: 128).

Following Arthur, analysis based on path dependence has fanned out without much in the way of critical discussion (though see Liebowitz and Margolis, 1995) to three of the disciplines on which development studies draws. Economists have used it to explain the pattern of national industrial development in both industrialized and developing countries: Sweden and the United States on one hand, Brazil and India on the other (respectively, Eriksson, 2000; Krugman, 1991; Meyer-Stamer, 1998; and Hall, 1999). Business and management has used it to make sense of the trajectory of individual firms (Schilling, 2002), and also of whole industries like America's cell phone industry (Noda and Collis, 2001; Redding, 2002).

Crucially, at last, political scientists have used it to understand the development of political institutions in Latin America (Collier and Collier, 1991; Mahoney, 2001; 2003) and, in a manifestation that many readers of *World Development* will know, Italian regional government in Robert Putnam's *Making democracy work* (1993), the source of our ubiquitous interest in 'social capital'. North's seminal work on institutions was the bridge between technology and

politics. Echoing Arthur's words by announcing that 'history matters' in his opening line, North used path dependence to explain the superior long-run economic performance of the United States and the United Kingdom over the whole of an (undifferentiated) Latin America and over Spain respectively (1990: 116-17).[4] Where the technological paths had ranged modestly from twenty to a hundred years, the political paths could stretch out over half a millennium or even more. Thus a recent even more ambitious account which does not use the path dependence language has identified the mortality rate of European settlers in different colonies on three continents as a major cause of the different institutions that colonists set up, which in turn are identified as a major cause of the (ex-) colonies' subsequent economic performance (Acemoglu *et al.*, 2001).

In short, path dependence's sudden ubiquity; the flexibility that allows scholars to use it to make sense of short- and long-run change in organizations, technology and polities, and at national, sectoral and organizational levels of analysis to boot – this is why the political economist Robert Bates has said that 'History, discourse, institutions, structures, symbols, path dependency ... mark the agenda ahead' for development studies (1993: 1080).[5]

'Critical Junctures': The Role of Accident in Path Dependence

Path dependence research initially allowed human actors little freedom. Mesmerized by the wingbeat of chaos theory's celebrated 'butterfly stirring the air today in Peking (that) can transform storm systems next month in New York' (Gleick, 1988: 8), or, more prosaically, accidents like that of geography which led to America's carpet industry growing up around Dalton, Georgia (Krugman, 1994: 225), it had a decidedly determinist character. 'Historical accidents' were David's prime mover. Moving to politics, Putnam similarly believed that the door leading to the path of civic development from the south of Italy clicked shut in the twelfth century. In his Olympian view, Garibaldi and Mussolini, neither of whom earns a mention in his book index, and even the framers of the very decentralization that was the focus of his study, lived all alike in vain. Putnam does see a role for 'those concerned with democracy and development' to improve civic development through steps to build social capital that are painstaking but still drastic from a millennial perspective (1993: 185). But he implicitly rules out a single Great Leap Forward, even one taken by a 'great leader' on a country's behalf.

This determinist strand of path dependence research also sometimes emphasizes cultural endowment as a shaping factor, powerful enough in one case, apparently, to tear apart the merger of two national car manufacturers, Volvo and Renault (Bruner and Spekman, 1998). Culture is held to shape institutions, not vice-versa (Greif, 1994; Redding, 2002). Given that culture develops by accretion rather than springing up fully-formed, however, this would appear to contradict the notion of a single critical event or 'juncture'.[6]

'Critical Junctures': The Role of Agency

Putnam was well aware of the unpalatable implication of his line of thinking, and disarmingly he allows an Italian regional president to express it: 'This is a counsel of despair! You're telling me that nothing I can do will improve our prospects for success. The fate of the reform was sealed centuries ago' (Putnam, 1993: 183).[7] A little later than Putnam, James Mahoney was less willing to leave the president and his Latin American counterparts twisting in the wind. He had identified first the nineteenth and early twentieth century liberal reform period (Mahoney, 2001), and then the even more distant founding of Spain's colonial empire (Mahoney, 2003) as critical junctures in Latin America's political history, when political and social institutions were created which have tended to endure, resisting transformation and ushering countries down different paths.[8] The pattern that became established ironically favoured the subsequent economic development of the imperial periphery (e.g. Argentina) over the core (e.g. Bolivia). Again the view is Olympian: instead of Garibaldi and Mussolini, it is now luminaries like Bolivar, Monroe (of 'Monroe doctrine' fame) and Kissinger who are the ephemeral figures. However, Mahoney and his colleague Snyder (1999) in an important theoretical article explicitly allow a role for agency. At the critical junctures, they suggest, human beings could have willed matters otherwise. Honduras and Nicaragua's liberal experiment, for instance, might not have been aborted, setting them on the path to dictatorship, had political leaders in the United States refrained from meddling, as of course they were free to do. We are not obliged to wait passively for the *Zeitgeist* to change; a determined individual or group may bend history to its will. One way they can do that is to create institutions to do their bidding, crucial meso-structures that stand between human beings and the macro-structures of society that neither individuals nor groups have much control over.

Still, Mahoney and Snyder imply that gaps between critical junctures will be centuries long, in contrast to the gaps between critical junctures in the adoption of new technologies (some readers will have reflected already that VHS videocassettes, and likewise WordPerfect word processing software, another of Krugman's examples, are already all but obsolete). During the gaps, the institutions that humans created to do their bidding harden into 'frozen constraints' (Mahoney and Snyder, 1999: 18), rather in the spirit of Winston Churchill's remark that 'We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us' (quoted in Booth, 2003: 99).

Between Critical Junctures: Political Machine-Minding

Thus while students of political path dependence differ over the degree of freedom that political actors have in shaping critical junctures, they agree in granting them no freedom to speak of in the very long intervals between junctures, when they have no choice but to eke out 'normal governance'[9] as machine-minders on a political assembly line.[10] In keeping with Arthur's notion of 'lock-in', path dependence is a strange kind of key which locks doors but cannot open them afterwards. Even the humane and supple view of Mahoney and Snyder continues to insist on the salience of the 'critical junctures' (see also North, 1990: 104).[11] History is a gigantic railway network, where travel is in a straight line until a points switch at a junction sends the train down another line, rather than, say, a language, developing incrementally and imperceptibly.

History and the Historians

As so often, path dependence has instructive precursors in disciplines with which its adherents tend to be unfamiliar. Stinchcombe, who prefigures the notion of 'lock-in', is one (1968: 122). In general, the notion that 'history matters' came as somewhat more of a shock to economists than it did to historians, who have anticipated the principal lines of the path dependence argument.[12] Space precludes engaging substantially with that literature, but I suggest that the approach of the French historian Fernand Braudel, representing the so-called '*Annales* school' of historians grouped around the journal of the same name, is helpful, as it is authoritative and maps closely on to the path dependence approach.

In the introduction to his very influential work, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Braudel recounts how he began with a conventional study of the diplomacy of King Philip II of Spain, but found himself drawn to deep underlying features that

dictated, as he came to believe, that Philip and his royal counterparts 'were, despite their illusions, more acted upon than acting' (1973: 19). Crucially for us, the structure that he settled on for his book has three levels. He called the first level *structure* (the deepest of the 'underlying features', especially geography). He inclined to call the second level 'social history'. At this level he was trying to identify *conjonctures*, a word whose etymological similarity to 'critical juncture' is clear: bundles of economic and social factors that influence historical developments. Unlike the critical junctures, however, 'There is no single conjuncture: we must visualize a series of overlapping histories, developing simultaneously' (1973: 893). *Events* – conventional political history, in other words – were the third level in his model.

The approach is similar to the path dependence approach in so far as he insisted that we must seek the roots of events in a 'social level' formed centuries past, and more fundamentally still at a 'geographical level' laid down whole geological eras ago. The deep levels would powerfully constrain events and their participants, largely unbeknownst to them. This is the history of the *longue durée*, the (very) long run. Braudel's emphasis on it is the essence of his contribution to historiography.

But there are differences too. As we have seen, Braudel rejects the notion of decisive 'critical junctures'. In a later book he sees the decline of the peasant economy as the crucial trend in modern France, but says: 'I shall make no attempt to identify some irrevocable turning-point' (1990: 401). In general we see him using trial and error in a quest for the complete explanation. His evidence may be quantitative – price movements and demographic statistics were meat and drink to him – but his method was humane scholarship leading to judgement rather than scientific research leading to correlation. History is a gradual unfolding, rather than a Stephen Jay Gould-style 'punctuated equilibrium'. Like the German philosopher Leibniz, Braudel believed that while the pace of change might speed up or slow down, 'nature does not make leaps' (quoted in Gerschenkron, 1968: 19). However – and here is another similarity with path dependence - since there is no turning point at which an individual or group can switch the railway points, free will remains heavily circumscribed, though in a subtly different way from the path dependence approach.

It follows that Braudel rejects single cause explanations, whether class struggle as in Marx or challenge and response as an explanation of the rise and fall of civilizations as in his *bête noire*, the historian Arnold Toynbee. He reproaches even his mentor, the economic historian Ernest Labrousse, for 'succumb(ing) to the need to return to a less cumbersome measure of time when he pinpointed the depression of 1774 to 1791 as one of the most compelling sources, one of the prime launching pads of the French Revolution' (Braudel, 1980: 30). Where Collier and Collier (1991: 38), in the quantitative tradition, were content to explain only 'a quarter, a fifth, or even a tenth' of the variance in their data[13], Braudel aspired to 'total history'. As a contemporary insisted, 'History seeks for causal wave-trains and is not afraid, since life shows them to be so, to find them multiple' (Bloch, 1954: 194).[14]

Policy Transfer, Policy Learning and the Possibility of Political Activism

This current esoteric expression of the perennial debate about free will versus determinism or agency versus structure in the course of history has a more than academic significance for those of us with a practical interest in the governance of developing countries. For path dependence in its strict form has a radical and perhaps even fatal implication for development policy interventions as traditionally practised. If governments have no choice but to soldier on down the path that choice or contingency placed them on long ago, purposeful action in the short- or even medium-term becomes futile. Nothing short of a once-in-every-500-years critical juncture, one fears, will make a government move towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) unless its path decrees it already. Indigenous development activists, international policy mongers in the development agencies and the consultant and academic communities, with our ever-ready blueprint models – we are all wasting our time. In normal circumstances there is no such thing as policy transfer or policy learning. (On a more hopeful note, we can infer that a government's path might be propelling it with equal inexorability *towards* the MDGs: path dependence must be neutral rather than pessimistic in this sense, despite North and Putnam's odd preference for negative instances. Moreover, path dependence does offer a richer explanation than lack of 'political commitment' for the admitted failure of so many of the World Bank's own public sector reform programmes [Nunberg, 1997; see also McCourt, 2003].)

Path dependence in this fatalistic form was bound to be resisted by many of us who thought that making a difference when the odds were stacked against us was what development was all

about. Isaiah Berlin (1969) has shown how hard it is to be a thoroughgoing determinist in practice, in the face of the mental habits on which, for instance, convictions in courts of law are based. Thus the World Bank simply glossed over the radical implication of path dependence for its own style of operation when it naturalized Putnam's 'social capital' concept (Bebbington *et al*, 2004). Likewise a recent book that argues for a new pro-poor politics of inclusion invokes path dependence, but only to insist that it is compatible with an incremental change process in which even 'relatively small groups of politicians and bureaucrats' could be enough to 'change paths' (Houtzager and Moore, 2003: see especially 3, 13 and 278). From a strict path dependence point of view, all this is naïve voluntarism of the most abject kind.[15]

Mainstream historiography, for its part, is a little less determinist. Here is Braudel's view at the conclusion of his Mediterranean study:

> 'By stating the narrowness of the limits of action, is one denying the role of the individual in history? I think not ... I would conclude with the paradox that the true man of action is he who can measure most nearly the constraints upon him, who chooses to remain within them and even to take advantage of the weight of the inevitable, exerting his own pressure in the same direction. All efforts against the prevailing tide of history – which is not always obvious – are doomed to failure.' (1973, 1243-4) [16]

Marwick has recently proposed a very Braudelian hierarchy of explanatory factors which is less determinist still. It consists of structures – geographical, demographic, economic and technological – ideologies, institutions, events and human agencies. On the last of these, Marwick says that 'it is usually possible to show, with evidence, where human actions have been influential, if not decisive ... there are few historians today who would declare that there are no circumstances in which human agencies, be they trade unions, employers' confederations or fanatical religious sects, cannot have any effects at all' (2001: 206; some readers may notice that Marwick has reached Clay and Schaffer's [1984] well-known 'room to manoeuvre' by a roundabout historical route). But whether Marwick's 'effects' will be superficial and ephemeral, or profound and durable, remains moot.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What, then, are the issues that we would like our case study to shed light on? Path dependence as defined here has furnished accounts of the trajectory of typewriters and of governments in Latin America and Italy. Table 1 compares it with the two alternative accounts of the 'development of development' that we have discussed or alluded to already. '(Post-) Washington consensus' in the table conveniently emphasizes the continuity of development thinking in our respect (see Fine, 2001) at the expense of simplification, but in a way that I hope most readers will recognize.

Table 1   Path dependence and history in development interventions

	(Post-) Washington consensus	**Path dependence**	**Braudelian history**
Roots of development	*Tabula rasa*	'big bang' critical juncture	structure (esp. geography) and social history/ *conjoncture*
View of history	(no coherent view)	equilibrium punctuated every 100-500 years	gradual evolution
Causation	unconstrained	unconstrained at critical juncture, then determined	mostly determined by structure and social history
Political action	free actions possible with 'political will'	free actions possible at critical juncture, then 'path-dependent'	free action significant only if going with historical grain (Braudel); *or* some unconstrained space exists (Marwick)

The Malaysian Civil Service

Our case study is of the development of the Malaysian civil service. I have chosen it for the following reasons. First, from a methodological point of view, while we should not generalize from single cases, a single-case design is appropriate when the case represents a critical example for testing a theory (Eisenhardt, 1989; see also Yin, 1994). Second, from a policy point of view, three recent separate studies conducted under both UN and World Bank auspices claim to have found evidence that the quality of the civil service is central to the quality of

governance as a whole and possibly also to national economic growth (Court *et al.*, 1999; Evans and Rauch, 1999; Kaufmann *et al.*, 1999).

Moreover, when set against the lamentable performance of the civil service in so many developing countries, Malaysia seems to represent a beacon of efficiency, having 'distinguished itself in the developing world as a country which ... has demonstrated ... a significant improvement in the strength of its administration ... The public service ... has ... undergone major changes within a short time frame, representing a fundamental shift in paradigm' (Sharma, 1998: 431-2). The World Bank's governance index places it on the 81st percentile of countries world-wide, against an average placing on the 50th percentile for countries in the East Asia region; even the middle-income countries among which Malaysia is numbered appear only on the 63rd percentile (Kaufmann *et al.*, 2003).[17] The Malaysian economy has done well, but its bureaucracy, apparently, even better. Thus the former Chief Secretary to the government states with a minimum of undue modesty that 'The rapid economic growth experienced by the country during the past few years can be attributed to the continuing efforts of the Civil Service in implementing the Malaysia Incorporated policy' (Sarji, 1995: 135).

And so for officials from other developing countries setting out on study tours and conscious that other success stories like diamond-rich Botswana and the island economies of Hong Kong and Singapore are special cases, all roads have led to Kuala Lumpur (Sarji, 1995: xiv). Quite rightly so, according to bureaucracy's most persuasive current advocate, slashing the Gordian knot of path dependence:

> 'The challenge of emulating East Asia's bureaucratic effectiveness may be less daunting than the stereotypical 'Confucian super-bureaucrat' image might suggest. Meritocracy and organizational coherence can be secured ... in a variety of institutional forms. Most countries should be able to find one suited to local history and politics.' (Evans, 1998: 73[18])

In short, 'If Malaysia can do it, why can't you?' The status of Malaysia as an exemplar of governance is based on the assumption that its experience is transferable, rather than the culmination of an idiosyncratic 'path'. What, then, has been the nature of Malaysia's civil

service management success? How path-dependent has success been, and how much of it depends on critical junctures in Malaysia's history? Finally, how realistic is it to expect other countries to emulate Malaysia's performance in the way that Evans says?

SOCIETY, ECONOMY, POLITICS AND THE CIVIL SERVICE

In this section I review the factors that have shaped the Malaysian civil service under the above headings, using documentary sources and the results of field interviews conducted in 2004[19] to understand how it is being managed in the present, and the nature of the relationship between past and present.

Society

The deepest social root is the premium placed on authority. Children tend to respect parents and adults; young Malays, district officers; and citizens 'will not readily challenge any ... government official, even one whom they believe to be corrupt. Even to hear criticisms of their leaders will sometimes cause them to feel uncomfortable or irritated ... obedience and respect for authority are a key factor in Malay social attitudes' (Taib and Ismail, 1982: 112-13). It is a longstanding feature – Andaya and Andaya in their history of Malaysia talk of 'an earlier age when Malays sought guarantees of just rule from their kings in return for promises of unswerving loyalty' (2001: 339) – but it was reinforced by British administrative culture, including the fact that as in other colonies, the British chose to rule indirectly through the native rulers (Mansor and Ali, 1998). Consequently, 'popular ... deference to the Westernized elite – particularly civil servants – was the rule rather than the exception' in the post-independence period (Embong, 2002: 22). Echoing this analysis, Scott (1968: 252) observes that 'the traditional reliance on high-status leadership has created a situation tailor-made for domination by the administrative elite. Both the bureaucrats and those they guide find this relationship quite natural and appropriate.' All of this is reflected in Hofstede's (1980) well-known research, in which Malaysia is actually the country with the highest score for 'power distance', defined as the extent to which cultures accept the right of superiors to exercise power over subordinates.

The second major social influence is Malaysia's ethnic composition, and the attitudes that flow from it: 'identity has hinged on ethnicity' (Case, 1995: 102). Despite differences within the indigenous community or 'bumiputras' (a Sanskrit word meaning 'sons of the soil'), the

politically vital cleavage is between the mostly Malay bumiputras as a whole and the descendants of the Chinese and (mostly South) Indian immigrants originally imported by the British colonial rulers to work in new economic activities, notably rubber plantations and tin mines. The cleavage is sharpened by the rarity of intermarriage, since the ethnic divide is also a religious (and linguistic) divide between Malays who are nearly all Muslim, Indians who are mostly Hindu and Chinese who are mostly Taoist or Buddhist. As in other former colonies with a relatively wealthy settler minority – Ireland (Foster, 1989) and Zimbabwe spring to mind – there is a sense that the minorities whose parents or ancestors were settlers are there on sufferance, and that independence in 1957 was the proper opportunity for the poor majority to assert its culture and interests at the settlers' expense (Scott, 1968; Taib and Ismail, 1982: 122-3). A retired very senior official commented in an interview that *'You go back to ancient thinking: this is their country and they want to dominate.'*

Some observers have suggested that ethnic identity has begun to weaken or fragment (Choi, 2003; Thompson, 2001; Weiss, 1999), leading Case (1995: 107) to make the intriguing suggestion that there is now room for 'Farsighted leaders (to) innovate within the parameters of cultural familiarity, couching initiatives in enough palliatives that they can nudge cultural change along a desired, or at least less determinist, trajectory.' This is reflected in political moves to sponsor a single Malaysian identity, or '*Bangsa Malaysia*' (Collins, 1998). Yet some Malaysian-based writers worry rather about increasing polarization. In social life the different communities largely go their own ways. In a recent survey, 98% of both Chinese and Malay students at the University of Malaya said that they had little or no social contact with their opposite numbers (Navaratnam, 2003: 578). Here we should mention the global Islamic revival, which in Malaysia has 'created barriers among Malays and non-Malays' (Andaya and Andaya, 2001: 332), since 'Muslim' is largely synonymous with 'Malay'. Thus stricter adherence to Islamic food codes has led to a decline in what anthropologists call 'commensality', the willingness of mostly Malay Muslims to dine with non-Muslims unless *halal* food is provided. Moreover, even contact at work is circumscribed by Chinese predominance in the independent private sector and Bumiputra predominance in the public sector and in government-linked companies.

Economy

It is well known that over the last quarter century, Malaysia's economic performance, as one of the 'Asian tigers', has been good, with steady growth through most of the 1980s and 90s (allowing for the hiccup of a –1 per cent growth rate in 1985) until the 'East Asian crisis' at the turn of the century, when the economy contracted by 7.4 per cent in 1998. It bounced back in the next two years, fuelled by government spending, but faltered again in 2001, when the economy stood still, registering growth of 0.2 per cent. At the time of writing, the upward trajectory of growth seemed to have been re-established, albeit at a less precipitous rate than before, with GDP growth projected at 5.3 per cent for 2004.

The strength of the economy over the period, allied to a certain self-confidence among the policy-making elite, has allowed government to reform both the economy and the civil service on its own rather than the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s terms; the government controversially rejected the IMF's money and advice in 1998 (Hilley, 2001). The government no doubt took some satisfaction when the IMF later ate its words and 'congratulated the authorities for Malaysia's strong economic performance and their skilful and prudent macroeconomic management' (International Monetary Fund, 2004: 4).

It is important to note that growth has been, in the current jargon, 'pro-poor': strong performance went hand in hand with the pro-Malay NEP measures, allowing the Gini coefficient (the accepted measure of income inequality) to decline from 0.513 in 1970 to 0.445 in 1990 (Gomez and Jomo, 1997: 170). The orthodox view is that NEP-style meddling in the free market must act as a brake, but the statistics of growth cannot be gainsaid, and the government analysis in its 'Second Outline Perspective Plan' of 1988 that the NEP was pro-growth because it delivered the essential 'atmosphere of peace and stability' is very plausible (Chowdhury and Islam, 1996). Perhaps the government's success derives from the particular character of its pro-Malay measures. Rather than the kind of job creation or welfare subvention programme that Sri Lanka practised across the Bay of Bengal, the government 'bet on the strong' (Gomez and Jomo, 1997), emphasizing business creation and entrepreneurship; a kind of Clintonian or Blairite 'tough love' *avant la lettre*. Economic performance has its own roots which are outside the scope of this article (though see the next section). They may include factors that we have explored already, such as the cultural value placed on authority, but we

cannot rule out the possibility of distinctive roots such as the entrepreneurialism of the economically dominant Chinese community.

Politics

Having created Malaysia's principal ethnic cleavage through importing Chinese and Indian labourers, the British could not do enough, or at any rate did not do enough, to prevent the democracy they created in the years leading up to independence from being 'tethered to the underlying socioeconomic structures' (Case, 2002: 103), just as in Cyprus, India and Ireland, and rather as Greif suggested (see above). Political parties correspond to the main ethnic groups: UMNO (United Malays National Organization), MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association) and MIC (Malayan Indian Congress). Yet it is fascinating to observe how these ethnic-based parties have interacted. Malaysia's community politicians have opted to cooperate rather than to confront, so that all post-independence governments have been cross-communal coalitions with UMNO as the dominant partner, the current manifestation being the *Barisan National* (National Front; BN for short). Political scientists have called this style of government 'consociationalism' (Crouch, 1996, chapter 9); in Malaysia it became known colloquially as 'the bargain'. As Malaysia's first prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, put it: 'The Malays have gained for themselves political power. The Chinese and Indians have won for themselves economic power. The blending of the two ... has brought about peace and harmony.' (Case, 2002: 105). Since 'political power' included the power to shape the bureaucracy, 'the bargain' ratified what Crouch (1996: 237) calls 'The old stereotypes – Malay bureaucrats and peasants, Chinese business and tradespeople, Indian professionals and estate labourers.'

Consociationalism only works when the consociating groups think they are getting enough out of it. Forestalling the threat that Singapore's Chinese majority posed to Malay interests by the simple expedient of expelling it from the Federation in 1965 proved insufficient. The fragile 'bargain' fell apart on May 13 1969, when ethnic rioting followed a general election perceived to have tipped the scales towards the Chinese. The government, Malay-dominated as ever, responded by strengthening the Malay side of the deal. The point of the celebrated 'New Economic Policy' (NEP), introduced in 1971, was to give Malays a foothold in the economy through such government measures as putting pressure on businesses to accept Malay partners. In the civil service, the NEP accentuated the pre-existing bias towards civil servants

of Malay origin. The stereotype of the Malay bureaucrat persisted, albeit a competing stereotype of the Malay entrepreneur or, sometimes, *rentier* (Gomez and Jomo, 1997) now began to emerge.

Consociationalism also only works for 'as long as the masses are docile and deferential and are prepared to entrust their leaders with the responsibility to safeguard the community's interests' (Crouch, 1996: 153), something that the deferential character of Malaysian society has permitted. What has variously been called Malaysia's 'soft authoritarianism' (Means, 1996), 'quasi-democracy' (Zakaria, 1989), 'semi-democracy' (Case, 2002) and - most expressively – its 'repressive-responsive regime' (Crouch, 1996) is at once an obstacle to full democracy and the indispensable condition that allows democracy to operate at all.

When consociationalism does work, it is by co-opting potential opposition. We have seen already how parties representing the three main ethnic groups are part of the governing coalition. But the urge to co-opt has embraced even the Islamic opposition party, PAS, which was part of the Barisan Nasional from 1973 to 1977. It has also embraced the main public sector trade union, CUEPACS, whose successive presidents have tried 'to outdo their predecessors in obtaining government approval' (Jomo and Todd, 1994: 160), and whose current leaders talked about their *'smart partnership'* with government in our research interview. There may have been an energetic policy debate within what Khoo (2003) calls the 'party-bureaucracy-class axis', but it has been conducted over the heads of the rank and file. The result is that much political activity is micro-politics: jockeying for position within the government, so that, 'UMNO general assembly elections have often been conceptualized as Malaysia's "real" elections', in which party officials are alleged to have bartered their votes for some kind of reward (Case, 2002: 111-12).

On the other hand, one thing that the British did manage to do was to defeat the Communist insurgency in the so-called 'emergency' of the 1950s. Through a combination of military repression and 'hearts and minds' tactics that the United States was to imitate disastrously, 'strategic hamlets' and all, a decade later in Vietnam, the British effectively destroyed the extreme left for a generation at least, so that following independence there was no significant pressure to adopt anti-capitalist economic policies. As a result we do not see the disruptive

cleavage between pre- and post-liberalization policies evident latterly in countries like Tanzania and India, not to mention China.

Labour Relations

The civil service partakes of the general climate of labour relations like any other employer, something public policy analysts are apt to overlook. The picture painted by the handful of scholarly studies (Jomo and Todd, 1994; Kuruvilla and Erickson, 2002; Mansor and Ali, 1998; Mellahi and Wood, 2004; Todd and Peetz, 2001), is of a strongly 'unitarist' style of labour relations (Fox's [1974] classic term), with roots in the 'emergency' period imperative to suppress communism in the labour movement, and bolstered by the current imperative to provide a favourable environment for foreign manufacturers who are typically hostile to unions. All of this is reinforced by the deep-seated social or cultural tendencies that we reviewed earlier, in which affirmative action is an important strand. Management style tends to be paternalist; on the other side of the coin, worker style is compliant. There is little diminution of managerial control and little involvement by workers or their union representatives in management decisions. Jomo and Todd (1994: 170) go so far as to conclude that unions are 'a sad and pathetic caricature of contemporary British unionism even after ... Thatcherism'.

The Civil Service Itself

There is a second sense in which Malaysia is an 'intermediate' state (see endnote), in terms of the classic politics/administration split. Malaysia's bureaucracy is neither wholly insulated from social influences in the way that Minns (2001) found South Korea to be, nor wholly politicized, either *de facto* as in countries like Nepal where political appointments are made even at quite low levels (McCourt, 2001a), let alone *de jure* as in the socialist countries like Vietnam that retain the cadre system.

Politicians and bureaucrats shared an identity of outlook in the period immediately following independence. They had, after all, sprung from the same root. UMNO's first leader, Datuk Onn Jaafar, was a civil servant, and the political elite was drawn largely from the civil service (Puthucheary, 1987: 95). For the civil service, the decade of the 1970s was the golden age, when the so-called 'administrocrats' enjoyed 'a position of power perhaps unequalled by any other civil service in a democratic country' (Puthucheary, 1987: 107) and when the dominant

policy that they had to implement was the ambitious NEP, making inroads even into the previously inviolate private sector. Malaysia was 'an administrative state' (Esman, 1972) or a 'bureaucratic polity' (Crouch, 1996: 199). It was equally the golden age of development administration internationally, a time when a study of neighbouring Thailand declared that 'The subject of bureaucracy has acquired a new lustre, a result of current concerns with the emergence of a host of new nations' (Siffin, 1966).

By the mid-1980s the bureaucratic party was over, even if Malaysia ended up with less of a hangover than many developing countries (appropriately enough for a country with an abstemious Muslim majority). Prime Minister Mahathir may have espoused a policy of 'Look East', including for the civil service (Taib and Mat, 1992: 432), but in the period of the National Development Policy from 1990 onwards, he took his cue from the West and specifically from the former colonial power, imitating Margaret Thatcher's privatization programme and her anti-civil service rhetoric (Gomez and Jomo, 1997). Criticism of inefficient public enterprises and of the public sector's hostility to the private sector became the order of the day (Khoo, 2003: 46), 'deification of private enterprise coupled with denigration of the Civil Service', as an observer of the British scene commented at the same time (Sampson, 2004: 112). Meanwhile, some 'lustre' – and some influence - had rubbed off the civil service and on to the new bumiputra entrepreneurs whom the NEP had conjured into existence. The rate of increase in the civil service, which had employed a 'staggering' quarter of the entire workforce in 1983 (Milne and Mauzy, 1999: 7), now slowed down.[20] 'To this day,' Khoo concludes (2003: 177), 'The bureaucracy has not recovered its early NEP pre-eminence. It is a junior partner of 'Malaysia Incorporated' and remains burdened with criticisms of inefficiency.' Where six of the seven members of the first post-independence Cabinet had been civil servants (including the prime minister), by 1987 that was true of only 3 out of the 14 UMNO ministers (Crouch, 1996).

One way of reacting to criticisms of inefficiency is to acquire the trappings of efficiency, in the hope that the substance will follow. It is in this light, I suggest, that we should view the numerous management initiatives in the civil service since the late 1980s, spearheaded by the energetic Chief Secretary to the government, Ahmad Sarji. He recounts how the civil service introduced Client's Charters and TQM in its ISO 9000 version (both acquired off the peg from Britain once again), together with home-grown initiatives such as the inculcation of 'positive

values', which included the 'policy on the assimilation of Islamic values in the civil service' (see Sarji, 1995: 207). Even if these measures often had a foreign provenance which was part of their prestige value, they were still genuine indigenous initiatives for which the World Bank or other external agency could claim no credit. Moreover, their emphasis on accountability, managing public complaints and evaluation was characteristic of a government that could be 'responsive' as well as 'repressive'.

It is unclear from published accounts, which mostly take government at its word (Chiu, 1997; Sharma, 1998; Taib and Mat, 1992; with Shafie, also 1992, as a partial exception), whether the TQM and other initiatives have really led to improved public service. But apart from the positive assessment of the World Bank's governance index quoted earlier, there are isolated plaudits from by no means uncritical scholars: Khoo (2003) praises the sense of mission of the bureaucrats who administered the NEP, and Jomo (2001) praises the discipline and independence of economic bureaucrats.

We should note the strongly centralized nature of public administration. The political backdrop is 'the ongoing struggle by the centre to restrain centrifugal tendencies', which Andaya and Andaya (2001: 339) attribute, Braudel-fashion, to basic geography: think of the large tract of ocean that separates West from East Malaysia. In an ostensibly federal system, 'State departments are in fact operating agencies of the federal government' (Puthucheary, 1987: 103). When we asked a state official in an interview about the state government's approach to staff appointments, and then about its approach to pay, his reply was the same in both cases: *'We adopt 100% federal policies.'* Yet Andaya and Andaya also note that there is little sign of separatism. Neither Sabah nor Sarawak is an incipient Bangladesh.

Affirmative Action in the Civil Service
But would civil service performance have been better still without the government's affirmation action policy – the political reflection of Malaysia's precarious ethnic mix - acting as a brake? To those who blame this crucial and distinctive aspect of civil service management for the complacency of Bumiputra public servants, supposedly safe in their jobs irrespective of effort, or, more specifically, for overstaffing in the State Economic Development Corporations, or for public enterprises hobbled by a shortage of Bumiputra managerial expertise (respectively

Emsley, 1996: 72; Gomez and Jomo, 1997; and Milne and Mauzy: 1999: 57), the government has a compelling, if not quite conclusive answer: would you rather shut off this safety valve and go back to May 1969? The government is also entitled to point out that the civil service is more open to non-Malays than it was under the British, who had set it up as the exclusive preserve of the sons of the Malay aristocracy (Embong, 2002). However, while the political benefit of affirmative action is real, in the bureaucracy just as in the wider economy, one can still ask if the efficiency cost is disproportionate, especially given the changes that have made Malays less dependent on the public sector for a stake in the economy.

The literature sheds only partial light on this. There was a scholarly flurry of interest in the bureaucracy in the twenty years after independence (Esman, 1972; Puthucheary, 1978[21]; Scott, 1968; Tilman, 1964), but almost nothing since 1980, apart from Khansor (1984). Certainly the post-independence 'lustre' of the bureaucracy has faded, but one wonders too if the NEP has cast a gradual chill on research in this area, just as in the area of political patronage in the economy (Trezzini, 2000: 622). One is also aware that Puthucheary (1987: 97) reports that the government had introduced a constitutional amendment prohibiting public discussion of the quota provisions in the Constitution (see below). Even from a government point of view the silence seems unfortunate, as our research uncovered obscure aspects of its policy that are actually favourable to the government's case. [22]

Affirmative action in employment was certainly an important element in the NEP. The initial incentive of a period of exemption from corporate tax for firms which employed a specified percentage of Bumiputra workers having been deemed inadequate, the Industrial Co-ordination Act of 1975 required firms to employ 30 per cent Bumiputras at every level or have their licences revoked (Andaya and Andaya, 2001: 314). Admittedly, a glance across the causeway that separates Malaysia from Singapore to take account of complaints of discrimination against Malays would entitle the government to point out what the Chinese-dominated private sector might do if left to its own devices (Ganguly, 1997). But affirmative action in civil service staffing actually predates the NEP, having its origin in the colonial period, as I have pointed out already. Recruitment quotas were introduced in 1952, ironically enough as the price of allowing non-Malays to enter the Malayan Civil Service (MCS) for the first time, restricting non-Malays to only one in every five entry positions.

The quotas continued unaltered after independence – which in this sense was no kind of 'critical juncture' – now under the aegis of Article 153 of the Constitution, the British-appointed Reid Commission's recommendation that they should be reviewed after fifteen years having been traded by the Chinese community in return for citizenship rights in the pre-independence negotiations (Koon, 1988). However, they applied only to the administrative elite, so that 87% of the MCS, but only 39 per cent of the 'senior bureaucracy' in mainly technical posts, were Malay in 1970; indeed, the quotas were in part a balancing response to that statistic (Puthucheary, 1978).

The literature is mostly silent on the position following 1980, though the general view is that Bumiputras increased their predominance, with Means (1991: 297) asserting that 'Through giving recruitment and promotion preferences to Malays, the whole structure of government has become a bastion of Malay power and the major avenue for Malay professional and economic advancement' (see also Gomez and Jomo, 1997). Crouch (1996) reports that in 1989, 19 department secretaries were Malay, two Chinese and one Indian, and that 88% of deputy secretary-generals were Malay. It is clear that much of the Malay middle class consists of public sector workers, Industrial Co-ordination Act notwithstanding (Embong, 2002). It is a fact that there has never been a non-Malay Chief Secretary, let alone Prime Minister. A deputy minister claimed in 1997 that senior positions, supposedly including the posts of armed forces chief of staff, police chief and state government secretary had now been opened to non-Malays. This was telling, as was the fact that details of the change were 'vague' (Milne and Mauzy, 1999: 95). By contrast, multi-ethnic and middle-income Mauritius across the Indian Ocean had had both a prime minister and a Chief Secretary from minority ethnic groups by early in the new century.

Turning from race to gender, the number of women working in the civil service has dramatically increased from a low base. By 1999, the civil service was 40% female, with 40,000 more women than in 1990 (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). But in 2000 women held only 2.2% of administrative and management posts in Malaysian organizations as a whole (up from 0.6% in 1990), and they face specific obstacles, both cultural and legal: there is, for example, no sex equality legislation (Omar and Davidson, 2004). Reading between the lines of Ahmad *et al.* (2003) suggests that in the civil service the obstacles can be very specific indeed.

DISCUSSION: PATH DEPENDENCE AND HISTORY IN THE MALAYSIAN CIVIL SERVICE

How much mileage is there in applying a path dependence explanation to the Malaysian civil service? The plausible candidate for decisive 'critical juncture' is the formation of the civil service under the British. It cemented a British administrative structure for the civil service; a British orientation that was still evident in the 1990s with the adoption of 'citizen's charters' and Total Quality Management; and the central role that the civil service was going to play in 'the bargain', of which the recruitment quota is the visible expression. It is in keeping with the path dependence view that we cannot regard either independence or the NEP period which followed the May 13 riots as a critical juncture, dramatic though both undoubtedly were. The formation of the civil service was already solid enough – sufficiently 'locked in' – to ride out those two episodes, which we can therefore discount in the same way that Putnam discounted the *Risorgimento* and Mahoney discounted Bolivar: we must be a little Olympian ourselves. For the foreseeable future, we are likely to see only 'normal governance' as far as the basic structure of government is concerned. That is important because the structure limits department heads' freedom of action, contrary to currently fashionable New Public Management doctrine. The affirmative action measures are less stable, since they do have critics, especially and naturally among the non-Malays, but not very much less. Granted, the path that followed this 'critical juncture' has been much shorter than the corresponding one in Latin America, but then Malaysia's colonial experience and independence alike are hugely more recent than Latin America's, let alone Italy's continuous political development over a millennium or more.

In other ways, though, path dependence as applied to Malaysia entails a reductive emphasis on a single cause that requires us to ignore other important contributory factors. Among them I would highlight:

- The pervasive respect for authority, rooted in royal history but reinforced by British administrative culture
- Malaysia's ethnic mix, the consequence of British importation of Chinese and Indian labourers
- The stable and buoyant economy, which has its own roots, including in the destruction of the socialist alternative in the 'Emergency'

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- The National Development Policy of 1990
- The personal role of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed

Justifying the importance of these factors is necessarily an exercise in counterfactual or 'what if?' history (Ferguson, 1997): how would things have been different without them? Without the respect for authority, Malaysia would have been a less stable country, and harder to govern. Mahathir would have had less room to manoeuvre, Malaysia resembling Britain in its willingness to vest considerable authority in its prime ministers.[23] Without the ethnic mix, Malaysia would have had no more need for the paraphernalia of quotas and the whole NEP than monoethnic Swaziland. Without the healthy economy, civil servants would have earned less and probably been less efficient and honest: we know from World Bank research that there is a correlation between wage levels and 'moonlighting' (Van der Gaag *et al.*, 1989); the government would have had less money for initiatives like Citizen's Charters; and it might have found itself carrying out civil service reform Washington-style, attempting to reduce civil service numbers just as ineffectually as most countries that followed the World Bank model in the 1980s and 90s (McCourt, 2001b). Without the National Development Policy, the civil service would have retained its predominance in national life. Finally, it seems idle to maintain that without Mahathir, Malaysia would not have been a very different place.

As we have seen, the path dependence view entails indifference to the 'normal governance' that occurs between 'junctures'. Yet even if we take the formation of the civil service as the operative juncture, who will maintain that nothing significant has happened in the following half-century? My judgement is that the five factors above, taken together, count for a great deal. Thanks to them, the civil service has expanded out of recognition, swollen and then shrunk in prestige, become feminized, remained relatively honest and, in Evans, Jomo and Sarji's analysis at least, contributed crucially to Malaysia's economic success – to mention only factors that we have discussed in this article. All this has happened while the civil service in so many developing countries has gone backwards. Study groups would not be beating a path to Kuala Lumpur to visit the civil service as it was in 1960. Moreover, agency has mattered a great deal, and not only at the putative 'critical juncture', even if Mahathir's personal authority was affected by long-run factors of which he himself was the product, such as the need to appease the Malay majority.

There is indeed a sense in which we can see the consolidation of the civil service in the early 1950s as having placed Malaysia on a path from which it has not fundamentally deviated. Counter-intuitively, but echoing Putnam and Mahoney, the difference that independence made was more apparent than real. But that is not the whole story. First, the 'critical juncture' has its own roots in Malaysia's social history. Second, there have been cumulative 'Darwinian' developments in the *content* of civil service management in which the agency of Prime Minister Mahathir was significant, and they have changed the civil service out of recognition. Third, if the *structure* has stayed the same, that is not only because government has invested in it and gained increasing returns, but because it is felt to be appropriate. In this most 'power distant' of countries, there was no appetite even in line departments for structural reform: *'Level of delegation is appropriate, despite the problems'* was a typical interviewee response. In the end, the mainstream historical view of Braudel and others carries greater explanatory force than the path dependence view.

Thus path dependence as a *political* explanation[24] is most convincing where it is (unconsciously) most derivative and least convincing where it is (self-consciously) most original when we apply it to Malaysia. Its stress on using the often very remote past to explain the present has been helpful to development scholars, and development actors even more, living as we all tend to do in a perpetual and voluntarist present; even while in its essentials it mostly recapitulates Braudel and others. Its unconvincing stress on decisive critical junctures, however, makes it simply the latest in a long line of reductive single-cause explanations, even if the line has some very distinguished members.

CONCLUSION: HISTORY, AND POLICY LEARNING AND TRANSFER

Our study has optimistic and pessimistic implications for the policy transfer and learning on which so much donor-led development has depended. Optimistically, path dependence accords developing countries the dignity of a history. As recently as 1965, the Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford remarked that Africa has no history, merely 'the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe (Trevor-Roper, quoted in Evans, 1997: 178). It is, moreover, a history which must be reckoned with, since 'History cannot be swept clean like a blackboard' (Said, 2003: xiii). For vulnerable countries (possibly including Iraq at the time of writting), history is a bulwark against the grandiose

schemes of self-styled builders of democracy and other wolves in sheep's clothing. A second optimistic implication is that a country established on a positive path, like Malaysia, may not be deflected from it even by a shock like the East Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s. Third, politicians can do a good deal more than mind the political machine: over time, they can transform the content of politics even while the institutional meso-structure that Mahoney and Snyder emphasized remains unaltered. But politicians are still severely constrained. Therefore – and this is our fourth optimistic implication - if history affects development willy-nilly, then it is helpful to be aware of how that is, if only to avoid kicking against the historical pricks as we have done too often in the past.

But we should not dodge the negative implication. Policy transfer and learning become a chancy business. Study groups are kidding themselves if they expect to return from Malaysia – or New Zealand, or Canada – with a reform package that they can implement wholesale. The experience of one country, or a donor's blueprint model for that matter, will only prevail if it goes with the grain of the target country's history. To discover that development policy assistance is even more complex than we had realized is not at all a timely message in a world suffering from aid fatigue. Yet 'things and actions are what they are, and their consequences will be what they will be; why then should we seek to be deceived?' (Bishop Butler, quoted in Berlin, 1978: 1). It is the job of development scholars to find a way of showing our policymaker and donor colleagues how an understanding of history can be an asset through increasing the likelihood that policy initiatives will bear fruit, and equally through helping them to recognize when it is time to cut their losses.

As always, we must be cautious about reading too much into a single case. But the lasting value of path dependence may well lie in directing our attention to the way in which history shapes and constrains the options of policymakers. Clark and Rowlinson (2004) have argued the need for a 'historical turn' in business studies, and it is now time for history to join economics and politics in order to enhance the study and practice of development policy. We must show our gratitude to the pioneers – David, Arthur, North, Putnam, Collier and Collier, and Mahoney – by pushing out from their beachhead to the heartland of historiography where we may well find further important clues to the success and failure of development programmes.

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Notes

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[2] Space precludes a detailed account of the origins and ramifications of the path dependence notion. Hirsch and Gillespie (2001) will supplement my brief description.

[3] This thesis dovetailed with the notion of 'technological trajectory' proposed by Dosi (1982) and his colleagues.

[4] In a pessimistic conclusion based on no visible evidence, North asserts that 'In Spain, personalistic relationships are still the key to much of the political and economic exchange. They are the consequence of an evolving institutional framework that produces neither political stability nor consistent realization of the potential of modern technology'. Most readers will be aware of the economic success that Spain has enjoyed in the fifteen years since North's book was published.

[5] Many other examples of studies that use path dependence could be quoted from all three disciplines.

[6] 'A single point in time' would appear to be the operative meaning among those given for 'juncture' by the Concise Oxford Dictionary.

[7] Mahoney and Snyder (1999: 18) say the same thing in academese: 'The path-dependent strategy's commitment to capturing long-term effects of past events creates a strong tendency to privilege agency over structure.'

[8] Here we have the single-cause explanation *par excellence*. Mahoney and Snyder are well aware of its centrality to path dependence. Their criticism of a rival view of Latin America's political development is its 'lack of a mechanism for specifying relationships between variables encourages their random introduction and fosters an indiscriminate eclecticism that does not produce systematic explanations of regime change' (1999: 22).

[9] The allusion is to Kuhn's (1962) account of scientific development, where long periods of 'normal science' are punctuated by revolutionary 'paradigm shifts' which rewrite the basic rules. I am grateful to Sterman and Wittenberg (1999) for spotting the analogy. Mahoney and Snyder, along with North and one or two others, have resorted to another analogy, with the notion of 'punctuated equilibria' in evolutionary biology popularized by Stephen Jay Gould (Eldredge, 1985). Since analogy is a legitimate form of scholarly argument, it is worth observing that Gould's notion, which postulates occasional quantum jumps in evolution, has been challenged, notably by Richard Dawkins (1986), who upholds the orthodox Darwinian account of gradual evolution.

[10] By contrast, Schilling (1998: 283) suggests in a business context that firms' adoption of a technology can be a 'function of strategic choices made by the firm.'

[11] Analogies with science in general and biology in particular fail to suppress the question of just how 'critical' a 'juncture' has to be to qualify as such. Clearly it has to be momentous enough to separate it from the increments on which the gradualist view of history (or of biology) is based, otherwise the distinctiveness of path dependence as an account of history disappears.

[12] It is surprising how little curiosity path dependence scholars display about mainstream historiography, despite their insistence on the importance of history. Their citations, such as they are, invoke economic historians exclusively, and they show no awareness of questions such as the nature of historical causation which have preoccupied philosophers and historians over the centuries. See Gardiner (1974) and Marwick (2001) for an introduction to these and other theoretical questions.

[13] It does seem odd that Collier and Collier, whose book is over 800 pages long, should set themselves so modest an objective.

[14] Compare Carr (1987: 88): 'The examination candidate who, in answering the question 'Why did revolution break out in Russia in 1917?', offered only one cause, would be lucky to get a third class. The historian deals in a multiplicity of causes.'

[15] The 'fundamental attribution error' is psychologists' term for our tendency to attribute responsibility for events to individuals rather than the situations that individuals find themselves in: see Jaspars *et al.* (1983).

[16] There is a remarkable similarity with the view of history that Tolstoy expounds in *War and peace*, in which Prince Andrey says about Russia's Napoleonic war leader, General Kutuzov, that he 'knows that there is something stronger and more important than his will – that is the invisible march of events, and he can see them, can grasp their significance, and, seeing their significance, can abstain from meddling, from following his own will, and aiming at something else' (2002: 851).

[17] Malaysia is ranked 39th out of 144 countries in Transparency International's 2004 Corruption Perceptions Index. Other rankings for the region: Indonesia, 133; Myanmar, 142; Philippines, 102; Singapore, 5; Thailand, 64; Vietnam, 102.

[18] In fact Henderson (1999) has suggested that Malaysia is what Evans (1995) calls an 'intermediate state', only partly complying with the bureaucratic ideal (the contrast is with Japan, South Korea and Taiwan). But I think the point still stands.

[19] Twelve interviews were conducted with serving and retired senior government officials. Two members of the national executive of CUEPACS, the civil servants' trade union, were also interviewed.

[20] Though this was an area where change was more apparent than real. The government claimed to have slowed the rate of increase to 0.2 per cent between 1989 and 1995. But once privatization is excluded, the remaining 'core civil service' actually increased by 7.7 per cent. This is similar to Britain, where again the government claimed to have reduced numbers dramatically, whereas when privatization was excluded, the number of civil servants was roughly the same on the day Mrs Thatcher left office as on the day she arrived.

[21] The data in Puthucheary (1987) derives from Puthucheary (1978).

[22] It was, however, possible at the time of writing to find a lively debate on the Internet by typing 'Malaysian constitution' into the Google Internet search engine.

[23] This allows for the argument against the 'great man' view of history that Malaysians' need for a strong leader would have conjured up someone very like Mahathir even if Mahathir himself had not come to the fore; and likewise that we are entitled to ask what it was about Malaysia that allowed Mahathir's writ to run so far.

[24] It is outside the scope of this article to say whether the same goes for the history of technology where the path dependence view originated.