

'Malaysian First' requires doing a Ridhuan Tee
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Teresa Kok couldn't help but notice Hishammuddin Hussein's use of the word 'dirty' to describe Teo Nie Ching for being inside a surau, hair uncovered, speaking. A Christian, she would have recognized the ulterior meaning in the word, its motive and its morality. In her church, it would be synonymous with 'heathen', 'defile', 'corrupt' and 'sinful'.

The Abrahamic religions, Western and Arabic, were about 'love' only some of the time. In the remainder, humanity is just tolerated, despised sometimes, not celebrated: we're all born into sin, they say.

In English, such a frame of thought is called a dichotomy. Like Teresa, Hisham, framing his world, his politics, ideas, prejudices and speech in dichotomous classes, paves the way for a person to migrate from one life to another, from dirty to cleanliness, from impurity to purity. This is called the conversion.

When Teresa's party boss Lim Guan Eng said the two school principals in Johor and Kedah were blameless for their bigoted remarks but that the fault lay with Muhyiddin Yassin and Umno instead, he was not just acting disingenuous. He was wrong.

To subsequently say the Kulai headmistress along with Namewee were 'victims of racist politics' rather than as perpetrators, Malaysiakini's Josh Hong wasn't just wrong. He was parroting after Lim, and acting out the 'Malaysian First' doctrinaire slogan.

For as long as there has been a Malaysia, being Chinese is a liability. All understood or knew instinctively that this liability supplies the motive as to why DAP's Chinese legislators and MCA's Chua Soi Lek, and the rapper Wee Meng Chee – but not Ibrahim Ali and Siti Inshah – are summoned into interrogation rooms (police and the MACC's, with the recent addition of the MCMC).

The Malaysian First answer to this ethnic problem given by Guan Eng's father Lim Kit Siang, also DAP's, is to first emasculate the Chinese identity and then subvert it by the replacement, 'Malaysian'. If only it works.

And the reason 'I'm Malaysian' doesn't is because the apposition of the Malay is the Chinese. The latter was, after all, part of the reason for the federal constitution's article on the special position of the Malays. There are no Malay 'rights' to fight for if there were no Chinese to fight against.

That Malay equals Malaysian is therefore a given; the morpheme 'Malay' prefixes 'sian'. But Chinese equals Malaysian is impossible (Dr Mahathir Mohamad said as much in *The Malay Dilemma*).

Ridhuan Tee is the paragon of 'Malaysian First' not for what he embraces, Article 3, Islam as the religion of the federation; Article 152, Malay as the official language, but for what he rejects. And it isn't just because of the thing he throws away but what he does with and to it – his Chinese birth identity.

On this point, Ridhuan and Kit Siang meet: in *Utusan* (which on Sunday has a circulation of 367,591 or roughly a readership of 1.8 million), the former makes it clear that there is no

true Malaysian who is Chinese, first, second or last.

The Chinese have a phrase for such a conduct of one who turns against his ancestral past, hence, against the meaning of his inherited self and yanking out his entire cultural roots. Translated, the phrase *jiancao chugen* (literally: cut the grass, exterminate the roots) means, no way kills better than from the roots up.

Kit Siang's Malaysian First identity is not even half way there and this is not merely on account of the absence of Islam in his equation. Rather, the ambiguity of Malaysian First lies in its intrinsic character: it's a negation of a negation.

It requires, foremost, the subjugation of an existing culture, an individual identity, after which to be replaced by an indescribable unknown quantity, a closet of rejects all dissimilar in size, fitting nobody, and must be sliced up for stitching into a one-size-fits-all.

Even in this idea, there are already prototypes: Ridhuan Tee or Mahathir Mohamad, take your pick, but mostly nobody, Chinese nor Indians, want to morph into either. Because the Muslim-Malay is half the national population (and, recall, the Malay is Malaysian first by default and by constitutional law), then it's the other half, Chinese and Indians predominantly, who will have to make the conversion.

That is, Malaysian First requires the sacrifices of (once again) the Chinese (and Indians); to do a Ridhuan Tee for instance. To suggest that the Chinese banish their identity for the sake of an 'inclusive' Malaysian-ness is to invent, for the second time, another 'social contract'; the first being, vaguely, Malaysian citizenship to Chinese in return for Malay political dominance.

Malaysian First is, however, far more insidious and more inhumane, as Ridhuan Tee, the prototype, has so well demonstrated (Ridhuan endears himself to Perkasa Malays more by who he spits on than by the religion he has embraced).

It requires in effect the surrender of individual culture, identity – life indeed – in return for staying in Malaysia unmolested, to be left alone, and not to be called 'Cina babi', 'dirty' (note how this parallels the expression, 'dirty Jews'), and never having to return to China.

To say the principals were blameless, Guan Eng was invoking the Malaysian First deal, suggesting: 'It isn't your fault that you Siti Inshah and you Ungku Aznan Ungku Ismail call the Chinese names, but let the Chinese stay. The Chinese have no China to return to if they're no longer Chinese but Malaysian First. Like Ridhuan Tee, you see?'

There is a problem in this narration deal-offer: Umno had never agreed to it. Muhyiddin when asked by Kit Siang if he would be Malaysian first and Malay second rejected it outright.

The fault is Kit Siang's and the inanity of his Malaysian First idea. For as long as there had been a Malaysia, as a split, apposite, dichotomous idea, the Chinese was never first. So who's to say they are now second?

Malaysian First is a new branding of Chinese politics, particularly DAP's. They lie about who is the victim and who is perpetrator of race politics. The Siti Inshahs of Kulai and Bukit Selambau aren't new or shocking to the Chinese or to Malaysian politics, but Namewee with his terseness and profanity is. He's a child of Kit Siang's Malaysian First politics, and this is why he has attracted MCA's ferocious denunciation and DAP ring-fencing in his defence.

The trouble with Malaysian First is that its 'beyond race' politics is conducted purely by the Chinese groups, DAP most fervently. It is so far the highest political expression to a cultural phenomenon, a whole 'pendatang' group ejecting its ancestry to take up – converting, actually – for another identity label although, oddly, Umno has, and could, never make it a precondition of national allegiance.

Hence, the Taiwan-graduated and Chinese-educated Namewee could shout himself hoarse he is a patriot, but in Siti Inshah's book he is hardly Malaysian. And to be rid of the vexing problem of Chinese students who, like Wee, are not Malaysian enough, Siti Inshah says, keluar.

Namewee's error in reply to Siti Inshah was, like Malaysian First, as abysmal as it was tasteless.

He doesn't answer the questions as follows: How could it be that Siti Inshah tells the Chinese to return to China when they have been told the same countless times and most of them have not left despite May 13, the NEP, and, today, cheap AirAsia flights to Shenzhen and as far as Tianjin?

If the Chinese won't leave, what are the Siti Inshahs to do? Get Ridhuan Tee to write more frequently on a point that's been repeated to no end?

Kit Siang, the DAP, and their sympathizers show that they don't get it each time they extol the virtues of Malaysian First: there are no two ways, three, or more, to be Malaysian and, anyway, none of which is possible staying in Malaysia.

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