

IT TAKES ONE RACIST BIGOT TO TARNISH THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

By Kua Kia Soong, SUARAM Adviser 16 June 2021

The Ngee Ann Poly Chinese lecturer filmed making racist remarks to an Indian man about his “preying on a Chinese girl” in Singapore has exposed the embarrassing racism of some members of the Chinese community. As an ethnic Chinese, I felt angry that this racist bigot (pigot?) could feel so confident as to utter such utter rubbish about how people should keep to their own “race”. Is it because ethnic Chinese are the majority in Singapore? Well, this video has circulated widely in Malaysia and elsewhere as well and it certainly does not help the image of the Chinese anywhere in the world.

In the old days, such racists, when confronted, would sometimes deny their behaviour but today, there is no escaping social media when such videos go viral. In the same way, when just one racist manager from mainland China was filmed making racist remarks about Africans in Africa and the video went viral, it tarnished the reputation of the PRC which had been trying so hard to win over the hearts of the African people.

Black Africans who have undergone the experience of slavery and suffered racism in the West including racist prejudice by the police perhaps best understand what racism is. The racism and racial discrimination we experience in this country cannot compare with the oppression faced by black Africans since the colonial days when they were traded as slaves.

When the PRC under Chairman Mao financed and helped to build the Tanzania-Zambia railway line from 1970 to 1975, the TAZARA was the longest railway in sub-Saharan Africa. It not only bolstered the image of China as a positively humane and anti-racist country but also enhanced the reputation of socialism as the peoples' alternative and morally superior to exploitative capitalism.

Today, China is confronting a challenge unprecedented in human history. China is set to become the largest economy in the world and the US, and its NATO allies are so alarmed by this development, that we are witnessing them resort to foul means to denigrate China and the "Zhinese" people (mouthed by the US white supremacist Trump). In this new cold war, it is not just the citizens of China but also the Chinese and all other Asians everywhere, especially in the US and allied countries, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand who suffer the racist threat posed by white supremacists.

It is therefore critical and incumbent on the leaders of all culturally distinct communities to educate their constituents to treat all peoples equally and compassionately and to ensure that racism is outlawed in all societies. That is why the ratification of the International Convention on the Eradication of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) is so crucial to the progress of this country. Up to now, neither PN, BN nor PH have the political will to implement this reform.

The myth of 'racial purity'

The first lesson in anti-racist education is to demolish the myth of “racial purity”. Racists like the Ngee Ann man believe the myth that the Chinese are genetically pure. But that is not what history nor genetics teach us. In fact, no nation is static. People have moved around the world throughout history and given today’s DNA technology, Mr Ngee Ann man will no doubt discover that his DNA is certainly not pure – he may have DNA of the multi-ethnic peoples of China, Indonesia, or Malaysia and even beyond these shores. Racist Nazis will discover that they may have Jewish ancestors just as white supremacists will discover they may have Middle Eastern ancestors.

Do racists know what love is?

It is sad that racists who have never been in love can spout such racist prejudice in public. They must have lived in such a cloistered environment that they cannot conceive of such a thing called LOVE. But it is not all their fault – the community and prejudice accumulated from the past have all contributed to such narrow-minded thinking.

I remember the dumbest interview question I have ever fielded was by a young Chinese reporter who asked me why I went all the way to UK to marry a British woman! Yes, he appeared to be a very inexperienced man and I could only feel sorry for him that he had never experienced love. In feudal times, marriages were arranged, and this still happens in many cultures. However, with more people acquiring independence and in a globalised world like Singapore, people fall in love with others who may be from a different ethnicity, culture, identity, religion or even class. When two people open their hearts to each other, they can broaden each other's perspectives and discover many commonalities among their differences. Sometimes, even the stoutest hearts of racially prejudiced parents-in-law such as Bruce Lee's mother-in-law can melt when their grandchildren are born.

When we were growing up, our parents did try to influence us to marry traditional Chinese spouses, which meant not only in ethnic but also religious terms. In other words, it was not good enough if the person you were going to marry was a "pure Chinese", he or she had to be "traditional" Chinese, meaning Confucianist, Taoist or Buddhist and not Christian or Muslim. The reason was, they tried to justify, so that we could continue to go and sweep their graves when they are gone...

Well, as it happened, my eldest brother fell in love with his Malay/Arabic colleague when they were teaching in the same school while I fell in love with a British woman when I was studying in the UK. My second brother was the only son who married a "traditional" Chinese woman from Singapore. And guess what? My parents' British daughter-in-law has proven to be a most filial daughter in law after all – she has been going to sweep their graves at every Qingming festival (except for during the pandemic of course) since we came back to Malaysia in 1982. Even their Malay/Arab daughter-in-law has gone to sweep their grave in Batu Pahat at Qingming! Now our son has a beautiful Swindian partner (Swiss father and Indian mother) and we love her like our second daughter. We have recently also helped to fund an Indian girl through college, and she has now become like family to us...

The Community's responsibility to eradicate racism

The Chinese community in Malaysia often likes to appeal to “international human rights” when it defends the right to mother tongue education and calls for an end to racial discrimination. You cannot pick and choose some human rights and ignore others for it must be remembered that human rights are universal and inalienable; indivisible; interdependent and interrelated. They are universal because everyone is born with and possesses the same rights, regardless of where they live, their gender or race, or their religious, cultural, or ethnic background. The international community also condemns racism and related intolerance. Equality is an intrinsic part of our human rights and that includes treating all human beings as equal in dignity and every other way.

Thus, the racism of the Ngee Ann Chinese man in Singapore should be an example for parents and leaders in the community to educate their children and constituents about the myth of racial purity and to show unconditional love for all peoples regardless of ethnicity, religion, and cultures. Like the racist PRC man in Africa, we should be reminded that one racist bigot can tarnish the whole community and undo all the good things being done by the Chinese community in this country, China and in the rest of the world.