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## **Shenzhen, the IDR and the Middle Path**

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Yin-yang dynamics work in all areas. Move in any one direction long enough and you will start seeing the ill-effects – the collateral damage if you will – of your progress.

The observation made by Daoist mystics of ancient China was that every concept contains its opposite within itself – darkness has light in it, female has male in it, yin has yang in it – and too much of any one thing will cause its contradiction to come into play. Whatever goes up generates the force that will pull it back down. Being the sole superpower leads to hubris which leads one to shoot oneself in the foot, time and time again. Going too far to the political left generates behaviour reminiscent of that found in the extreme right. This list of karmic motion – in contrast to the linear dualism of western thought – goes on without end.

Thus, too much success must in the end lead to failure.

The trick then is to know when to retreat, and to know how to retreat. Often, that is beyond the wisdom of man, and especially of collectives, to do. We seem fated to suffer the full extent of our folly before we can garner sufficient force to turn things around, back to the Middle Path, as it were.

Take global politics in modern times, for example. Colonialism, the unhampered expansion of western power, reached its ultimate state when capitalist imperialism, modernism, the nation-state ideology and the Social Darwinism that fuelled it finally brought havoc to Europe. The continent and its empires crumbled from within, burning itself out through a series of great wars.

Conquered and colonised nations, in freeing themselves from external control, had to form an understanding about the forces that were able to subjugate them, and also about their own weaknesses. Some managed to change before being conquered: Japan got rid of

its samurai class, and Germany and Italy relied on extreme interpretations of the nation-state to unite into modern powers and colonising latecomers.

China tried different ways over 150 years, but failed every time until Mao Zedong managed finally to unite the empire once again. Big countries tend to fall further. The system that was to play saviour relied on a perverted view of eternal class struggle, where classes were the expression of greed and exploitation. The solution? Get rid of classes.

Getting rid of classes also meant getting rid of everything that ever existed in Chinese culture that one could perceive to have stemmed from class exploitation. And so, to save China, Mao ended up almost destroying it. Luckily, Deng Xiaoping managed to survive all the purges, and it was he who managed to turn things around. He ended the “yin” of Maoism, and injected “yang” back into Chinese society.

And so the Shenzhen experiment came into being – to nurture a society at the periphery of the empire within which classlessness was banned, and which would be the prototype of what the post-Mao – post-yin – China would be. It was the first of the many Special Economic Zones that would be founded, and was established exactly 40 years after the People’s Republic came into being, right next door to prosperous capitalistic Hong Kong.

It is here that the comparison of Malaysia’s Iskandar Development Region (IDR) with Shenzhen is most compelling. The IDR – situated next door to a prosperous and competition-fixated Singapore –has the potential to be more than just another short-lived economic engine.

Malaysia, being a smallish country and being granted independence in a relatively peaceful manner, did not take to extreme solutions the way large countries did.

So far, the reasons given for the creation of the IDR, including the official ones, do not sufficiently consider the fact that the consociation model under UMNO dominance has successfully ruled Malaysia for 50 years, and that its model of race-based affirmative action has created a society unable to leave race out of its political considerations.

When a political discourse succeeds too well, bankruptcy in effective thinking becomes apparent. One is trapped in formal, and not innovative, thought. That was the case in classless China, and there are signs that such is beginning to be the case in race-fixated Malaysia. Fostering the embryo for a class society veered China away from Maoist insanity. Shenzhen was that embryo.

If ascribed its rightful strategic significance, the IDR can be the embryo of a race insensitive society that can take Malaysian nation building to a new level.

Now if this logic holds, then the special policies to be applied in the IDR would be ones that can in time help the rest of the country break through the limitations that race fixation has trapped it in. Thus, if the IDR is to be the prototype of the Malaysia of the

future, affirmative action that is to be taken there would have to be definitively need-based and race-blind.

Reversing from an increasingly yang (race-conscious) direction towards one that consciously makes race irrelevant is the only way one can stay to the Middle Path.

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