

## Nukleus: A Lesson in Ethics

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In April this year, a garment factory in the capital of Bangladesh collapsed, resulting in the deaths of over 1,000 workers. Looking at pictures of the accident, there is little wonder why it is considered to be the deadliest accidental structural failure in modern history. In the media blitz following the catastrophe, it's not just the ethics of the fashion industry that have been put under the spotlight. People are starting to question their fashion choices and are starting to wonder – where do our clothes come from?

Fashion used to be an exclusive nirvana for those who could afford it. Only those who could pay for the luxury of being stylish pursued it, with the middle classes and below resigning themselves to clothes that were merely practical. Somewhere along the line, high fashion started trickling down the social ladder, making ready-to-wear pieces far more affordable and accessible. Today, we are completely spoilt for choice. Cheap and trendy clothes are at our beck and call, and most of us aren't hard-pressed to throw away our clothes once the trends change. We are so caught up in keeping up with what's in that we tend to be blind to what happens before these beloved clothes get on the racks.

I think it is fair to say that all Malaysians love bargains. Like, more than other people. I know I do! But after thinking about my own shopping habits, I decided that it was time to reevaluate

them and start making better choices. I set off on a small search to find a local brand that has values I can back hard, and minimises their environmental footprint as much as possible. I stumbled across Nukleus – much to my dismay, they specialise primarily in men’s innerwear. Boo, I’m not a man! But I decided to have a chat with the founder of Nukleus, Tan Cheng Woi.

Based in Penang and distributed all over South East Asia, Nukleus came into being in 2010. Curious about sustainable fashion, they went to the World Wide Fund for Nature in Malaysia (WWF) to school them on the basics. They got way more than they had bargained for. “The apparel industry is so much more insidious than people know,” says Cheng Woi. “There are so many issues. Child labour, terrible work environments, miniscule wage – we just didn’t know.” Determined to tackle these issues head on, Cheng Woi and his team partnered with WWF Malaysia to form Nukleus.

“We want to be more than just another brand. There are already thousands of brands competing against one another, but what makes them different? We only use organic cotton, we make sure the processes our products go through do the least damage to the environment possible and we are constantly trying to improve our work practices. This is what makes Nukleus different,” Cheng Woi explains. As someone who knows nothing about cotton, I asked if Nukleus apparel is completely homegrown, from field to fitting room. Seeing that Malaysia doesn’t have the right climate to grow cotton, Cheng Woi sources his cotton from organic cotton farmers in India. Why India? “If you check out our blog, [The Cotton Story](#), you’ll see why we feel it is important to support the farmers in India. The industry is simply horrendous, they get into so much debt because they are misled and if crops don’t yield, the farmers can’t pay off their debts. They resort to drastic measures to escape it.” Now if that isn’t an eye-opener, I don’t know what is.

Has it been a struggle not to conform to the pressures of the over-demanding fashion industry? “Yes, of course it has,” says Cheng Woi. “But we are very intent on keeping to our values.” Bigger brands might be more established and have more customers because they play the price card, but Nukleus wants to own the brand and their mission. It is refreshing to find a brand that is uncompromising in their practices and doesn’t just want to make sales, but wants to change the world at the end of the day, one pair of briefs at a time.

Nukleus apparel isn’t just good for the environment – it’s good for you too! Completely free of harmful dyes and synthetic materials and they’re good for sensitive skin, so your naughty bits will thank you. While their main focus is on men’s innerwear, there are a few pieces for girls as well. “We are not opposed to the idea of expanding our range, but we want to do it right and in our own time,” explains Cheng Woi, when asked about the limited products. Well, we can get behind that. Eco-friendly clothing with a big heart is definitely more of what we need.

**By: Kate Ng**

[Nukleusshop.com](http://Nukleusshop.com)