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TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
MR. S. RAJARATNAM, AT THE OPENING OF THE CHINESE
CERAMICS EXHIBITION AT YU YI PTE. LTD. ON SATURDAY,
SEPTEMBER 3, 1977 AT 2 P.M.

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I believe this is the first time that a Chinese ceramics exhibition of contemporary products from China has been organised in Singapore. I am told that there are over 5,000 exhibits from the main producing areas of the People's Republic. It has been organised by the Singapore Chinese Merchandise Importers' and Exporters' Association and the Singapore Chinaware Merchants' Association. The purpose of this exhibition, displaying ceramics worth over a million dollars, is primarily to promote trade between Singapore and the People's Republic of China. Singapore as a growing tourist centre in the region can be a more profitable outlet for Chinese porcelain and earthenware than can China itself where tourism is still in its infancy.

However, there is yet another aspect to this exhibition than the commercial advantages it will bring to both countries. As I said the exhibits that you see here are all contemporary examples of Chinese ceramics. There is no other country in the world that has poured in so much of feeling, sensitivity and skill into this craft than China. According to scholars the Chinese have for some five thousand years used pottery not only for utilitarian ends but also, through it, to tell a great deal about themselves and their view of life.

This is why antique Chinese pottery and porcelain made by largely anonymous craftsmen hundreds of thousands of years ago continue to astonish and delight not only Chinese but non-Chinese as well. The craftsmen who created these master-pieces are dead and gone but their artistry, which gave immortal life to otherwise useless materials like clay, slims and quartz, has not lost its fascination.

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That is why I believe that a people absorbed only in material achievements and insensitive to art, music, drama and poetry do not endure for long. This is something we in Singapore should bear in mind. We have achieved a great deal in the material aspects of life but this has not been matched by a corresponding achievement in artistic expression and appreciation. However, in recent years, we have turned our attention towards rectifying this short-coming and I hope there will soon come a time when Singapore will be as well-known for its artistic contributions as for its material achievements.

In regard to this exhibition the products on view should tell us a lot about the new China. How many of the exhibits will astonish and delight those who view them a thousand years from now as do the products of earlier periods? How much of the spirit of Ancient China has been absorbed into the New China. According to the catalogue sent to me by the organisers of this exhibition the most expensive exhibit (worth some \$250,000) is a five foot vase which took four craftsmen some five years just to paint the vase. I was intrigued to know what was the theme which justified the expenditure of five years by four craftsmen.

The theme, I learn, is from Chinese mythology. It depicts the Goddess of Lo River and seven fairies descending from Heaven. This tells me something about the New China which I failed to learn from serious political works on the ideology of the New China.

Perhaps art tells more about the basic feelings of a people than what ideologies may prescribe for them. Anyway that is one way of approaching this exhibition.

I now have great pleasure in declaring this exhibition open.

SEPTEMBER 3, 1977.
