

Singapore Government

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29 NOV 1980

11-1/80/11/22

Acc. No.	NARC
80/2052	5

SPEECH BY MR CHUA SIAN CHIN, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS,
AT THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER OF THE SINGAPORE CHEE
YANG (CHUA SI) KONG HUAY AT NO. 38 AMBER ROAD, SINGAPORE
1543 ON SATURDAY, 22 NOVEMBER 1980 AT 8.00 PM

Today we celebrate the golden jubilee anniversary of the Singapore Chee Yang (Chua Si) Kong Huay. To do honour to the memory of the founding fathers and to make the commemoration meaningful we should try to derive useful lessons from our past history that will give us wisdom and confidence to face the future.

The association was founded in 1930. At that time new immigrants were still coming in large numbers into Singapore. Unrestricted immigration from China came to an end only in 1933 through the introduction of a quota system. But substantial numbers still come until the outbreak of the Second World War. Most of the new immigrants were brought in by labour brokers to supply the labour market through an indentured labour system. Under this system the employer would advance their passage money and in return they would be indentured to serve him for a period until they had paid off their debt by deductions from their wages.

As could be expected there was a great deal of malpractices and exploitation of these indentured workers by the employers which the then colonial government did very little to prevent or protect them from. Under these circumstances the only avenue open to protect themselves from the excesses of exploitation was to seek the help of their fellow clansmen through the local clan associations. Thus our clan associations performed a very important function in protecting the interests and promoting the welfare of our largely immigrant community in those days. This evoked strong loyalties towards ethnic, dialect and clan groups. This was the best way for the various ethnic and dialect groups to protect their mutual interests and ensure their survival under a colonial system.

Since then great changes have taken place in the world and in Singapore. We are an independent nation. We are fast becoming a modern industrial society. Most of our people are now born, bred and educated in Singapore. Their way of life and work have changed. We also have their attitudes and interests in life. With independence loyalties towards our young Singapore nation grew and loyalties towards ethnic, dialect and clan groups began to diminish. Other group loyalties began to form, as different types of group interests that cut through ethnic and dialect lines emerged.

To protect the interests of workers, we have our modern trade unions which, unlike the old trade guilds, are not organised on ethnic or dialect groups. We now have various forms of co-operative societies catering for different interests and organised on multi-racial lines. Modern business enterprises which want to be big and competitive cannot be run and managed on the basis of family ties. But whatever changes we make for development and progress we must never abandon our roots and links with the past.

In a way our old clan associations provide us with this link with our past history. They are a good example of how our pioneering forefathers organised themselves for mutual aid and protection. We can learn from the way they forged strong loyalties and trust and other abiding relationships that enabled them to overcome adversity. It is this, more than anything else, that ensured their survival as a group. It also gave them the confidence to press ahead and eventually to prosper. This is something which our younger generation who tend to be individualistic can learn from and benefit by putting their group interests, whether that of the corporation they work for or that of the nation, above their individual interests.

Modern Japan has shown that group loyalty and trust and the placing of group interests above individual interests have enabled a people to move forward to the heights of success in an increasingly competitive world. It has also shown that while striving to reach the heights of modern technology it is also necessary to preserve some of its old cultural traditions and values that give its people a sense of purpose and direction.

However, our clan associations while preserving their basic objectives, must change with the times. They must not only extend the scope but also change the nature of their activities in keeping with new developments. Their welfare activities must not cater only for their fellow clansmen but also benefit other needy and deserving fellow Singaporeans. In the coming decade the problem of caring for the aged will increase as more of our people grow older. It is here that the clan associations can make a significant contribution by establishing and running homes for our senior citizens. If each clan association is unable to run its own home for the aged, a few can get together and pool their resources. From their years of experience of doing welfare work they should have the expertise to do so.

Our clan associations must also come forward to participate more actively in promoting national causes. For example, they should come out into the forefront to support our current "Speak More Mandarin and Less Dialect" campaign. Since more of their members belong to the older age group and use dialect, their active participation will have greater impact and provide the impetus to the campaign.

Finally, it is in this spirit of change and progress while preserving our links with the past and learning from it, that we can fruitfully commemorate the golden jubilee anniversary of the Chee Kong (Chua Si) Kong Huay. This is the way forward to an even better and more successful future. I would like to wish the association continued success and prosperity in the years ahead.
