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**SPEECH BY MR GOH CHOK TONG, PRIME MINISTER AND
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE BANQUET DINNER JOINTLY
ORGANISED BY THE SINGAPORE CHINESE CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE & INDUSTRY AND THE SINGAPORE FEDERATION
OF CHINESE CLANS ASSOCIATIONS, AT RAFFLES BALLROOM,
LEVEL 4, THE WESTIN STAMFORD AND WESTIN PLAZA ON
WEDNESDAY, 19 DECEMBER 1990, AT 8.00 PM**

Enhance Our Value-System

Thank you for your warm words of support and encouragement. My wife and I are pleased to be with you tonight.

I do not regard my appointment as Prime Minister as a personal achievement. I regard it as a duty, a calling to serve my country and fellowmen. My mission is to keep Singapore thriving and make it an even better place than

today. It is a big challenge. But with your support, and that of other Singaporeans, we can succeed.

One of my big regrets in life is not learning Mandarin as a boy. I had the opportunities, but I did not seize them. My father sent me to Hwa Chiao Chinese Primary School at Pasir Panjang. I was only five years old. The war had only recently ended. There were many older boys and girls in the same class. Some were twice my age. My father found that I had difficulty coping. So a year later, when Pasir Panjang English Primary School re-opened, he transferred me there. I started from Primary One, with other students of about the same age. From then on, it was English all the way. Chinese was taught in the upper primary as a non-examination subject. But nobody took it seriously. It was a big mistake that I also did not. These are mistakes which you realize only when you grow up. I hope younger Singaporeans do not make the same mistake of ignoring their mother-tongue.

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There are many thousands of Singaporeans whose first language is Mandarin. Whatever my standard of Mandarin, I have to make the effort to reach out to them directly. So I am now learning Mandarin. But it is tough learning a language at this age. You may think I am now competent in the language because right now I am speaking to you in Mandarin. But really I am

not. I had to write out my speech in English, then get my Chinese teacher to translate it, and then spend hours learning it.

In learning Mandarin, I am also discovering idioms, proverbs, and philosophies which capture centuries of wisdom succinctly. And this is the other reason why I regret my lack of proficiency in Mandarin. There is a whole civilisation of which my forefathers were very much a part, and of which I am a part, but to which I have limited access. I do not have the master key to unlock the treasures of this civilization.

But fortunately, I was brought up in an extended family environment in which useful values were transmitted.

As a child, I lived with my grandmother, uncles, aunts and cousins. My father died young and my second uncle took over the responsibility of looking after the extended family. He worked in a biscuit factory, as a factory hand. He worked hard, and was very thrifty. Without any formal lesson being given, I learnt the meaning of responsibility to the family, and self-sacrifice. We practised ancestor worship. We observed Qing Ming and other Chinese customs and festivals. The support provided by the extended family system was invaluable to me. I am afraid this value-system of the Chinese has been

undergoing some erosion because of our exposure to western influences. It will be further eroded if we do nothing. The question is how do we stop this erosion and what value system we want.

The value-system we want is one that will ensure the long-term survival of Singapore as a nation. It is already there – the extended family system, relationships based on social hierarchy, thrift, hardwork, and self-sacrifice. But we cannot simply promote Chinese values as national values. We have to be sensitive to the values of Malay, Indian and other non-Chinese Singaporeans.

The solution lies in promoting a set of shared values for Singaporeans of all races. These should be core values which all Singaporeans can identify with. They should be values which will consolidate our multi-racial society and contribute to our long-term growth as a distinctive Asian nation. Outside these core values, which we should regard as national values, each community can promote and practise its own values which other communities may not fully identify with. But these values must not conflict with the core values. This way, we reconcile the values of a community with the values of a nation.

We will be publishing a White Paper on this in a month's time. I do not want to go into the details of this White Paper tonight.

I hope that when the White Paper is published and debated, your members will support the shared values and help pass them on to the next generation, through education and personal examples. But as Chinese Singaporeans, in addition to the shared values, you should also promote those values which have seen the Chinese civilization grow without a break for over 5000 years. But please do so within the context of a multi-racial society.

Lastly, let me thank you again for honouring me tonight. May I add that we should thank Mr Lee Kuan Yew for his immeasurable contribution to Singapore. Without him, tiny Singapore would not be such a great nation. My colleagues and I pledge to do our best for Singapore.

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