

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR HOWE YOON CHONG, MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MINISTRY OF DEFENCE FOR POTONG PASIR, AT THE NATIONAL DAY SCHOOLS CONCERT AT LORONG 8 TOA PAYOH ON FRIDAY, 15 AUG 1980 AT 7.00 PM

This is an appropriate occasion in conjunction with our National Day celebrations to remind ourselves to be good students, to be good workers, and to be good citizens. Students of the Chinese language would have known this advice in the form of "讀好書, 作好事, 做好人" But like all good advice it is necessary to relate it to the prevailing circumstances.

"讀好書" To read good books requires us to pay attention to our studies, to read widely, to seek knowledge, to learn to distinguish right and wrong, and to follow the path of virtue and wisdom. All these must remain unchanged. In the prevailing conditions in Singapore we need to define what we must study and learn. Our multi-racial society and our dependence on the outside world for our living dictate that we must be bilingual if not multi-lingual and we need to learn English. We need to know more than one language in order to understand the feelings and sensitivities of the other races in our country and we need English to communicate with people in the outside world, to promote trade and industry, to keep abreast of developments in science and technology. We should also try to retain our cultural heritage through the study of our own mother tongue.

We are aware that to be bilingual or trilingual involves very much extra effort, particularly for those who do not have a facility for languages. Yet this effort must be made. It is best made when one is young. The young students of today must put in every effort to learn English in order to have access to modern science and technology and at least one local language preferably their own mother tongue in order to retain his cultural identity and to live harmoniously in our multi-racial

society. A bilingual educated person is more able to understand other cultural values than a monolingual person. To be effectively bilingual is not easy but then for Singaporeans our very life itself has never been easy. We must accept that anything that is worthwhile cannot easily be achieved.

Our education should involve more than just book learning. At an early stage our students are urged to prepare for a career. This may or may not be good. We cannot get away from the fact that we need to learn skills, to keep up with the latest developments in science and technology and also to contribute to our economic well-being. Students of today have to work hard doing all these things. In addition they need to read widely to draw from the wealth of literature in either English or the other languages in order to be cultured and educated Singaporeans.

While we need to have many kinds of specially trained people like lawyers, doctors, engineers, management executives, scientists, and others in various professions, we also need cultured and educated persons in our society who can see beyond the narrow confines of their particular trade or skill. Our education must encompass much more than just learning enough to hold down a job or a profession. Young minds should be open to the wealth of knowledge available in books in our libraries in various languages. Students must read more outside their textbooks and widely in many subjects to be really cultured and educated. This advice to read good books is as valid today as it was first given many many years ago.

"作好事" To do good work does not just refer to being charitable or philanthropic: like advising our scouts or girl guides to do a good deed everyday. It means much more. It has universal application, enjoining every citizen to work hard in whatever he is doing and to keep on learning and improving in his job. He should continue his education and add to his knowledge all the time. When every citizen improves in this way our society can progress both economically and culturally. Every citizen must be able to take pride in his work. However humble the work may be, he should do his best and try to improve the quality of his skill. He must not be indifferent to his job, neither must he be slipshod. To be slipshod is to be negligent, to cause wastage of time and material, this is downright criminal.

The younger generation should take "do good work" (作好事) to mean "be more earnest in your work". Try to avoid opportunism, i.e. to make the most in the easiest way in the shortest time. This opportunism may bring short-term gains, like hopping from job to job for a little more pay. In a period when jobs are easy to find, one can reap benefits. In the process the worker does not improve his skill at all. He becomes indifferent to his work. The crunch will come when times change and he finds himself in difficulty because he had learned no skill. This situation is likely to become more serious as our industries move to higher skills and technology. The practice of job hopping upsets the economic process and causes wastage to time and materials which is not good for the society. Hence our young Singaporeans must learn to be as skilled as possible, to have good work ethics, and to be conscientious and diligent to improve. He should take pride in whatever he is doing and get satisfaction from the results of his own work.

"做好人" To be good citizens must mean in the Singapore context not only to work hard for our economic and cultural progress but also to contribute to the welfare of our community and to share in the duties and responsibilities of defending our home and country. A good citizen lives in accordance with the accepted code of ethics and social behaviour. In our highly urbanised housing estates, we need to have additional qualities of courtesy, patience, and tolerance. We need to be public-spirited and civic-minded. Without these qualities we cannot build a pleasant home and a happy harmonious community. We should avoid causing nuisance to others and prevent damage to public property and amenities. Everyone of us should try to maintain a high standard of honesty and integrity. We should be concerned not only with our own welfare and that of the other members of our family, but whenever our neighbours are in need we should extend to them every assistance possible. We should retain our traditional family structure and cultural values that we have inherited and we should not allow these values to be pushed aside by modern western influences. Above all, our young men should take their National Service seriously and use the period of military training to their best advantage by building themselves up physically and mentally so that they can learn the skills and be prepared at all times to defend their home and country.