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SPEECH BY MR LEE KHOON CHOY, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE (PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE) AND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION, AT THE OPENING OF THE THIRD SENIOR CITIZENS' WEEK CONVENTION AT THE VICTORIA THEATRE ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 1981, AT 2 P.M.

I am happy to be with you this afternoon to officiate the opening of the Third Senior Citizens' Week Convention on "Remember our Elders". First of all, I would like to congratulate the Convention Organising Committee for initiating this convention which provides an opportunity for us to exchange our views on how to respect, love and to remember our senior citizens.

From 15th to 22nd this week, the aged homes, senior citizens' clubs, community centres and voluntary community organisations throughout the island are busy in celebrating the Third Senior Citizens' Week.

Never has Singapore seen so much care and attention paid to our senior citizens. You can see the old folks are full of life and vigour when given the opportunity to express themselves. You find the old timers rediscovering their talent in singing old songs and finding happiness in doing so. Without such activities, life for these senior citizens would be a matter of dragging on from day to day with nothing to hope for and the world is at a standstill. Such activities cheered up the lives of our old folks and make them feel that the society do care for them and that they can be equally useful to society.

This is the sort of spirit we should inculcate in our society - the spirit of the strong helping the weak; the rich, the poor and the young, the old. I am glad to see that this spirit is fast growing in our society. The average Singaporean has a heart despite our commercialised way of life. Whenever the newspapers publish a story disclosing the sorry state of a victim of a disaster, you find spontaneous donations from well-wishers extending their sympathies.

Unlike Western societies when the basic concept is "survival of the fittest", Singapore is essentially an Eastern society which

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believes in the symbiosis mutualis approach in treating one's fellow human beings. The Western concept of "survival of the fittest" makes human beings treat one another as separate, antagonistic units. They attempt to eliminate one another in order to survive in the same way as big fish eat small fish and small fish the shrimps. Based on this concept, the strong tries to dominate the weak, the wealthy the poor, and the young the old. There is no place for the old folks because they have become weak and especially when they are poor. That is why in Western society, the old folks are neglected by their offsprings, and they usually lead a miserable life if they are poor.

The Eastern symbiotic approach to life encourages the strong to look after the weak, the rich the poor and the young the old. The symbiotic way is to learn how to live with one another on the basis of mutual help for mutual benefit.

I hope that as our society becomes more English-educated, our society does not become too Western oriented in the sense that it begins to adopt the rule of "survival of the fittest". The English language should help us modernise but not Westernise. We should maintain the virtues of our oriental traditions whilst modernising our means of production. That is to say, we should remain Eastern inside and Western or modern outside.

We have heard of cases where Western-educated children have neglected their parents when they returned from studies overseas. I know of a case where the aged parents have transferred their property to the grown-up son thinking that when they die, someone would inherit the property. The next thing the old folks get was a letter demanding from the parents rental for the property which they have given away. This is what I mean by being completely Westernised, and losing touch with the virtue of oriental sense of value. This is not the type of society we want to build. We want a society which is modernised, but we also want to retain the virtues of our forefathers, the care and respect for the old, filial piety, loyalty, diligence, thriftiness and other traditional values. A Chinese proverb says: "Store up padi to prevent hunger, breed children to ensure old age." I wonder to what extent this is applicable to our society today and to what

extent it will be applicable to our society of tomorrow. In other words, will the sons ever feed the parents in future.

The Third Senior Citizens' Week Convention is Eastern oriented. Singaporeans have demonstrated that they do care for aged elders and they will continue to do their utmost to help them. A convention like this will certainly come up with many answers to the problems of looking after the old folks of our society who have in one way or other contributed to the development of our society. Now that they have reached the winter of their lives, it is our duty to see in what way we can brighten up their lives so that they will not feel unwanted.

I wish the convention every success in their deliberation.

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