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SPEECH BY DR WONG KWEI CHEONG, MINISTER OF STATE (LABOUR) AND MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR CAIRNHILL, AT THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER OF THE NG CLAN AT 78A RACE COURSE ROAD ON 7 APRIL '82 AT 8.00 PM

As we progress and modernise, many of us see less and less of the relevance and usefulness of the values upheld by our fore-fathers. Confucianism and other such schools of thoughts have gradually lost their impact on society. However, I would like to point out that Confucianism still has particular relevance to our modern industrialised society.

Take the case of Japan. Loyalty is a distinctive trait of Japanese workers. This trait is contributing in no small way to the Japanese economic success. How was this quality of loyalty to one's country, company and work cultivated among the Japanese workers? You may say that it is again part and parcel of the Japanese culture. But more than this, the culture has its roots in Confucianism. The Japanese have through the years extended their Confucian principles from their homes to the work-place. They have interpreted the word faith to mean also having a sense of conviction to work. This boosts morale at the work-place and helps in the practice of team spirit, as the total workforce share similar beliefs and values.

Japanese workers believe that when a company has faith in their staff, the staff will similarly have faith in the company. Subsequently, ensuring the well-being of the company will become a joint responsibility of both workers and employer. It is common to find Japanese workers trying to improve on their skills and methods of production so that the overall performance of the company could be improved. Where faith and commitment in work exist, very little close supervision is necessary. These are some of the basic reasons accounting for the high productivity of Japanese workers.

I remember an interesting conversation I had with a Japanese industrialist. I learnt a lesson on achievement from him. He told me that one of the teachings of Confucius touches on the commitment of man to his own chosen course of development. Simply put this teaching says that a man at the age of 15 should have decided on what he wants to be. At the age of 30 he should have established himself. At the age of 40, he should uphold a strong conviction of what his own principles are. At the age of 50, he should already know the decrees of heaven. At the age of 60, he should be receptive to all kinds of opinions. Finally, at the age of 70, he should have attained what he wishes to have. In short, this simple teaching advocates a stage to stage development of one's principles and maturity of conviction. This Confucian teaching in Chinese is as follows:

我十五岁就立志学习，三十而立，四十而不惑，五十而知天命，六十而耳顺，七十而从心所欲，不逾距。

We can see that Confucius' thinking is very closely linked to the promotion of harmonious human relations, all leading to the culmination of harmony among the human race.

As a further illustration of the effects of Confucian teachings on work attitudes, the Japanese industrialist quoted this analect:

我每天三次反省我自己，为人谋而不忠乎？与朋友交而不信乎？传而不习乎？

This teaching when applied to the work environment means that each day the worker will examine himself on three points. The first point is, has he performed his work faithfully; secondly, has he dealt with his friends sincerely; and thirdly, has he mastered and practised the instructions of his superiors.

No wonder the Japanese worker is in general diligent, loyal, and skilful.

The Japanese actually adapt these Confucian ethics to their industrialised society. The logic is obvious. Good human relations

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in an office, factory or any organisation is congenial to good performance. The most effective way of bringing about attitudinal change is through the inculcation of values.

Role of Clans

It will not be too big of a problem for Singapore to try to induce its workers to believe in values like loyalty and diligence. This is because Singaporeans do have for their heritage Asian cultures and values. In fact the several clan associations still play an active role in preserving Chinese culture like classical Chinese music, painting and dancing. At a broader level these clans could be seen as vehicles for the transmission of traditional Asian values and teachings.

In addition to this valuable social function, I hope that the clans could extend their realm of concern to cover the well-being of the state as well. They can do this by helping to promote the concepts of Confucian ethics to a wider circle of people. During their association functions, the members could inform their guests the importance of creating greater awareness of traditional Asian values among their friends, colleagues, and workers. The relation between positive work attitudes and Confucian ethics must be realised.

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