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SPEECH BY DR YEO NING HONG, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS
AND INFORMATION AND SECOND MINISTER FOR DEFENCE (POLICY),
AT THE TEOCHEW POIT IP HUAY KUAN'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY
DINNER AT THE TEOCHEW BUILDING, 97 TANK ROAD,
ON SATURDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER 1989 AT 8 PM

First of all, let me congratulate the Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan and all its members on the Huay Kuan's 60th Anniversary. Tonight, I would like to pay tribute to the fortitude, industry, and thrift of our forefathers.

Sixty years ago in 1929, the Huay Kuan was founded, and received its accreditation from the Colonial Government. It was the year best known in history for the Great Crash of the Stock Market in the United States. The Crash triggered off the Great Depression worldwide. Millions of people were thrown out of jobs and poverty became widespread in many countries. That event seared the memory and psyche of an entire generation. It was not an auspicious beginning for the Huay Kuan.

But then, the beginnings of our forefathers were also not auspicious. They came to Singapore from their humble villages and towns. They migrated not for a softer or easier life. They migrated to escape poverty, hunger, and starvation. They came knowing that it was to be an uncertain life of virtual slavery. They came penniless, but prepared to work. They worked, they saved, and they sent money back home to support the families they left behind.

From such inauspicious beginnings, our forefathers helped built Singapore into what it is today. Had it ever crossed their minds that the Singapore they were helping to create would be what it is today - peaceful, progressive, prosperous? A major metropolis, a communication hub, a financial and trading centre? With a list of the world's No. 1's. I suspect it had. For our forefathers were not unintelligent people. And their long-term vision had sustained them, even through the crippling depression and the destructive tragedies of World War II. Gradually, many of them made Singapore their home. They purchased land for their descendents. The land they bought, as in the case of Ngee Ann Kongsi, is today, worth billions. They started charitable and education projects to help one another and others in need. Some of these projects are seen today in institutions such as the Ngee Ann Polytechnic. For our forefathers it was not immediate gratification that matters, but the long-term future for their descendants. For all the advances of modern science, technology, and management, we still have much to learn from our humble forefathers. They were made of stern stuff. They were toughies. They endured adversity and overcame calamities. They did not pack up at the first encounter with disappointment. They thought in terms of decades, not days.

How can we best pass on the virtues and values of our forefathers to our children? Many people agree that the best and most effective way is through the home. A million parents each in his or her own way passing on the lessons of life to a million children, one-on-one, day-by-day. Parents must bear that responsibility. But, parents' efforts can be reinforced by others, by leaders in every strata of society.

Schools also can help. So too can clan associations. Clan associations can distill these values, proven and time-tested, and help discard superstitions and retrogressive practices. They can affirm such values and virtues, and publicise their affirmation through the mass media. Yes, we live in a rapidly changing world. But some virtues are never outdated. Virtues like fortitude, industry, and thrift. Our forefathers passed them on to us. They are our heritage. Our responsibility today is to pass them on to our children, to future generations. We must not fail them.

I wish the Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan every success in the coming years.
