

**TRANSCRIPT OF EULOGY
BY EMERITUS SENIOR MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG
AT THE FUNERAL OF THE LATE MR LEE KUAN YEW
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UNIVERSITY CULTURAL CENTRE AUDITORIUM**

HE WAS MY TEACHER

1 Mr Lee Kuan Yew gave his life to us. To truly appreciate this, you had to have marched alongside him in his long political journey. Or studied him closely – his words and actions, his ideas and vision, his values and philosophy. Or carried along by his passion in building a nation and improving the lives of Singaporeans. Or lived his worries, day in and day out.

2 To Singaporeans, he was our first Prime Minister, our leader who fought for our Independence, the man who turned Singapore from Third World to First, our national father. For me, he would always be my teacher.

EARLY YEARS

3 I first met Mr Lee in 1958 when I went to his office to invite him to speak to my school (Raffles Institution). He was the Leader of the Opposition. Later, I nervously chaired the talk to a packed hall. That was my high point in school.

HIS GREATEST PASSION: SINGAPORE

4 Mr Lee Kuan Yew was Singapore. But it surprised me that he had earned that accolade just two years after Singapore's independence. On a field trip with my class of international students to Puerto Rico in 1967, a Puerto Rican excitedly shouted "Chino, Chino" when he saw me. I shouted back, "Singapore!" He replied, "Lee Kuan Yew!"

5 Mr Lee drove his people hard because he had to toughen fledgling Singapore quickly. As he put it, he had to account for the lives of millions of Singaporeans. He rallied and united a disparate population to share a common identity. He braved necessary long-term painful policies. Farmers were resettled and land acquired. Old mosques and temples made way for public housing, roads and schools. Gangsters and drug traffickers were detained without trial. Some people alleged that these policies lacked compassion. But Mr Lee taught people how to fish and brought fish to Singapore waters. He housed and schooled millions. He gave us safe streets and parks. He was a leader, not a populist politician. The outpouring of grief,

gratitude and love for him says it all. People know that Mr Lee did immense good for them.

6 Mr Lee consulted widely with colleagues and people he trusted. He told his Backbenchers to bring out the people's concerns and gossip from the coffee shops and the hawker centres. Mr Lee never muzzled anyone. But he robustly defended his convictions and Singapore's interests, very often to the discomfort of his critics. To those he believed were out to destroy Singapore, he put on his knuckle-dusters.

7 Mr Lee was a good teacher. He was always scanning the future, anticipating challenges, pre-empting problems, and thinking out solutions. He shared with the Cabinet useful articles, his conversations with world leaders, and insights from overseas trips. He studied best practices and explored innovative ideas for Singapore. Where there were no precedents, he thought out creative and innovative solutions.

LEADERSHIP RENEWAL

8 Mr Lee was a worrier. He worried incessantly whether Singapore would survive after he and the Old Guard were gone. He wanted to be judged on this, not by the city he had built and the lives he had improved. As Singapore prospered, and hard times and history forgotten, he did not believe that able, committed and honest leaders would emerge naturally, unlike his generation who were born with fire in their bellies to fight for independence, multi-racial equality and a fair and just society.

9 And so, Mr Lee single-mindedly planned for leadership succession. He emphasised character, motivation, commitment and ability over academic grades. He underlined the importance of having the moral authority to govern.

10 In pushing for leadership renewal, he had to cut short the political careers of his old colleagues. This was painful for him. He said that it was "emotionally difficult but necessary... I had to do it, whatever my own feelings". I know he felt for them. He would occasionally ask me about them.

11 Learning from Mr Lee, I too planned for leadership renewal. He was surprised when, soon after the 2001 General Election, I intimated my intention to step down. He told me that there was no hurry. I explained that Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong was already approaching 50. I wanted to give him a long runway to lead Singapore and develop the 4th generation leadership.

WISE TEACHER

12 After I took over as Prime Minister, Mr Lee was punctilious in observing the protocol of my office. He made sure he arrived before me for all events. As I respected him as my elder and mentor, I told him to dispense with this practice at non-formal events. But he explained that it was important to observe this protocol. Otherwise, people might draw the wrong conclusion that he did not respect me and take their cue from there.

13 I valued Mr Lee's advice when he was Senior Minister in my Cabinet. He sought to understand my thinking and objectives, and suggested refinements, and sometimes alternatives, to my policies and programmes. But he always made it clear that the decision was mine to make. He was, as he put it, a resource and data bank.

14 We lunched regularly. Our conversations never drifted far from his life's work. We shared many common concerns, including the emerging trend of income stratification and social fragmentation. He worried about almost every aspect of Singapore. He never ceased sharing and I kept on learning. Once in a while, he showed his soft side. We talked about our families and health. After Mrs Lee's death, I glimpsed how lonely and sad he was. Sadly, we had to discontinue our lunches in 2013 because of his health. Sadly, his physical health declined. Sadly, Mr Lee is gone.

CONCLUSION: HONOURING MR LEE

15 I cannot put his legacy more eloquently than his Old Guard comrade, the late S Rajaratnam. He wrote¹:

"There is one monument which I think would bring warmth and comfort to him in the twilight years of his life. And that is the city and society which he, more than anybody else, has literally built out of nothing..."

The question today is not what Mr Lee has done – what he has done is on record and indelible – but whether the city and society he has built will endure after he is gone.... (And) how much of the past that will help shape the future will be remembered and understood by succeeding generations."

¹ Excerpt from *A Place in the Sun: Tribute to Lee Kuan Yew*, Singapore Indian Development Association, 1992

16 Mr Lee has completed his life-journey. He transformed our lives. He touched our hearts. We grieve. But I believe Mr Lee would say, "What to do? This is life." He would want us to move on with the Singapore Story. He would want us to fight our own battles and conquer our own peaks. He would want Singapore to succeed long after he is gone. We must honour him.

17 I have seen and heard many acts of kindness over the past week – Singaporeans helping those who need help, staying strong together even as we mourn. This shared, compassionate moment is the people's tribute to Mr Lee. Let us stay united, across race, language, religion, across young and old, across rich and poor, across our whole society, to write an exciting sequel to his and our Singapore Story.

18 Thank you Mr Lee.
