

Singapore Government Press Release
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**SPEECH BY DR LEE BOON YANG MINISTER FOR INFORMATION,
COMMUNICATIONS & THE ARTS AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE SPEAK
MANDARIN CAMPAIGN HELD ON TUESDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 2003 AT 4.30PM**

AT THE MOX BAR & CAFÉ NO 21, TANJONG PAGAR ROAD #04-01

Professor Wee Chow Hou, Chairman of Promote Mandarin Council

Ladies and gentlemen

Distinguished guests

Introduction

I am pleased to be here today for the launch of this year's Speak Mandarin Campaign. This year is a special year, we are celebrating the Speak Mandarin Campaign's 25th year. When it was first launched by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in 1979, the campaign aimed to encourage dialect-speaking Chinese Singaporeans to adopt Mandarin as a common language.

By the early 1990s, it was clear that this campaign had achieved its initial target; Mandarin had been established as the principle language of communication among Chinese Singaporeans. The number of Chinese Singaporeans aged 15 and above who are competent in Chinese and comfortable using Mandarin in their daily lives, increased year by year. According to the AC Nielsen Media Index 2002, in 2000, 82% of those surveyed were found to be literate in Chinese. This figure grew to 86% in 2001 and 87% last year. The number who said they preferred to use Mandarin also increased from 58% in 2000 to 64% last year.

In the next phase, the campaign's focus shifted to encouraging English-educated Chinese Singaporeans to take an interest in speaking good Mandarin and acquiring a more in-depth knowledge of the Chinese culture.

Use It. Don't Lose It

This year's campaign continues in the same vein, to reach out to English-speaking Chinese Singaporeans, particularly professionals, managers and executives, who in the course of their everyday lives, do not use Mandarin. Even though they have studied Mandarin as a second language in schools, many seemed to have stopped

using Mandarin once they started working. As with all languages, proficiency is a matter of practice, if you don't use it, you lose it.

Hence, our theme for this year's campaign is: Use It. Don't Lose It. It would be a pity to spend years in school studying Mandarin only to lose it through lack of practice. Our campaign seeks to encourage Chinese Singaporeans to put the Mandarin they have learnt in school to full and regular use in their social and business interactions with fellow Chinese Singaporeans. We also want to reach out to those who use basic Mandarin for everyday communication, but who do not have an in depth understanding of Mandarin or Chinese culture. We want to encourage this group of Chinese Singaporeans - particularly those aged between 15 and 29 - to improve their level of Mandarin competency, and encourage them to learn more about Chinese history and culture.

An old Chinese saying stated that in order to acquire knowledge, a person must be ready to engage his mind, his mouth as well as his hands.

古人读书有秘诀。他们说：心到、口到、手到。

Gǔ rén dú shū yǒu mì jué. Tā men shuō: xīn dào, kǒu dào, shǒu dào.

心到：是指读书的时候一定要专心。

Xīn dào: shù zhǐ dú shū de shí hòu yí dìng yào zhuān xīn.

口到：读书时一定要仔细朗读。

Kǒu dào: dú shū shí yí dìng yào zǐ xì lǎng dú.

手到：是读书时一定要经常书写。

Shǒu dào: shì dú shū shí yí dìng yào jīng cháng shū xiě.

Mastering Mandarin calls for a holistic approach. We need to harness all our five faculties; the eyes for reading, the ears for listening, the mouth for verbal practice, the hands for writing and the mind for concentration. This five-pronged approach would help us to enhance our grasp of Mandarin and deepen our appreciation for the language and culture.

，我们希望通过耳到、口到、

Wǒ men xī wàng tōng guò ěr dào, kǒu dào,

手到、眼到、心到，五个“到”，和许多希望接触华语或

shǒu dào, yǎn dào, xīn dào, wǔ gè "dào", hé xǔ duō xī wàng jiē chù huà yǔ huò yǔ huò

从来没有接触华语的朋友，一起享受接触华文、华语的乐趣。

cóng lái méi yǒu jiē chù huá yǔ dè péng yǒu, yì qǐ xiǎng shòu jiē chū
huá wén, huá yǔ dè lè qù.

Mandarin, An Asset

When we launched the Speak Mandarin Campaign in 1979, China was just emerging from the throes of the Cultural Revolution and not a global economic player. Today, China is fast emerging as a major player in the global economy. Anyone who wants to do business or work in China will find some competency in the Chinese language an advantage. Understanding Chinese culture and mindsets is even better.

From a business perspective, the economies of both China and Singapore are becoming increasingly intertwined. In 2002, trade between China and Singapore hit S\$28 billion, an increase of 25% over 2001. Based on these figures, China is now Singapore's 4th largest trading partner after Malaysia, the US and Japan. China is also our largest foreign investment destination, with Singapore companies investing in almost 10,000 projects in China, to a value of US\$40.5 billion (as at end March 2003). More and more Singaporeans are finding that their work will require them to travel and operate in China.

Besides economic considerations, speaking Mandarin can also bring Chinese Singaporeans closer to our ethnic and cultural roots. Being educated in English is also an advantage for Singaporeans. English enables us to engage the rest of the world in commerce, trade and cultural exchange. But we should not allow English to displace Mandarin to the point of diminishing our appreciation of Chinese history, culture and heritage. If indeed over the years, we lose our ability to switch between English and Mandarin, we would have lost a tremendous competitive advantage.

Role of NLB

Apart from driving home the message of: Use It, Don't Lose It, this year's campaign will also take its message into the HDB heartlands. Since last year, the National Library Board has taken on the role of driving the Speak Mandarin Campaign. By leveraging on its extensive network of libraries and by tapping into its reading campaigns, we hope to get more Chinese Singaporeans to read more Chinese books.

Last month, the Ministry of Education of China donated some 1,000 volumes of Chinese language books to NLB in support of the campaign. This will add to the library's current collection of 1.8 million Chinese books, and offer more opportunities for Singaporeans to learn about Chinese culture and language. Available for loan at ten selected libraries, the latest addition of Chinese books will serve as useful material for those who wish to improve their Mandarin. Entrepreneurs keen on polishing up their Mandarin language skills and gain in-depth knowledge of Chinese culture and mind-set will also find this latest addition of Chinese books useful.

In addition, the NLB's digital library, eLibraryHub, provides users with a wide range of web resources and online information resources at the China Resource Library.

Library users can tap into the content to keep abreast of the latest developments, such as in tourism, life sciences, education, investment and finance sectors in China.

Conclusion

Being able to speak Mandarin is fast becoming a necessity for Chinese Singaporeans. A good command of Mandarin will enhance communication between fellow Chinese Singaporeans and improve appreciation of the Chinese arts, culture and heritage. It can also help to open up opportunities in the rapidly expanding Chinese economy. It is thus of vital economic and social importance that Chinese Singaporeans make the effort to brush up on Mandarin, and to Use It as often as possible in order not to Lose It.
