

18 OCT 1985

PRESS RELEASE

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Release No: 24/OCT
04-2/85/10/12

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SPEECH BY MR WONG KAN SENG, MINISTER OF STATE (COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNICATIONS & INFORMATION), AT THE SPEAK MANDARIN CAMPAIGN QUIZ COMPETITION AT KUO CHUAN COMMUNITY CENTRE ON SATURDAY, 12 OCTOBER 1985 AT 8.00 PM

Language is the foundation of all culture. For thousand of years, people have transmitted their culture, values, lifestyle and so on through the use of language. In the case of the Chinese civilization, the beginnings of the Chinese Language started when Qin Shi Huang unified the whole of China and gave it a common written language. However, because China is so large a country with millions of people, there are many dialects used in the country. Therefore, in order for effective oral communication to take place, it has adopted a common spoken language as well and they called it "Pu Tung Hua" which is what we called Mandarin. In that way, the people of China whether they are from the North or the South can understand each other through the spoken "Pu Tung Hua".

In Singapore, our forefathers came from mainly the southern part of China and there were many dialect groups. While they may be able to read the written language, they have difficulties understanding each other because of the use of dialects. This is not ideal for Singapore. Therefore, six years ago, the Government promoted the Speak Mandarin Campaign so that in a small Singapore, Chinese descendants of different dialect backgrounds will be able to speak the common language, Mandarin. In this way, communication and understanding even among the Chinese population can be improved.

The language is also the transmitter of values which we have imbibed for thousands of years. It is the root of our culture. The Speak Mandarin Campaign therefore is another way for Chinese Singaporeans to foster their understanding of the traditional culture.

The Campaign over the years has achieved good results. More and more Chinese Singaporeans are speaking Mandarin in place of dialects. Even among our elders, I noticed more and more of them speaking Mandarin instead of dialects when I visited them during my house to house visits. In a generation or two, I believe our children would speak Mandarin more fluently than they would speak dialect.

The Quiz that we hold here tonight is one of the activities to promote the 'Speak Mandarin Campaign'. I am pleased to note that in this Quiz Competition, our grassroots organisations are actively involved. I also see the participation of officers from the neighbourhood Police Post. This is an indication of the strong co-operation between the people and the Police in this neighbourhood. An interesting feature in this 'Speak Mandarin Campaign Quiz Competition' is that the prizes are not the normal plaques and trophies. They are items such as meat, fishballs, chicken, donated by our shopkeepers and market stall holders of Kuo Chuan. I am glad they are also actively supporting the Government's 'Speak Mandarin Campaign' effort.

I would like to thank the organisers, participants and well-wishers for putting in this fine effort to make the 'Speak Mandarin Campaign Quiz Competition' a success.