

# 华语·新时代



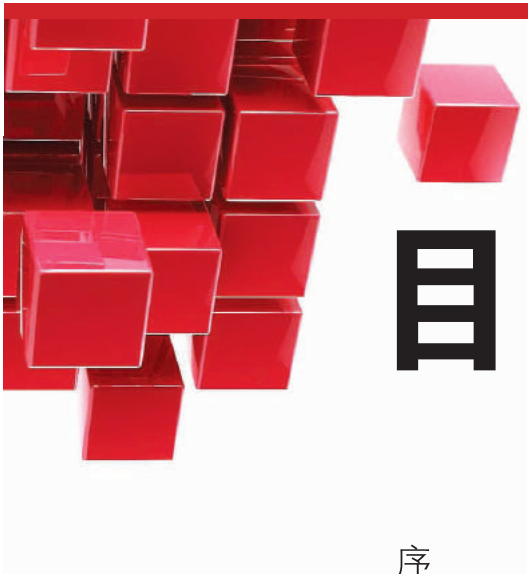




**华语·新时代**







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**35**年前开始的讲华语运动，是新加坡历史悠久的一项社会运动。多年努力，日见成效，如今已经有许多新加坡华人在生活中多说华语，少说方言。

虽然如此，前进之路仍然面对许多重大的挑战，特别是如今有越来越多的新加坡华人在家中说的是英语而不是华语。

但我们决心不惧挑战，勇往直前。新加坡推广华语理事会将坚持不断自我更新的精神，不断推出各种新鲜有趣的活动，以吸引广大社群参与，达到推广华语的时代使命。

际此运动诞生35年的重要时刻，我们决定出版35周年纪念册，追溯这场意义深远的文化运动多年来的发展和影响，可谓恰当其时。

这本纪念册，全面涵盖了讲华语运动历程上的点点滴滴，深入分析这项运动对新加坡所具有的重要意义，书中访问了讲华语运动的关键人物，及与运动发展有关的多位人



萧作鸣先生  
推广华语理事会主席

士，并收录了许多新加坡人分享他们一些与讲华语运动有关的个人经历，包括在上世纪80年代后出生年轻一代的故事。

纪念册内容以中、英两种语文撰写，让读者能通过两种不同视角了解整个运动。

展望未来，我们将继续与更多伙伴合作，在主要的推广活动结束后，继续扩大讲华语运动的影响范围。这些伙伴包括教师、社区领袖以及家长，特别是家长更扮演着关键性的角色，他们能鼓励孩子在日常生活中多讲华语，让孩子从小能够打好语言基础，事关至要。

我们的目标，是培养人们对华语和中华文化的欣赏和热爱。因为讲华语不单是为了满足经济需要，更因为华语能让我们明白自己的文化根源，能让我们衔接起过去、现在和未来，为我们在瞬息万变的世界里，找到自己应有的方向。





# 献词



**黄循财**  
文化、社区及青年部部长  
兼通讯及新闻部第二部长

**语**言，不仅仅是日常生活沟通或生意往来的工具。它也是文化传承的载体，也随着时代的变化，被文化影响着，也影响着文化。

我们的语言反映了我们的价值体系、思维模式以及一个社会群体的精神。了解语言的深层文化内涵与意义有助我们表达我们的思想，与他人建立认同感，促进感情联系。

如今，许多新加坡人已掌握双语。华族新加坡人学习英语为第一语言，华语则是我们的母语。我们身处一个现代化的多元种族社会，不同的文化在这里交融、交会。

母语是一条管道，让我们通过它认识华人哲学、思想、传统；母语也是一座桥梁，将我们与祖先及我们的根联系在一起。

的确，掌握双语让我们更能体验东、西两方不同的文化，并游刃于两者之间。世界其他地方虽然大有双语人才，但新加

坡的不同在于我们整个社会能维持双语能力，我们应该保持与加强这份优势。

讲华语运动创立至今，多得推广华语理事会及其伙伴的努力与支持，才能取得今天的成就。

在此祝贺讲华语运动成立35周年，并祝福讲华语运动未来在推广华语这项使命上，取得优越的表现。





告别方言 拥抱华语

**1979**年9月7日傍晚，联络所的电视机前聚集了不少民众，他们不是为了追看最新一集的粤语连续剧而来，而是等着看建国总理李光耀在新加坡大会堂演讲的现场直播。

李光耀当时正为首届全国推广讲华语运动主持开幕仪式，他先是以英语，然后再以福建话和华语发表了题为《华语还是方言》的演讲，语重心长地向华族社群阐明政府鼓励大家改用华语来取代方言的原因。

他透露，他是苦学了18年才掌握好福建话，能讲流利的福建话让他能深入民心、赢得选战，不过如今却要推动华人用华语取代方言，这其实在政治上对他不利，然而考虑到年轻一代的长远利益，他不得不采取应变措施。

李光耀从务实的角度出发，用华族家长熟悉的福建话来说服他们在家中与孩子讲华语的重要性：“大部分人需要常常听、天天讲，才自然而然能说流利的语言。这是事实，无论任何人多聪明，如果没天天讲，他是不会说得流利的。所以我们如果要改善社会，要提高教育水准，要进一步提高文化水准，我们必须逐步用华语取代方言。”

“文化上这（华语）是有价值的语言，经济上也有价值。再过20年，如果中国四个现代化取得成功，它的贸易相当大。到时会说华语方便，讲福建话没用。”

## 为确保双语政策成功

李光耀的顾虑源于他所看到的现实情况：当时华族学生虽然

在学校上华文课时说华语，不过他们一踏出课室便转用方言谈话，他们所学的英语也同样只在课堂上使用。

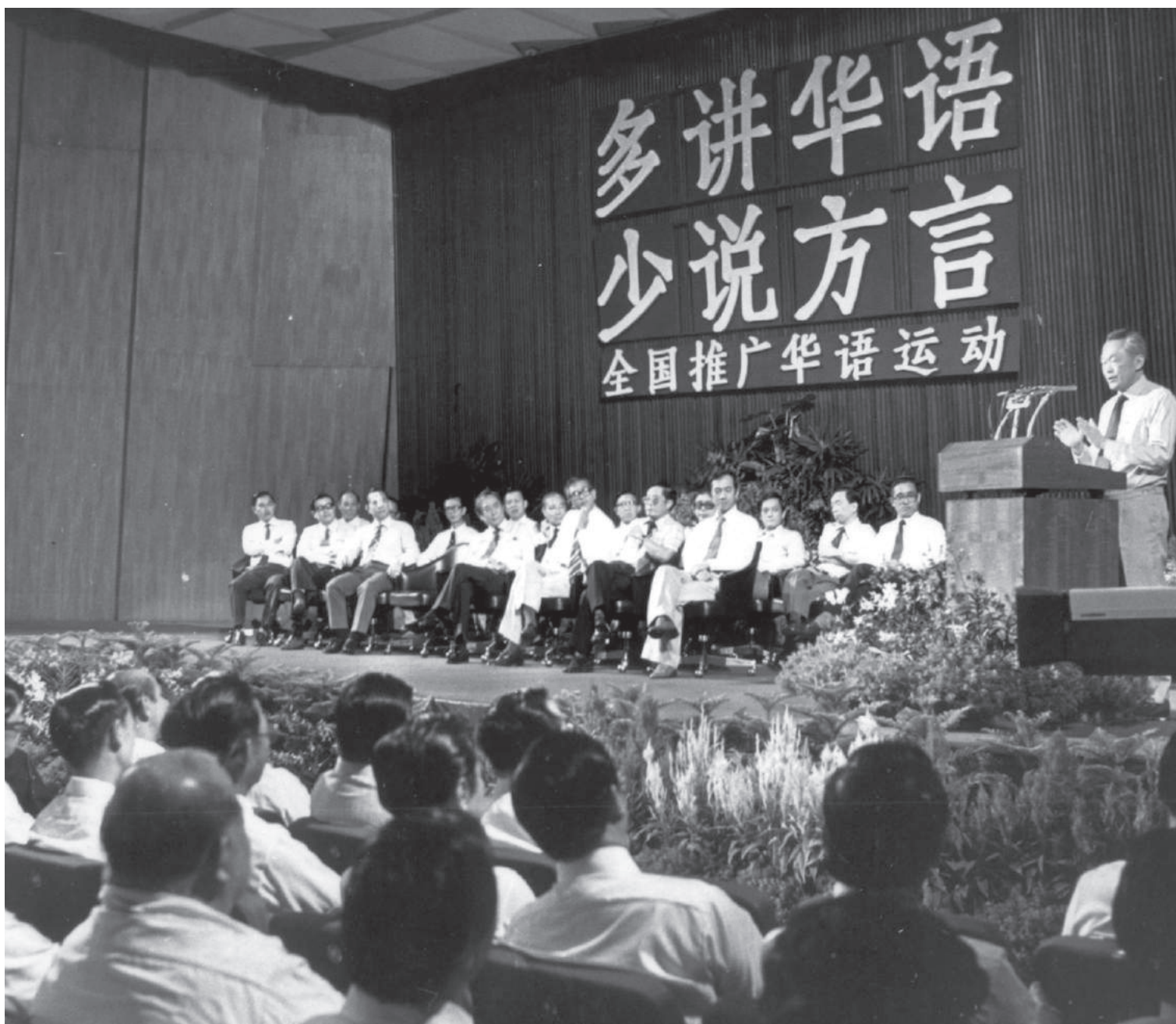
新加坡当时虽然已经有两代人在战后接受了12年的华文教育，不过大多数新加坡华人仍无法说一口流利的华语，追根究底，问题就在于他们在家里、日常生活中主要还是以方言沟通，而这也直接影响了政府推行双语教育的成效。

人民行动党所领导的政府是在1959年开始推行双语教育政策，要求每一名入学的孩子学习英语和自身的母语。

实施双语教育是基于新加坡多元种族和文化的国情，政府为培养新加坡人的国民意识，促进各族国人之间的交流与团结，选择将中立而且在国际上最广泛应用的英语为官方行政语言，与此同时，它也要求各族国人掌握自己的母语，以确保国人保有对传统价值观的了解和认同。

双语教育是新加坡教育制度的基石，不过方言却妨碍了双语政策的推行。当时受委对教育制度进行检讨的副总理兼教育部长吴庆瑞博士在他1979年发表的《吴庆瑞报告书》中就指出，学生的家庭用语和学校学习的语言不相协调，是导致学生语文表现差的最主要原因。

报告指出：“许多新加坡人没有发现当前的学校制度有多不协调，大多数学生虽然在学校学的是英语和华语这两种语言，不过有多达85%学生回到家中根本不用华语或英语。”



时任总理李光耀在1979年9月7日举行的全国推广华语运动开幕仪式上致词。李光耀总理从务实的角度提倡并鼓励国人多讲华语，少说方言。

调查也发现，政府从1959年至1979年推行双语教育的20年来，只有大约3%到5%学生能够有效地利用两种语言说、读、写；有多达50%到60%虽然精通其中一种语言，不过第二语言只达过得去的水平；而其余30%只掌握了一种语言。

李光耀在他于2011年出版的著作《我一生的挑战——新加坡双语之路》（简称《我》书）中回顾发起讲华语运动的原因时指出：“我赞同吴庆瑞指方言妨碍学生有效学习英语和华语的论点。要是学生在学校学习华语和英语，回到家里学的却是方言，那他们实际上是在学习三种语言。他们在家中学习方言的时间，比他们在学校学中英语的时间长，这也难怪他们的方言比华语和英语都强。”

李光耀坚信，每个人只有一个主导语言，而只有一小部分人

能在掌握英语和华语的同时，保留讲方言的能力。为减少方言对学生学习英语和华语的干扰，他决定在华族社群中推动用华语取代方言。

事实上，当时许多在家惯用方言的孩子，在进入学校后才从头开始学华语，这对他们造成很大的学习压力。

政府大力推广华语的举措就有效为他们营造了有利学习华语的环境，让他们有更多机会在家里和社交场合应用华语，大大减轻他们入学后才学新语言的负担。

## 华语为凝聚不同方言社群的共同语言

政府推展讲华语运动，将华语设定为新加坡华人社会的共同语言，这不仅仅是为确保新加坡的双语教育政策取得成功，也是为了国家的稳定发展。

**“我赞同吴庆瑞指方言妨碍学生有效学习英语和华语的论点。要是学生在学校学习华语和英语，回到家里学的却是方言，那他们实际上是在学习三种语言。他们在家中学习方言的时间，比他们在学校学中英语的时间长，这也难怪他们的方言比华语和英语都强。”——李光耀**





时任副总理兼教育部长吴庆瑞博士在1979年发表的《吴庆瑞报告书》中指出，学生的家庭用语和学校学习用语不协调是导致学生语文表现差的主要原因。这份报告对新加坡教育发展及语言环境有着关键性的影响。



**早年新加坡社会里流行各种方言。上世纪80年代，为配合我国提倡讲华语运动，著名方言谐剧搭档王沙与野峰改用华语演出。**

新加坡的华族社群由多个不同方言群体组成，要如何把全国人民团结起来，加强不同籍贯华族国人的国家认同感、消除方言群体之间狭隘的宗乡观念，这是新加坡政府在独立建国之后所面临的一大挑战。

新加坡早期移民先辈大多是从中国南来谋生的华南乡民，他们主要来自福建和广东，大多没有受过教育，普遍以方言会话。当时在新加坡华人社会里流行的方言超过12种，其中福建话的使用率最高。

根据1957年新加坡人口普查的报告，在全国109万华族人口

当中，华人家庭以华语作为母语的仅占1%，其他都以方言作为母语。当中以福建话为母语的占40.6%，潮州话22.5%，广东话18.9%，海南话7.2%，客家话6.7%，其他少数方言则有4.1%。

当时不同籍贯的华人都分别居住在各自的方言聚居地：福建人在厦门街居住，同时在那里经营香料贸易的生意、潮州人的地盘在潮州街和香港街、广东人集聚牛车水，而海南人则占据桥北路、海南街一带。

由于不同方言无法互相沟通，这妨碍不同方言群体之间的交谈和往来，长远来说，这不但会影响华族群体的团结与合作，也不利培养新加坡华人对国家的归属感。要是不着手改善问题，当这些不同籍贯的华族国人从各自的方言聚居地搬入组屋区后，无法沟通的情况将更为显著。

为消除华族国人之间因语言不通造成的隔阂，确保我国华族社群掌握有助彼此交往和沟通的共同语言，政府决定号召新加坡华族社群放弃说方言的习惯，推行以“多讲华语，少说方言”为宣传主轴的讲华语运动，要让华语真正成为新加坡华人的母语。

## 华语是传统价值观载体

推广讲华语运动除了是为巩固双语教育政策、团结华族国民，当然也是为了达到保留传统文化的目的。毕竟语言不仅是人与人之间沟通的工具，也是传承文化与传统价值观的载体。

为抑制以英语为主流的西方政治文化对本地社会的影响，新加坡政府积极透过加强华语教育，传播儒家思想，以保留和继承中华文化遗产。

李光耀清楚意识到儒家思想对建国治国的重要性，因此他在坚持推行以英语为第一语言的双语政策的同时，也不断提醒华族国人不能放弃华语。

他在《我》书中指出：“学习华语的同时，你也在吸收历史、传统与文化等中华文化的精华。儒家思想提倡忠孝仁爱礼义廉耻，这些传统价值观对建国以及培育正直公民很重

要，这种经千锤百炼的传统价值观，将有助我们应对瞬息万变的世界所带来的冲击。”

不知不觉，讲华语运动自1979年开始推展以来，已经走过了35个年头。从最初鼓励华族国人改用华语来取代方言，到现在把焦点转向促进人们对中华文化与价值观的了解，讲华语运动的对象和目标顺应时代的变迁不断演进。

这个重塑新加坡华族社群语言环境的过程并非一帆风顺，但是从越来越多新加坡华人已能够掌握并使用华语的现象不难看出，它已取得了明显的成效。

**“学习华语的同时，你也在吸收历史、传统与文化等中华文化的精华。儒家思想提倡忠孝仁爱礼义廉耻，这些传统价值观对建国以及培育正直公民很重要，这种经千锤百炼的传统价值观，将有助我们应对瞬息万变的世界所带来的冲击。”——李光耀**





## 访李显龙总理

访问：黄伟曼（联合早报） 摄影：唐家鸿（联合早报）

# 在英语环境中，请尽量运用华语

### 1 李总理，讲华语运动走过35载，您如何评价它的进展？

运动最初的目标是多讲华语，少说方言，目标是很明确的。当时，很多新加坡年轻人的第一语言是方言。他们有些没读过多少书，有些则是因为家庭背景的关系，主要用方言交流。当时，（建国总理）李光耀先生觉得，这样下去不行，

因为如果顺着大趋势，人们要学英语，同时也要学华语，而且还要学方言，并且是各种各样的方言，那是没有办法达到的目标。所以，这运动开始时的首要目标是把语言统一起来：少说方言，多讲华语。

依我看，在很大程度上，这个目标已经达到了，因为今天用

方言的年轻人其实很少——我们做过调查，只有5%左右。绝大多数年轻人都会讲华语。至于年长新加坡人，我们也看到相当大的成果，因为现在大多数年长者都懂华语。他们可能讲得没那么流利，在表达时用方言比较方便。我在接见民众或和居民交谈的时候，就经常碰到这样的人。他了解我讲的华语，但比较喜欢用福建话、潮州话、琼州话或海南话等方言，向我解释他的问题。可见我们看到了成果。当然，我们不应期望年长新加坡人能完全改变他们的生活和语言习惯，完全改用华语交流。

然而，大环境在过去35年内的确改变了。今天很多父母亲毕业于统一源流学校，他们的工作语言是英语，家庭主要用语经常也是英语。我们今天的目标不再是“少说方言，多讲华语”，现在的宗旨是“在英语环境中，请尽量运用华语”，使华语能够继续成为一个活的语言、一个有生气的语言、一个能够表达我们的精神、我们的思想、我们的欲望的语言。在这方面，我们还必须做得更多。

**2 建国总理李光耀在讲华语运动20周年的一个访问中曾对运动做过评价。他说，推行华语的工作当时只“做了一半”。您刚才谈到在英语大环境下，要鼓励更多华人说华语仍会面对挑战。那我们从运动20周年至今，有没有取得一些进展？**

讲华语运动20周年大约是15年前的事了。依我看，过去15年，我们的社会有了改变，讲华语的人增加了。今天，一年级新生大部分都来自讲英语的家庭——至少在名义上他们说他们来自讲英语的家庭——但我认为他们很多都相当熟悉华语，

并且经常用华语交谈。大环境持续在改变。

另一个很重要的因素是中国的崛起。中国今天的国际地位和15年前已经不同，新加坡今天和中国的交流跟15年前也很不同。今天，有许多新加坡人到中国经商或工作，有些人甚至在中国念书。这是新加坡华人使用华语的一个很大的动力。

**3 您刚刚提到讲华语运动的发展。运动在不同的阶段有不同的使命，面对不同的受众，1979年它主要针对讲方言的群众，到了1991年已经转为要让大家在英语大环境中讲华语，现在运动则不时提醒人们多用华语。您觉得讲华语运动发展至今，它还能转型吗？它应如何坚持它的使命？**

我想短期内运动的目标不会改变。但我们每一年都必须为运动寻找新的表达与阐述方式，要有新鲜的尝试吸引眼球，吸引人家的注意，鼓励大家支持这个运动。这是我们必须不断做的工作。

**4 您会不会担心双语政策实施越久，运动的效果将慢慢削弱？**

这个运动还有一定的价值，我们一定要继续做下去，我们不能放弃。因为像新加坡这样以一种语言（指英语）为主要语言，但另一种语言（指母语）还被大家普遍使用，作为日常用语，同时也是传承文化的语言的社会，少之又少。中国不是，港台也都不是。如果说有两种语言的西方国家，加拿大是一个例子。加拿大主要以英语为工作语，但有一部分的加拿大人讲法语，并且对法语的认同感很强。你听加拿大领袖

讲话，他们经常演讲到某个段落就突然改变语言，用几句法语，然后又再继续讲英语。他们觉得这样很自然，我们却觉得很奇怪，莫名其妙，他突然间在讲什么。但是，英语和法语之间差别不会那么大，英语和华语却是截然不同的两种语言。像我们这样两种语言都维持相当的水平，英语很好，华语不错，我认为是很了不起的。这是我们必须不断努力推进的一项工作。

## 5 那如果是一名年轻的双语专业人士向您表达同样的忧虑，说他希望看到社会未来能够是个有多元语言环境的社会，您会怎么回应他这样的诉求？

我可以说在新加坡，各个母语会永远存在，但要希望人们在掌握母语时，都能够达到同样的水平，并希望在所有场合当中，每一种母语都有充分的发挥空间，这是很难做到的。你看欧盟28个国家，有24种官方语言。他们在处理每一份文件，都必须把内容翻译成24种语言，翻译员变成大忙人了。

这不是很实际的做法，可是他们基于政治考量，不得不这么做。如果我们也这么做，每一份文件、每一个通告、每一则公文必须翻译成四种语言，我想我们的行政效率肯定会降低。这是做不到的工作。

## 6 但这样的焦虑对于讲华语运动来说，是动力还是阻力或压力？

如果态度积极，那应该是动力。如果是持消极、悲观或排斥的态度，那当然变成一种阻力了。我有时担心，我们会因为想要追求百分百的完美语言方案或环境，而排斥不完美，但还是可行且能够具体应对问题的处理方法。例如谷歌翻译，我知道很多华社人士觉得它是不能用的工具，它的翻译是无价值、机械性的字对字翻译。但我认为谷歌翻译有它的价值。因为如果你想要了解一篇网页的内容，或者必须很快地掌握一篇文章的主要含义，把内容翻译成另一种语言，或者翻译成华语，虽然谷歌翻译不完全正确，甚至是文法有些毛病，但它八九成可以过关。我觉得我们可以用谷歌翻译。我

**“大家都能用英语，觉得很自在，但同时，每一个种族也都希望维持自己的传统、自己的文化，希望继续使用自己的语言。不只是华族；印族同胞、马来同胞更是如此。”**



们不可能每一次看到一篇新的网页就找一个专业翻译员替我们翻译，而我自己也没有能力这么做，所以谷歌有它的用处。科技一年一年进步，它可能还远远比不上一个专业的、受过教育的、真正的、活生生的翻译员，但是我可以随时用谷歌，翻译员却有限。

## 7 但是政府还是决定要设立翻译委员会？

我们还是必须提高我们的翻译水平。我们能够运用华社一些有经验，并且有一定翻译能力的人士的帮助。他们可以帮我们这个忙，帮我们做得更好。

## 8 您刚才提到，多元种族、多元语言的环境带来一些挑战。英语是本地各族群之间的共同语言，而政府经常谈到要扩大共同空间，您觉得扩大共同空间跟推进多讲华语的宗旨是否有矛盾或冲突？我们应该怎么取得平衡？

我认为不是矛盾，而是一种张力。一方面，我们要维持一个共同的空间，大家都能用英语，觉得很自在，但同时，每一个种族也都希望维持自己的传统、自己的文化，希望继续使用自己的语言。不只是华族；印族同胞、马来同胞更是如此。问题是必须找恰当的场所、恰当地使用，这样我们能够在两者之间（指扩大共同空间和讲母语）维持平衡。

当然，我们必须做一些妥协。如果我们是纯粹的单语社会，我想在语言方面，只掌握单语的语言能力会比我们掌握多种语言的语言能力来得强。中港台地区，或者是英国或美国，都是单语社会。中国人或台湾人讲华语，香港人讲粤语，语

言的流利和速度，我们绝对比不上。没办法，我们讲英语也不比英国人或美国人来得快，因为他们脑子里只有一种软件，他们能一抽就马上抽出来。我们有两套软件，每一次都要转换运作模式，所以总是比他们慢一点。从这方面来看，这确实是一种妥协。我们必须讲两种语言，两个语言的水平不可能达到百分百。但另一方面，我们能够掌握两种语言，我们对世界的看法，对世界的了解，就比他们丰富。使用两种语言肯定有它的好处。

## 9 您的父亲、建国总理李光耀曾谈过您跟您弟妹进华校的原因。可否简单分享一下您从小学习华语的经历？

我们没有讨论过是要上英校或华校，完全是由父母作决定。他们把我送到当时的南洋女中附小念书，我就接受了，当时也没有面对任何问题。在学校里，从幼稚班、小学一直到中学，一直都觉得很自然。在我很小的时候，大概在四五岁至小学那个阶段，有一段时间，家里有补习老师，帮我和妹妹和弟弟补习华语，但我的华语基本上是在学校学的。我也不觉得自己和其他学生有什么不同的地方。当然，我的家庭是讲英语的，父母亲主要是讲英语的，而当时南中的学生大部分是在讲华语的家庭里出生的，这是我们不同的地方，但这完全不是一个问题。

后来，到了中四、高中，我渐渐觉得虽然在理解方面，我的华文不成问题，但如果跟同学相比，我的表达能力相对来说比较弱，尤其是在写作方面。口语则不成问题。中四的时候还可以，但到了高中，我有一段时间有补习。当时，高中的华文课叫做理解与写作，相等于现在的General Paper。我下





了一些功夫，成绩还不是很理想，差点不及格，但无论如何过关了。

（学习语言）不是愿不愿意的事情，每一个人在掌握语言时，受天分影响。你尽力而为，所能够达到的水平仍会不同。我们必须接受这点。基本上，这是我对语言的看法。我觉得我的语言学习能力也许不错，可是肯定不是最强的。但如果我下了功夫，还是可以达到一个相当好的水平，绝对可以运用的水平。

我从学校毕业以后，讲华语的机会比以前少了。以前在军队中经常用华语，因为早年有很多军官和士兵是华校生，跟他们交流或给他们授课时，经常都用华语。从政之后，我在接见民众或者和居民交流时，也经常用华语。在行政上或工作方面，则大部分是用英语。因此，如果我有一段时间没有练习或者没有运用华语，很明显地会感觉生疏。语言是这样的，你不运用它，就会渐渐失去表达能力。读跟听比较没有问题，但要讲比较难，要写当然更难。

## 10 您平时会尽量频密地去接触华语吗？看中文书吗？

我看中文书的机会太少了。你问这个问题，我就尝试回想我什么时候看过一本中文书，那已经是几年前的事了。当时，龙应台出了一本书，书名是《大江大海》，我从头看到尾，很精彩，也留下深刻的印象。后来，本地作家朱亮亮写了一本《追虹》，我也看了，也很能够认同她的经验。她写说，自己的祖先当年到南洋来，后来她在马来西亚落地生根，还经历了大战时期。她的父母亲经历大战，后来回中国时，她

也跟他们回去中国，之后有幸再到新加坡，在新加坡长大。

这是她的人生经验，她用华文写。她的女儿（人民行动党议员、教育部兼通讯及新闻部政务部长）沈颖现在把书翻译成英语了。我知道沈颖的语言水平，相信她翻译得不错，但我还是要读朱亮亮自己的话。我能够看华文书，这是能够掌握语言很大的好处。

其实，我现在读书的机会比以前少了，觉得有点可惜。一方面是时间问题，但其实主要是因为我总是在思考工作的事情。要看书，你就要把工作的事情放一边，关注书里的内容，从第一章读到最后一章。这度假的时候可以做，但如果不是度假，脑筋不会朝这个方向去想，比较不容易做到。不过，看的华文资料不少。文章，尤其是中国方面的一些报道，或是写关于新加坡的事情，我经常找原文读。一方面是要练习语文，另一方面是想了解他们的遣词用字，他们的口气，以便较准确地了解他们的思想。当然，我也读报，每天都读早报，这是不可或缺的。

## 11 李光耀经常鼓励新加坡家长让孩子从学前教育开始就接触华语，甚至鼓励他们把孩子送到双语幼稚园。您对这个做法有什么看法？作为家长，您是否也敦促自己的孩子，希望自己的孩子的华语水平能够更好？

这是符合科学原则的做法。研究语言的科学家发现，一个孩子学习语言能力最强的阶段是他很年轻的时期，其实是他上小学之前的那几年。所以要孩子能够学好华语，最好能够很

早就开始。不只是发音，整个文法，语言的结构，如果能够两三岁开始学，或者从出世以后就听惯华语，或开始有机会讲华语了，这个对他学习华语是有终生的效益的，并且是牢牢记住，不会忘记。成人学华语，学语言，你不用它，很快就完全忘记，完全失掉它。孩子学语言，是永远在脑子里面的。我看这是符合科学的做法。

不过，以一个家长来说，每个孩子都不相同，有些孩子语言能力强，有些孩子语言能力弱，可能是兄弟姐妹，但不是每一个都相同。我们可以鼓励他，可以去支持他，辅助他，但不能强迫他。如果压力太大，孩子会抗拒，这就弄巧反拙。

## 12 您的孩子在家中会用华语跟您交谈吗？

我有四个孩子。大女儿修齐的语言能力不成问题。她在学校念书时，一直都不需要华文补习，最后也选修高级华文，而且到了高中继续选修华文。这是她自己选择的，她的语言能力很强。

大儿子毅鹏有阿斯伯格综合症（Asperger's Syndrome），自闭症影响了他的语言能力。英文不是问题，但华文就不行。我另两个儿子的语言能力也没那么强。有一个儿子（指二儿子鸿毅）修读华文B，他尽了很大的能力，但我想他可能因为有阅读障碍，学习语言的能力受影响。小儿子（浩毅）华语还过得去。我问他要不要安排补习，他说不要，所以我让他自己学习。因为他年纪比较轻，他学华语时，网上的工具已经比较齐全，在看文章时他可以用网上字典、翻译、发音等工具，省了很多查字典的功夫，所以他愿意继续

修读华文。他的华文成绩我忘记了，但是及格了，而且他一直都对华文保持兴趣。他毕业之后去服役，服役后有一段时间他在等上大学，还趁机去上华文补习，找了一个中国来的朋友帮他补习。那段时间，我们在交谈的时候都尽量用华语。他后来上大学时修读电脑科，我们经常谈关于电脑的课题，要用到很多电脑名词，所以又改回用英语交谈了。他如果有一天有孩子，可能又会找到一个用华语的机会。

## 13 在工作方面，您觉得受过双语教育、懂得华族文化是一种优势吗？

肯定是优势。在这个社会，华族文化的根还是相当强的。要了解新加坡人的思想，通晓他的语言和想法，是很宝贵的，因为如果要人家认同你，接受你，那他们必须觉得你跟他们是一样的。

另一方面，在国际场合中，如果能够和中国或者其他国家与地区的领导人直接用华语交流，不但比较方便，也比较亲切。我们也可以谈一些不容易通过翻译谈的事情。在正式的官方会面中，我们当然还是会用英语，因为这是工作会议。我们是新加坡，我们不是中国，不是台湾，我们想避免任何误会，被以为是中國的一部分。我们不是中国人，我们是新加坡人，而我们的团队里也有非华族。在会议上，其他领导会用华语，我有时就直接听了用英语回答。翻译是单向的：英语翻华语。这是一个比较现实的做法。但是，我们在吃饭时间交流时，就能够直接用华语跟对方讨论天下大小的事情，对方也觉得自在，比较放松，愿意分享他们真正的思想。通过翻译，过程不但慢了下来，更有一点僵化，感觉就很不不同。

## 14 我们对新加坡的新一任领导班子，或是下一任领导班子的语言能力，要有这样的要求吗？

我觉得领导班子里应该要有一些华语掌握得很好的人，但要每一位领导人都精通双语，这要求太高，不一定做得到。

## 15 您说要求太高，是因为现在的大环境吗？

上一代人，也不是每个学生都精通双语，有些人主要讲英语，有些则主要讲华语。当年讲华语的人今天大致上都会不少英语，但当年讲英语的，今天不一定都学好华语。当然，如果他们从政，那他们今天的华语肯定比从政第一天时好，因为他们必须多用。所以，谈下一代领导班子，我看能够维持现在这样的状况就应该是不错了。

## 16 但您刚谈到，在和别的国家的领导谈话时，能够用华语交谈有它的优势。那您是否担心我们会失去这样的优势？

每一个人都有他的优点和弱点。我们不可能希望样样俱全。我们必须接受这一点。

## 17 一些新加坡人，包括年轻人，也呼吁政府保留方言，担心方言流失。您觉得这个担忧是可以理解的吗？对于一些人觉得我们应该重新审视方言政策，您有什么看法？

我可以理解他们的感受，但坦白说，要恢复以前的情况，已不可能，也不应该。今天新加坡人能够讲华语，是因为我们

在讲华语运动方面费了很大的功夫。如果我们保留各种不同的方言，今天新加坡人不只不能够讲华语，我想要维持方言的水平也非常困难。

其实，新加坡的方言环境比华语环境还要复杂。大家基本上都会讲华语，但我们有许许多多的方言，要保留这许许多多的方言，并且还能够用方言交流，这怎么可能呢？不可能的。现在有人说应该保留方言，恢复它。我觉得，如果是有一些人想要唱方言歌曲、唱戏，这都能够做到，他们能用学第三语言的方式去学方言。但是如果要普遍使用方言，如在熟食中心用方言跟摊主交谈，我们要用哪一种方言呢？是买海南鸡饭的时候用海南话，买潮州粥时讲潮州话，买福建面时讲福建话吗？这是一种浪漫的幻想。实际上，在现实社会中，不太可能做得到。我们不应该错误地低估讲华语运动的重要性和成就。多讲华语，少说方言是正确的。

## 18 您刚才说，现在讲方言的年轻人大概只有5%。考虑到这个群体现在变小了，政府现在在回应人们对于重新审视或放宽方言广播的政策的时候，有什么考量？

我想，我们不应该发出错误的讯号。我们主要的方向是，要维持和加强讲华语的环境。这个是最重要的。不要以为我们在维持讲华语的环境的同时，可以再制造一个讲福建话、讲潮州话、讲琼州话、讲客家话的环境。这不行。其实，新加坡人的福建话、潮州话，或者海南话，跟中国福建、广东、海南省人所讲的方言，已经大不相同了。新加坡的方言现在掺杂马来语和英语，掺杂了我们新加坡社会各种各样新加坡独特的语言，所用的词句和文法都不是原来的方言。方言在

中国还是很正统。你听邓丽君唱歌就知道了，她的闽南话和我们的福建话不同。

## 19 您认为中国的崛起对我们学习华语有帮助。一些新加坡人现在也会以这务实的角度看待华语，认为学习华语是重要的。但除了务实的考量，华语还有其它方面的魅力吗？

务实的考量有它的价值。如果中国今天是个落后的国家，我们可以谈华语的文化价值，可以谈悠久的历史 and 哲学，但如果要鼓励学生学华语，肯定会比较困难。如果现在的学生因为认为学华语对将来到中国工作有用，因此有自然的动力要学好华语，那就用这个动机去顺水推舟吧。他学了华语之后会自然而然吸收到许多跟华族文化有关的价值观、文化知识和常识。这是我们希望看到的成果，我们也会自然而然得到收获。例如说梵文，在印度那是重要的文化传承，但印度虽然有梵文专家，人数却很少，学的人数很少，不是每个人都有时间去学。

## 20 中国的崛起提供了我们学习华语的契机。根据您的观察，它达到了多大的效果？

效果已经清楚了。如果没有中国崛起，如果中国不是今天的中国，我们现在在学校里要让学生和家长接受双语政策，肯定比较难。基本上，今天所有家长都接受学习华语是有价值的。他们也许对教学方法或课程内容有意见，不过他们基本上都接受，孩子应该学华语。没有人说，这是浪费时间的事情。大家都知道，你如果不学华语，以后肯定后悔。

## 21 总理在《联合早报》举办的“国是论坛”上提到，很多西方人也开始学华语，而且学得很好。这样的情况发展下去，新加坡在双语优势方面会不会面对一些竞争？

会有竞争，但我们跟其他国家不同的是，我们整个社会都维持双语能力。在西方，不是整个社会都在学华语，而是少数对华语有兴趣的人去学，虽然这少数人往往学得非常好。但以整个社会来说，他们能够讲华语的人的比例永远都不会很多。

## 22 总理，对于新加坡人学习华文华语，您有什么期待和愿望？我们未来应如何继续鼓励新加坡人讲华语？

我希望我们能够随着科技和社会的改变，继续调整华语的教学法和运用方式，让华语能够一直是一个活的语言，而不是一个死的语言。我们要应用华语，学了之后要能读，要能讲、能听、能享受。这很重要。我们要能够在严肃的场合用



语文教学应与时俱进，应用新的科技和工具提升学生学习语文的兴趣。图为华民小学的学生利用平板电脑，兴致勃勃地认识生字和字义的发音。





2013年11月22日，李显龙总理受邀担任《联合早报》“国是论坛”的主宾，总理在会上与出席者进行交流，左为对话会主持人，《联合早报》总编辑吴新迪。

华语，在工作场合中例如在中国或者与在新加坡的中国商人讨论事情时用华语，但也要能阅读文章、看微博，或唱流行歌曲。

我们必须与时俱进，适应新环境。我们教华语时，应该用新的科技和新的工具。今天网上什么都有，你用鼠标点击一个词句，就能马上知道它的发音，或查翻译。需要任何资料，可以找到文章，今古《二十四史》也能找到，只要去查，有兴趣读，就能马上得到。你甚至不需要去书局买书或订书，就能马上获得资料。我们应该运用科技，我们在学语言的时候也可以运用科技。

另外，我们也要了解语言学的新突破，了解学生是怎样学语言的，是从哪里学起的。他们是先学听和学讲，然后才学读和写。那应该怎么样学听，怎么样学讲？需要拼字吗？需要

默写吗？需要听写吗？这些都是我们传统的学习方法，也是中国几千年来做法，但今天我们应该有更好的做法，我们必须去尝试。我们不能够抗拒它。我们必须不断探索，因为科技每天都在进步。要学华语的人都面对同样的困难，要从头学起。有人说，你只要找到某某秘诀，你就能在十分钟内学到十个汉字，但这没那么简单。

**23** 我感觉总理对国人的华语能力还是蛮乐观的。但社会上还是有人不时对华语水平、母语水平日益低落趋势表达担忧，也有人担心社会出现英语单语化的现象。您怎么看待这样的担忧和焦虑？

我能够了解这群人的焦虑和出发点。他们很多都是受华文教育的华社领导人。对他们来说，新加坡今天的华文华语水平跟当年的华文华语水平有很大的不同。这是无可否认的，但是不是华语水平日渐低落，我们会走向世界末日？我看不会。我们在可做的范围内能实际做到的，大概能达到95%的效果。当然，我们还可以改进，但我们其实必须承认，（为达到这个成果）我们已经尽了相当大的努力了。

如果我们希望（自己掌握华语的能力能让我们）从一个文人的角度出发，去写文章、作诗、填词，能够畅所欲言，样样事情都能用华语表达，并且希望社会许多事情都通过华语去传达，这是很难做到的。我们想要做得更多，但我们也知道有某个限制、某个限度。这是一个多元种族的社会，我们不能成为一个以华语为主要语言的社会，我们不得不维持新加坡是一个以英语为工作语言的社会大环境。在这样一个大环境下，（对于母语）我们能够做到的，我们会尽力去做。





一项与时俱进的全国运动



# 讲华语运动推行初期：1979年-1981年

**从**最早的“多讲华语，少讲方言”、到后来的“能用华语是福气，别失去”、之后还有“华语Cool”，以及近年推出的“华文？谁怕谁！”等等……从这些标语可以看出，已迈入第35个年头的讲华语运动，在过去这些年来如何随着大环境的改变，而调整宣导的对象和目标。

追溯讲华语运动的起源，政府当时发动这项运动的目标主要有两个：一，让讲不同方言的华人拥有共同的沟通语言；二，鼓励华族新加坡人掌握母语以传承华族文化。

当年，新加坡华人的生活用语主要还是以方言为主。当时一项民间主要沟通语言的调查显示，无论是巴士售票员与乘客或是小贩摊主与顾客之间，有超过八成民众主要用方言对话，而当中福建话的使用率最高。

在那个时候，政府已在学校实行以英语为第一语文、华语为第二语文的双语教育政策。大部分学生除了在修读华文这一个科目时使用华语之外，教师在教导其他科目时几乎都是用英语授课。

建国总理李光耀的顾虑是：新加坡华人若继续在日常生活中使用方言，学生可能看不到学习华语的必要性，而只会把华文华语视为一项为应考而学习的科目，这将对政府实行的双语教育政策造成干扰。

他认为，要是新加坡华人只能够掌握英语以及市集里使用的方言，这将导致华族传统文化和价值观无法有效获得传承，因为方言的书写形式是新加坡人所无法理解的。

为了给年轻一代创造一个有利于讲华语的环境，政府在1979年9月7日推展了讲华语运动。

## 运动获得华社热烈支持

根据当时的报章报道，这项向新加坡华人推广华语的计划获得华社热烈的支持。

在筹划讲华语运动初期，报章和社团组织不单主办多场座谈会，讨论推广华语的目的和意义，这些团体还联合组成全国推广华语工作委员会，以便有计划地在民间推广华语。

各政府部门也采取相应措施，积极配合这项运动。

时任公务员首长的沈基文在给各政府部门常任秘书的通函中发出指示，要求所有负责与公众接洽的华族公务员都必须说华语，并且在办公时间停止用方言交谈，同时还要佩戴“我会讲华语”的牌子。

为帮助公务员掌握华语，当时的文化部和教育部也跟南洋大学华语研究中心合作，根据各个政府部门的需求，为公务员





在维多利亚剧院举行的第三届推广华语运动开幕仪式上，表演者以传统舞蹈鼓励人们讲华语。

提供学习华语的教材。然而，推广讲华语运动的过程并非一帆风顺。当年受委担任推广华语运动委员会首任主席的文化部政务次长欧进福博士指出，当时民间就有三把反对这项运动的声音。

第一把反对声音来自那些习惯讲方言的年长者，他们十分抗拒学习新的语言；第二把反对声音来自受英文教育的华人，由于在工作或生活上无需使用华语，因此他们觉得没有必要学习这种在他们看来属于低层次的语言；第三把反对声音则来自非华族新加坡人，他们担心这项运动的成功将导致沙文主义抬头，一些少数种族国人甚至还认为他们将来会被逼学华语。

## 向友族同胞强调宣导对象是华人

为安抚这些非华族国人的不安情绪，多名部长和国会议员以及文化部纷纷出面强调，讲华语运动的宣导对象是华人。

另外，多份本地报章也在1980年初，相继刊登了多名新一代政治领导人学习华语的经验，借此鼓励民众积极学好华语。当时出面畅谈学习华文华语历程的政治人物就包括当时的贸工部长吴作栋（现任荣誉资政）、教育部高级政务部长陈庆炎博士（现任总统），以及全国职总秘书长林子安等。

在推行讲华语运动初期，政府采取了多项措施，以便为国人营造有利于讲华语的环境，其中引起较大争议的要数政府逐步取消电台和电视台方言节目的决定。

电视台先是于在1978年7月停止播放方言广告，随后在1979年10月底推出第一部以华语配音的香港连续剧《倚天屠龙记》。到了1981年，电视台便全面取消了方言电视节目。

电视台给那时极受欢迎的香港连续剧配上华语配音的初期，引起观众强烈反弹，他们纷纷投书中英文报章、拨电给电台表达他们的不满，他们认为华语配音使得连续剧原味尽失，因为配音无法捕捉到粤语对白中原有的幽默和急智。

欧进福博士对这项措施在民间引起的反应记忆犹新：“人们批评政府这样做会削弱剧集的娱乐性，有些甚至说这等同于剥夺老一辈人的娱乐。”

除了电视台，电台也从1983年1月1日起全面停播方言节目，在那个年代备受年长者喜爱的李大傻讲古节目也从此走进了历史。

尽管这些措施不受欢迎，引起一些民众不满，但是政府的立场并没因此而动摇。

欧进福博士在2000年接受《华人·华语·华文》特刊访问时指出：“广播和电视是深入家庭的传播渠道，要改变一个家庭的语言习惯，最有效的方法就是通过电台广播和电视，尤其是利用一些受欢迎的节目去影响他们。回首看来，我敢说，我们20年前的决定是正确的，要不然讲华语运动不可能深入到家庭里面去。”



讲华语运动推行初期可见到摊贩们在小贩中心穿着宣传T恤。





时任劳工兼交通部长王鼎昌及社区领袖在大巴窑 7 巷的湿巴刹分发讲华语运动的宣传单和贴纸。

**“广播和电视是深入家庭的传播渠道，要改变一个家庭的语言习惯，最有效的方法就是通过电台广播和电视，尤其是利用一些受欢迎的节目去影响他们。回首看来，我敢说，我们20年前的决定是正确的，要不然讲华语运动不可能深入到家庭里面去。”——欧进福博士**



## 讲华语运动首任主席：欧进福博士

欧进福博士是新加坡大学经济系毕业生，当年毕业后曾到过美国深造，回国后便以英语在国大授课，并从事经济课题方面的研究。

尽管他的专业背景跟中文或汉学没有直接的关系，但是他在从政期间却经常在国会内外，针对华文华语这个课题提出看法。

这名精通双语的麟记区国会议员指出：“再三提出华文华语这个令多少人‘逆耳’的课题，并不是（因为）我不识时务，而是觉得应该有多一些人挺身而出，来反映关心华文教育人士的心声，也希望能因此加强华族学生及家长对自己语文的重视。更重要的是，我希望能抛砖引玉，激发知识份子和民间团体关注今后华文华语发展的趋势。”

出于对华文华语的关心，欧进福博士在1979年接下推广华语运动委员会主席的职务，成为这项运动的第一任掌舵者。当时，他是文化部政务次长。

欧进福博士虽然在1981年卸下了推广华语运动委员会主席的

职务，但是他却仍旧十分关心推广华文华语的工作。在1988年，他还倡议将讲华语运动扩大成文化月，让新加坡华人认识自己的文化传统。

欧进福博士在从政期间担任过多项政治职务，曾任外交部政务部长以及丹戎巴葛社区发展理事会市长。现年70岁的他是在2001年退出政坛。



## 推广华语运动初显绩效：1982年-1993年

**建**国总理李光耀在1979年发起推广华语运动时，就给这项运动设定了长远目标：即在五年内，让所有新加坡华族学生放弃方言，改用华语，以及在十年内，让华语取代方言成为人们在咖啡店、小贩中心、商场等基层场所内使用的语言。

为了达到这个目标，常年举行的推广华语运动每年都以不同场所和群体为宣传重点：1982年主要鼓励人们在工作场所多讲华语、1983年把重点转向小贩中心和巴刹、1984年则将宣传对象锁定华族家长，之后还相继对交通工友、白领工作人士展开宣导工作。

代表工人的全国职工总会积极响应政府号召，成立了一个推广华语工作委员会，分阶段在工人群众中推广华语，而联络网遍布所有社区的人民协会也踊跃地在基层中展开推广华语的活动。

作为市井民众用餐和购物的地点，巴刹和小贩中心是最流行讲方言的场所，可以说是方言的堡垒。

各区国会议员和基层领袖积极走访巴刹展开宣传，争取摊贩和民众对讲华语运动的支持。当时就有一些摊贩反映，由于人们都已习惯使用菜类和食品的方言名称，因此他们一时间很难改口讲华语。

当局认真看待这些反馈，为了鼓励摊贩和顾客使用华语，相关政府部门甚至还展开规范这些食品名称的工作，并在1987年出版了常见食品简编手册。

推广华语委员会与社区团体合作，在民间推广华语的其他做法还包括：在民众联络所开办华语班、利用大众传播媒介刊登华语课程内容、录制并售卖华语课程卡带、由社团为学生主办华语讲故事、问答和朗读比赛等。

推广华语委员会还在电信局的协助下，播放电话华语课程来教授华语。这项“打电话，学华语”的服务是在1983年推出，当时公众只要拨打特定的电话号码，就能听到两三分钟的华语对白，练习说华语。

推广华语运动开展初期，当局也经常电视上和电台中播放推广华语运动的宣传短片和广告歌，鼓励人们多讲华语。那些出生于上世纪七八十年代的国人，肯定对那首由台湾天后、新加坡媳妇黄莺莺主唱的《大家说华语》的广告歌印象深刻。

本地电视台也积极配合政府政策，协力创造一个有利于使用华语的环境。除了取消播映方言节目、给入口方言节目加上华语配音，还加紧制作本地华语电视剧，给华语电视观众提供更多选择。





时任总理吴作栋于1993年推广华语运动开幕仪式上致词时说：“为了制造有利于学习华语的环境，新加坡人之间应该多用华语交谈。（高层次的）华语应该在社会里广泛使用，它的地位才能提高。”



在1982年，新加坡广播电视台（现称新传媒）制作的华语电视剧，每星期还不到一小时，后来1989年，它每星期播映的华语电视剧的时间已超过10小时，当中的一些本土剧如《铁警雄风》、《牛车水人家》吸引了不少观众追看，这些连续剧的收视率，甚至突破了香港粤语连续剧《网中人》和《变色龙》在本地创下的收视纪录。

政府在推广华语运动推行的首十年后展开调查，验收这项全国性运动所取得的成绩。从当时公布的调查结果来看，在鼓励人们少说方言、多讲华语方面，这项运动已初显绩效。

根据当局所提供的小一新生登记资料，在家中主要讲华语的华族小一新生已从1980年的26%，增加到1989年的69%；来自讲方言为主家庭的小一新生比例，也从64%减少到7%。由此可见，当时有越来越多家长响应政府推广华语运动的号召，用华语跟孩子沟通。

在巴刹和小贩中心内，小贩与顾客用华语交谈的现象也已日趋普遍。当时的环境发展部（现称环境局）的调查显示，在这些场所使用华语者，从1979年的1.2%增加到1989年的22%。

除了成功推动原本讲方言的国人改用华语，政府采用简体字取代繁体字、普及汉语拼音的决定，也在一定程度上，帮助那些不会讲华语的新加坡华人，克服学讲华语的障碍。

## 汉语拼音降低了学习华语门槛

对于许多来自讲英语家庭背景的新加坡华人来说，汉语拼音的使用为他们降低了学习华语的门槛，因为他们可以先利用英文字母拼成的注音，来学习华文生词。

教育部在1981年1月1日起，推行华族学生姓名汉语拼音化的措施，让家长在孩子的出生证书上填写汉语拼音名字；另



1986年推广华语的讯息由公共巴士带到全国各个的角落。



上世纪80年代起，政府采用简体字取代繁体字，也全面展开汉语拼音教学，为学习华语降低门槛。

**政府在推广华语运动推行的首十年后展开调查，验收这项全国性运动所取得的成绩。从当时公布的调查结果来看，在鼓励人们少说方言、多讲华语方面，这项运动已初显绩效。**



外，公司与商行注册局也鼓励公司在进行注册时，采用汉语拼音名称。

这项措施当时引起了一些争议。这是因为老一辈国人的姓氏大多是用方言来拼写成英文语音，可是当他们的孩子的名字用汉语拼音拼写后，便出现父子不同姓的情况，这令一些家长无法接受。政府后来采取了折中方案，让孩子把汉语拼音名字括弧起来，附在方言拼写的姓名之后。

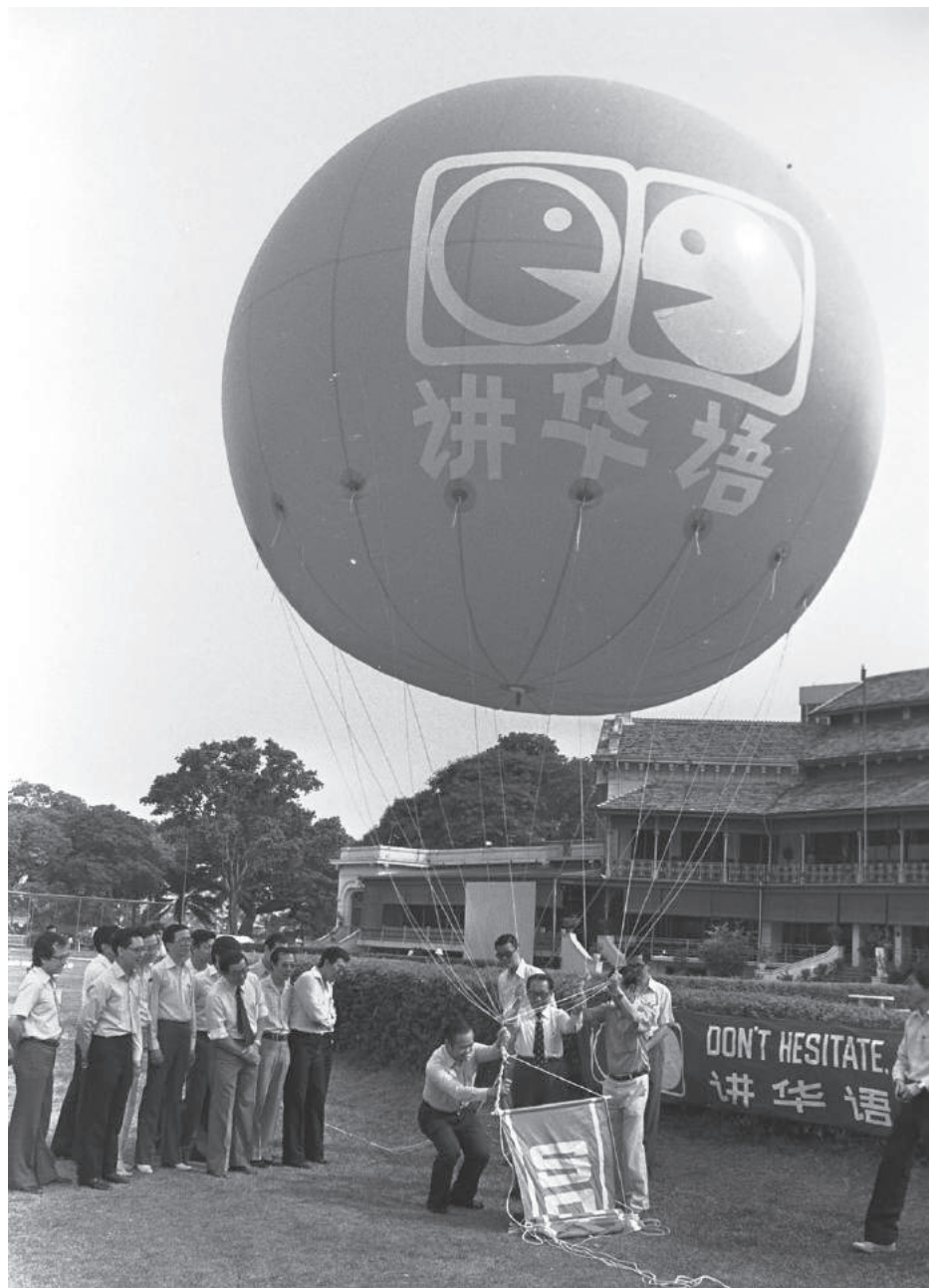
## 华语的经济价值

这些年来，推广华语运动虽然遇上不少阻力，但也得来一些助力。最大的外在助力当属中国80年代中改革开放、经济蓬勃发展的趋势。考虑到日后要跟这个崛起中的大国打交道，掌握好华语是先决条件，这给务实的新加坡人提供了学习文华语的推动力。

当时任第二副总理的王鼎昌在为1985年的讲华语运动主持开幕仪式时，就首次谈到华语在文化价值以外的经济价值，他认为随着中国进一步发展，华语的经济价值将会有所提升。

在1988年，时任贸工部长兼国防部部长的李显龙，也在为该年的讲华语运动主持开幕仪式时谈到这一点。

在这之后，“中国因素”便成了许多新加坡人学华语的其中一个重要考量。



1982年，推广华语委员会主席何家良（半蹲者）在政府大厦广场上释放了一个直径6.1米，挂有“讲华语”标语的氦气球，提醒人们说讲华语，少说方言。



## 任期最久的主席：何家良

政坛人物兼本地著名画家何家良是讲华语运动的第二任主席，也是这项运动自1979年推行以来，任期最久的一名主席。

他是在1981年从欧进福博士手中接过讲华语运动的领导棒子，担任主席长达11年。在这段期间，他也担任过多项政治职务，曾任高级政务次长。

何家良在2000年接受《华人·华语·华文》特刊访问时指出，他认为讲华语运动能顺利推行，主要因为他们与基层领袖有紧密合作关系。

他当时坦承：“开始时虽然碰到一些困难和阻碍，但是基层领袖都非常合作。我们先晓以大义，告诉他们是为了学生学习的方便，以及华族之间能够沟通。他们都非常了解，了解了也都支持。所以每年运动一展开，他们就自动自发沿户访问，分发传单，使讲华语运动形成一个全国性的运动。”

何家良在1997退出政坛后，曾出任南洋艺术学院院长，不过现年76岁的他已在多年前卸下院长的职务。



## 重要转折点：1994年-1996年

**讲** 华语运动在推行了15年后，在1994年进入一个重要的转折点。

当时，讲华语运动展开了一次彻底的革新：无论是新委任委员会成员的背景、这项运动接下来要锁定的宣导对象、宣传策略以及要主办的活动等各方面都跟历届迥然不同。

最引人注目的改变当属委员会主席的人选。当时华昌集团主席何光平受委接手领导讲华语运动，成为出任这项职务的首个英校生。

那一届委员会的名单也一反传统出现了多名来自英文源流背景的委员，打破了过去委员会成员以华校生为主力的惯例。

新加入的委员会成员包括前官委议员蔡哲洲、大华银行集团主席私人助理冯清莲，以及当时任新加坡电影协会主席、现为新加坡媒体发展管理局助理营运局长的陈继贤。

当时之所以作出这一系列改变，主要是政府意识到有必要把讲华语运动的对象，转向受英文教育的新加坡华人。

随着本地社会日益受到西方流行文化的影响，加上大多数受英文教育的华人都以英语作为工作和社交语言，这导致年轻一代华人的华文水平普遍下降。令人感到担忧的是，若他们

荒废以华文华语沟通的能力，这将导致优良的华族文化传统无法获得有效传承。

在1991年，当时担任总理的吴作栋就针对新加坡华人逐渐趋向讲英语的现象，公开表达了他的担忧。他当时说：“人们普遍使用英语，会不会使到我们失去一些传统文化和道德价值观？”

除此以外，一些受英文教育者对华语所采取的轻视态度也令人担忧，当时就有一些学者和华社领袖呼吁国人合力提高华语的社会地位，否则华语将继续被这些新加坡华人视为一种“阶级低”、“无用”的语言。

何光平清楚意识到这个群体的存在。

他后来在卸下讲华语运动主席职务多年后接受媒体访问时透露：“有许多年纪较大的受英文教育者根本对华语、华族文化没有兴趣，他们觉得这些都跟他们没有任何关系。也就因为他们的无知和成见，他们根本不知道自己错失了什么。新加坡存在很多这样的人，可悲的是，他们都是身居高职的人物。”

何光平在1994年至1996年出任讲华语运动主席期间作出了不少改变，其中最明显的转变是让讲华语运动一改过去那



巡回大使许通美教授曾在1994年9月6日举行的第16届讲华语运动开幕礼上与时任新加坡国际基金会长陈庆珠教授表演一段华语相声，以鼓励受英文教育的新加坡人多讲华语。时任副总理李显龙（现任总理）表演结束后上前道贺。



种说教式的推广方式，给这项运动换上轻松和幽默的宣传风格。

他于2000年接受《华人·华语·华文》的访问时，解释他为何采取这样的宣传方针：“对于那些非常现代和来自专业领域的英文源流新加坡人，你不能用沉重和说教的方式来推动他们讲华语。相反的，我们应该以委婉轻松的手法来推广讲华语的信息，例如通过高格调的宣传广告，而这当中，‘趣味’的元素是不可少的。”

何光平也认为：“不能把（学习华语的）门槛定得太高，以免吓走讲华语运动的对象。我们应该吸引他们接触中华文化，通过易于理解的方式，如欣赏华语电视节目和影片，来让他们从中学习华语。”

于是在1994年的讲华语运动，他们与本地影院合作主办了一场华语电影节，引进多部名导制作的电影，如张艺谋的《菊豆》、徐克的《新英雄本色》等。

为了给年轻一代提供更多接触华语影片的机会，他们也说服本地影院引进华语版的华特迪斯尼动画片《狮子王》（The Lion King），而且还率先在新加坡举行首映。

其他创新尝试包括：设计了新颖和幽默的广告在电视、报章和杂志中宣传讲华语运动，以便让来自英文教育背景者也能接触华文流行文化，以及邀请出身英文背景的社会名人出面鼓励人们多讲华语。





“不能把（学习华语的）门槛定得太高，以免吓走讲华语运动的对象。我们应该吸引他们接触中华文化，通过易于理解的方式，如欣赏华语电视节目和影片，来让他们从中学习华语。”——何光平

“华语多讲流利”是讲华语运动1994-1995年的标语。





1994年讲华语运动的对象转为受英语教育的新加坡人。当时的推广华语委员会主席何光平（中），以及四个小组委员会主席章能容（左起）、冯清莲、陈振忠副教授和黄国立，希望习惯讲英语的新加坡华人，能跟他们一样多讲华语。

令人印象深刻的是，在1994年讲华语运动的开幕礼上，英校出身的新加坡巡回大使许通美教授和新加坡驻美国前大使陈庆珠教授双双上台，为观众表演一段华语相声。

其他为讲华语运动“献声”的社会名人还包括酒店业女强人蔡琼莹和泳坛宿将洪秉祥，他们分别在讲华语运动的广告中，幽默地秀出他们苦练出来的华语。

在1995年的讲华语运动中，他们还邀请到建国总理李光耀的次子、当时担任新电信总裁的李显扬，在备受欢迎的英语环境剧《同在一屋檐下》中客串演出，讲了一段华语对白。

何光平解释，找这些出身英文背景的名人为讲华语运动“代言”，目的是为了鼓励其他受英文教育者多讲华语，“即使讲得不流利，能开口说华语就是一个好的开始”。





## 首个英校出身的主席：何光平

华昌集团总裁何光平是讲华语运动自1979年发起以来，首位来自私人机构，而且又是英校出身的主席。

他自小在泰国生活，在国际学校念书，因此惯用英语沟通。他父亲是新加坡企业家何日华，母亲是知名双语作家李廉凤，双亲都精通中英双语，不过何光平自小便十分抗拒学华文。

后来，他父亲在他16岁那年把他送到台湾东海大学读了一年的华文，这段经历开启了他对中华文化的认识。

他在一篇于1994年9月刊登在《海峡时报》的专访中，谈到他当初接下讲华语运动领导棒子的决定时指出：“我觉得有必要改变现状。接受这项任务主要有两个原因：一，我觉得自己可以与大家分享我的经验；二，我开始有兴趣接下一些文化相关的任务。”

他在1995年10月的一篇访问中，谈到领导这项运动的感想时透露：“最大的收获是有机会接触到来自社会各阶层的人。”

## 加强对年轻一代的吸引力：1997年-2006年

**随**着讲华语运动迈入第20个年头，要如何确保这项运动继续维持活力、对年轻一代保有吸引力，这是讲华语运动委员会所面对的最大挑战。

在这段期间，推广华语理事会主办的活动就包括新谣音乐会、讲故事比赛、演唱会，以及安排了新传媒艺人参与的电视游戏节目。

其中，2003年和2004年的讲华语运动就以创造多个“第一次”，而令人留下深刻印象。

2003年，推广华语理事会一改传统，选择到丹戎巴葛一家热闹的夜店MOX Bar为该年的讲华语运动举办开幕仪式。这是讲华语运动首次在这种被许多人视为“非传统”的场所举办开幕仪式，主办方的目的是希望借此向人们传达“讲华语也可以很酷、很时髦”的信息。

时任新闻、通讯及艺术部部长的李文献医生是这场开幕仪式的主宾。他当时在致词时指出：“能够说华语已成为新加坡华人必备的语言工具。掌握好华语，不单能改善新加坡华人之间的沟通、提升人们对华族艺术、文化以及历史的鉴赏能力，也能为你在不断蓬勃发展的中国，开启更多商机。掌握好华语是有很大的经济和社交价值，因此新加坡华人应该尽力学好华语，在日常生活在多使用华语，才

不至于丧失讲华语的能力。”

在2003年的讲华语运动中，电视观众也破天荒第一次看到亚洲新闻台的英语新闻主播郝慧冰（Melissa Hyak），在三个新闻时段中以中英双语播报新闻。

这是该台为配合2003年讲华语运动开幕仪式而做的一次尝试。考虑到这个区域新闻台主要面向讲英语专业人士，推广华语理事会希望透过这样的尝试，鼓励那些已习惯用英语交谈的年轻专业人士多用华语。

2004年的讲华语运动则是因为第一次推出双语并用的“华语Cool”（Huayu Cool）标语，而令人留下印象。当时，推广华语理事会特地邀请了知名多元艺术家陈瑞献为这个标语题字，并设计了以红花衬托标题字样的宣传海报。

不过这个双语标语推出时引起不少议论：有些人认为这个标语很时髦、能引起年轻人共鸣，不过却也有些人认为这会鼓励年轻人使用混杂语言，不利推广标准华语。

黄昭虎教授在接受本刊访问时表示，他当时并没有因为这个标语引起的争议而感到气馁。

“我们的目的纯粹是为了给这项运动换上活泼又摩登的形





时任副总理李显龙于1997年讲华语运动开幕仪式上致词时以《海峡时报》和《联合早报》为例，指出这两份报刊为读者提供两种不同的世界观。拥有双语能力的读者能因此以不同观点理解世界课题。



象。我倒觉得，这个标语能引起那些批评者议论，显示它已成功达到宣传效果。”

为了改变人们认为讲华语老土又过时的印象，他上任后便展开重新包装这项运动的工作，除了通过互联网和流行文化推广华语，同时也给讲华语运动换上更现代化的标志设计，尝试为这项已推展了十多年的运动注入活力。

虽然讲华语运动早在1995年就已开辟专属网站，但是当时该网站主要只是提供学习华语的资源，如基本商用词汇、成语和华语影片等。有鉴于本地互联网渗透率不断提高，讲华语运动在1997年大举上网推广华语。

换上新装的讲华语运动网站加入了更多有趣的互动元素，如动画寓言故事、中文故事接力赛等。该网站还在1998年获得国家电脑局颁发的新加坡综合网非商业组第一奖。

1998年讲华语运动开幕仪式上，时任新闻及艺术部长兼贸工部第二部长的杨荣文也为当时新推出的“华综网”主持启用仪式。

类似互联网搜索网站的“华综网”，当时是新加坡首个华文资讯交流综合网，除了是搜索服务的指南，也是了解新加坡本土资讯，阅读本地文学创作，以及协助孩子学习华文的电子空间。

到了2002年，为了迎合年轻人的喜好，讲华语运动还与私人企业界合作，推出策略网上游戏“三国演义”。

事实上，推广华语理事会一直致力于帮助那些有兴趣学好华语的人，并提供相关资源。

1998年讲华语运动主办的系列活动中，就加入了一场“华语

**“能够说华语已成为新加坡华人必备的语言工具。掌握好华语，不单能改善新加坡华人之间的沟通、提升人们对华族艺术、文化以及历史的鉴赏能力，也能为你在不断蓬勃发展的中国，开启更多商机。”——李文献医生**





本地艺人郭淑贤在1998年讲华语运动推展20周年的开幕仪式上献唱。





推广华语理事会找来了朝气蓬勃的本地年轻歌手蔡淳佳和饶舌组合臭皮匠担任2004年讲华语运动“华语Cool”的大使，为讲华语运动注入活力。以通过流行文化鼓励不讲华语的人，走进华文华语的世界，感受这个时髦语言的魅力。

之窗”展销会，供业者展销各种华文华语相关的书籍、教育光碟、电脑软件和华语课程。

那时担任讲华语运动委员会主席的黄昭虎教授当时受访时指出：“这是为了把讲华语运动转向为国人提供（学习华语）的实际支援。”

配合推广华语理事会的努力，英文报章《海峡时报》也从2004年5月开始，在其副刊版位开辟了一个名为Cool Speak

的双语专栏，以中英双语向英文读者介绍一些可在近期的时事新闻或流行歌曲中看到的热门华语字句，同时向读者解释这些字句的用法。

这个每星期见报一次的专栏当时非常受英文读者欢迎，连续刊载了四年，《海峡时报》之后还把专栏内容结集成书，印制成精美的口袋词典出售给公众。

随着讲华语运动步入第20个年头，政府不再只是希望通过这





1998年讲华语运动主办一系列活动如“华语之窗”展销会、论坛及讲座。图为时任运动主席黄昭虎教授为来宾分享活动细节。

项运动鼓励人们开口讲华语，它也开始关注如何鼓励国人以流利且准确的华语对话，同时进一步把焦点扩大到提升国人读写华文的能力。

1999年，当时担任总理的吴作栋就对国人在华语中掺杂其他语言的习惯表示担忧。他当时呼吁国人别讲掺杂了方言和英语单词的“杂菜式”华语。

这也是为何讲华语运动自2001年起，便把重点放在鼓励人们

说正确的华语，而在这之后为讲华语运动主持开幕仪式的部长，也都一再强调华文对新加坡华人的重要文化意义。

当时担任新闻及艺术部长的李玉全在为2001年的讲华语运动主持开幕时指出：“我们共同的工作语言是英语，不过只有我们的母语才能让我们认识到自己的根以及民族身份……掌握华语将能够让我们吸收华文学原著的精华，让我们不至于因阅读翻译版本而无法感受原著的精髓，这将有助我们对自身的文化遗产和价值观有更深入的认识。”

事实上，在1997年，当时担任总理的吴作栋就已在国庆群众大会上谈到培养新一代华文精英，来替代老一代南大生的重要性。

在1998年，时任新闻及艺术部长兼贸工部第二部长的杨荣文也强调了鼓励国人掌握中华文化与语言，以提高华族自我意识的重要性。他当时甚至提出了把华语提升为华人社会的高层语言（high language），让华语与英语并驾齐驱的目标。

在他看来，华族的自我意识可化为内在力量，可使人们经得起灾难、政治动荡与战乱的考验。他认为：“如果我们只使用英语，荒废了母语，使它沦为第二语文，我们的内在力量就会被削弱，我们也将成为无根的浮萍。”

尽管政治领导人一再向国人强调掌握华文华语的重要性，但是要鼓励年轻一代新加坡华人掌握好华语、提升他们的华文水平并不容易。

在1997年至2006年领导讲华语运动的黄昭虎教授也认为，一些新加坡人对华语的偏见对讲华语运动构成一定阻力。

黄昭虎教授指出，有些家长太自满了，认定华语难学又不重要，甚至还认为孩子要是华文考不好顶多把他们送出国留学，这种不重视华文的态度，直接影响了孩子学习华语的兴趣。

“一些家长会告诉孩子：不用担心，要是他们华文不及格就把他们送到澳大利亚留学，这是错误的……要是你给孩

子提供这条比较容易走的后路，他们自然就没有学好华语的动力。”

随着在家中讲英语的家庭不断增加，这使得提升国人华语水平的任务更加艰巨。调查显示，在家中讲英语的家庭，从1990年的26%上升到1999年的42%，与此同时，在家中讲华语的家庭则已从1989年的70%下跌到1999年的54%。

首任讲华语运动委员会主席欧进福博士早在1989年10月接受《海峡时报》访问时，就已对国人中文读写能力不断下滑的趋势表示担忧。

他当时指出：“一个有生命力的语言，不可以只存在于口语的形式，它也必须用在文字的形式，例如阅读报纸……如果我们的学生在学校里学华文学了10年后，竟然没有能力读报，那肯定出了什么问题。”

事实上，年轻新加坡华人对华文书报的兴趣确实有减低的趋势。

在1999年，时任教育部长的张志贤引述《联合早报》读者调查数据指出，不满30岁早报读者的比例不断下滑，从1989年的35%，跌至1999年的20%。他对这个现象表示担忧，并指出如果年轻人不阅读华文报章，要向他们灌输传统价值观就更困难了。

考虑到年轻一代新加坡华人对学习华文兴趣大不如前，用语



程度相对低落，若不设法着手应对，可能会导致一些在学习华文面对困难的学生因噎废食，以致华族文化和传统价值观无以为继，政府当时除了继续大力推动讲华语运动，也在1999年对母语教育政策进行了检讨，改革华文教学。

这项改革的目的除了是要照顾那些在学习华文面对困难的学生，同时也要让更多学生修读高级华文，以确保语文能力和家庭背景不同的学生，都能透过专为他们特别设计的教学法，去掌握各自能力所能达到的最高华语水平。

当时引起最大争议的是2001年开始供学生选修、强调沟通技巧多过书写能力的华文B课程。

这项课程主要是为那些学习华文时面对困难的学生而设，教育部通过降低学习华文的门槛，避免他们因被强逼学习华文，而对华族文化产生厌恶感。

不过也有不少人担心，教育部为学生提供这个“软选择”，可能促成学生的华文程度和学习意愿进一步下降。



教育部放宽母语教学政策后，允许更多学习华文有困难的学生，选修华文B课程，避免他们因被强逼学华文，而对华族文化产生厌恶感。



结果，华文B课程在一片争议声中推行。

当时担任总理的吴作栋在2004年的一次演讲中维护了政府当时推出华文B课程的决定。

他强调：“课程不是要降低华文水准，而是为了挽救华文。如果没有华文B，长期来看，普通华文的水准可能必须降低以照顾学习进度较慢的学生。”

有趣的是，在这段期间，原本已被禁的方言，又在一些传播媒介上重现。政府在90年代末期放宽了条例，允许一些方言节目透过需付费的有线电视播出。

### 《钱不够用》触动一些人敏感神经

不过在1998年，本地知名导演梁智强制作的电影《钱不够用》里头出现80%方言对白的情况，却触动了一些人的敏感神经。

他们担心方言会开始回流，导致讲华语运动多年的努力付诸流水，因此主张删剪那些讲福建话的片段。

当时领导讲华语运动的黄昭虎教授并不赞同禁止播映这些方言片段的做法，他受访时透露，他当时也把自己的想法告诉时任新闻及艺术部部长的杨荣文。

黄教授认为，讲华语运动已推行这么多年，华语已成功取代方言成为新加坡华人的常用语，因此人们无需为了电影中的

几句方言而紧张。黄教授在回首他的十年任期时，对另一段经历印象深刻。

### 回应旧南大生的批评

那是一场与旧南大生的闭门对话会。黄昭虎教授还记得，当时旧南大生认为政府推行讲华语运动的做法很虚伪，认为政府纯粹是因为看到中国崛起、学华文开始吃香，才决定推广华语。在他们看来，要是政府真的重视华文，当年就不应该关闭南大。

黄教授说，他在会上直率地向与会者指出，要不是李光耀推行以英语为第一语文的双语政策，以及任人唯贤的制度，新加坡人根本无法享有现有的生活水平，而大家也因为受惠于新加坡的经济发展，现在才可以安然坐下来讨论如何推广华语。

黄昭虎教授说，他不知道当时与会的旧南大生是否能够接受他的论点，“重点是，我希望人们能理解，我们（推广华语委员会）没有政治意图，也没有政治立场。”

**“重点是，我希望人们能理解，我们没有政治意图，也没有政治立场。”——黄昭虎教授**





推广华语理事会在2004年首次推出双语并用的标语“华语Cool”，尝试为讲华语运动换上更现代的标语设计。此标语持续使用了3年。图为2005年的巴士与宣传海报设计。（图片来源：推广华语理事会）





## 黄昭虎教授：由受英文教育的学者来领导讲华语运动

英校出身的黄昭虎教授也经历过一段辛苦学习华文的过程。他小时候生长在一个很少接触华文华语的环境，不单对华语汉字感到陌生，华语也说得结结巴巴，不过由于从小他就在家里用方言交谈，所以他的潮州话倒是说得很流利。

他后来是在1981年到加拿大攻读博士学位时，才认真学好华语。当时是因为要用华语向中国和台湾留学生讲解《圣经》，而不得不两手拿着英文版和中文版的《圣经》，以英文版作参考，然后以华语向他们讲解。

做了三年的“翻译员”，他终于看得懂中文版的圣经，并且还在这些中国和台湾留学生的“调教”下，讲了一口较为流利的华语。

尽管自己和太太两人自小受英文教育，一对子女也因为小时候住加拿大没机会学华语，黄昭虎教授仍坚持两个孩子在回来新加坡后，要学好华文华语。

他经常提醒那些育有年幼孩童的家长，掌握华语不单是为了

文化传承，也有很大的经济价值。他指出，除非中国发生灾难性的政治动荡，否则年轻一代将见证中国成为全球最大经济体，因此孩子有必要掌握好华语，这样才能让他们具备走进这个全球最大市场的条件。

“即使你不打算去中国发展，你也无法摆脱中国的影响力，因为日后若你的老板或上司是中国人，你最终还是得学好华语。这就跟日本经济处于鼎盛时期的情况一样，日本人即使听得懂英语，他们还是会坚持用日语与人沟通。”

黄昭虎教授于1997年起担任推广华语委员会（1998年改为推广华语理事会）主席，任期共长达十年，并在2006年卸下主席职务。他目前在南洋理工大学任职，主要给工商管理硕士课程学员讲课。

展望未来，他认为讲华语运动接下来面临的挑战，是如何鼓励人们说漂亮、高素质的华语，以便能够在商界有效运用华语表达自己的想法，与他人沟通。

# 为讲华语运动注入朝气：2006年-2008年

**在**2006年至2008年期间领导讲华语运动的陈继贤认为，要推动这项运动有两大挑战。

首先是要如何确保这项已实行20多年的运动与时俱进，并保持新鲜感。他指出，推广华语理事会每年都绞尽脑汁推陈出新，希望设计出能引起共鸣的宣传主题和活动，这具有一定的难度。

此外，要如何让那些习惯讲英语的华族新加坡人，改变华语难学的印象，这更加不容易，毕竟学华语难免会让他们回想起求学时代，被迫学华语的那段痛苦记忆。

这也是为何陈继贤决定从最轻松、最贴近人们生活的休闲活动如卡拉OK来推广华语。

“就算他们不会华语，只会哼唱一两首华语歌曲，那也总算是一个开始，至少通过这种轻松的活动入门学华语，能为他们消除华语难学的心理障碍。”

这也是为何2006年讲华语运动以华语为媒介体的华语爵士夜活动，选在驳船码头的一家爵士酒廊举行。主宾是当时的副总理黄根成，他还兴致勃勃地与爵士歌手杰欣达（Jacintha Abisheganaden）合唱了一首中文爵士歌曲。

黄副总理当时在致词时提醒国人多讲华语，但无需用华语取代英语，而是兼顾好两个语言。

陈继贤受访时透露，他在担任主席期间所采用的策略，是鼓励人们在享受娱乐活动的过程中接触和学习华文。

这项策略的灵感来自多年前到机场给朋友送别时发生的小趣事。

他说，当时大家在向即将远行的朋友道别，身边一名年仅五岁的小朋友出人意料地向眼前的大人说：“来日方长，多多保重！”

这名小朋友显然是从武侠片中学到这句经典对白，只是没想到小朋友竟然还懂得把这句古代人道别的台词，套用在现代人送别的情景中，这让在场的大人都忍不住捧腹大笑。

陈继贤指出：“那名小朋友让我们看到，其实我们在娱乐中学习时，学习效果最好，所以我们当时（策划活动时）在想，何不从人们喜欢的休闲活动着手，鼓励人们多使用华语？”

目前在新加坡媒体发展管理局担任助理营运局长的陈继贤清



时任副总理兼内政部长黄根成于2006年讲华语运动开幕仪式上致词时说：“我们可以通过音乐、电影、电视及具有创意的语言应用，如成语等，让华语丰富华族新加坡人的生活内涵。”



楚意识到，要鼓励讲英语的华族新加坡人，特别是那些已离开学校、踏入职场的年轻专业人士多接触华语并非易事，所以他们决定投其所好，透过年轻人喜欢的娱乐平台如流行音乐、卡拉OK、电影等来推广华语的使用。

陈继贤从1984年至今一直担任新加坡电影协会主席，他也曾任嘉华院线董事经理。他当年通过他在业界的人脉关系，说服本地影院引进华语版的华特迪斯尼动画片《狮子王》（The Lion King）、主办华语电影节，致力为年轻一代提供更多接触华语影片的机会。

除了透过电影向年轻人伸出触角，推广华语理事会当时也通过许多不同方式，鼓励人们多使用华语。

其中一些推广华语理事会与企业合作伙伴作出的特别尝试包括：与语言中心合作主办一场由孩子负责给参赛家长打分的讲故事比赛，鼓励家长以身作则多讲华语；与音乐书籍出版商合作印制收录了多首流行曲目的“华语Cool”（Huayu Cool）歌谣集，并在歌词旁附上汉语拼音，鼓励人们通过流行文化掌握华文华语。

2008年讲华语运动也推出了英语和华语“养生”讲座，通过休闲活动鼓励惯用英语的华人多接触与使用华语。

## 邀请不同行业代表推广华语

为了给那些习惯讲英语的群体更多学习华语的动力，陈继贤说，他们还特地改变了以往邀请艺人担任宣传大使的策略，

转而邀请不同行业的代表以身作则，在他们各自的领域推广华语，希望借此向人们传达只要多学多讲，华语并不难学的信息。

以2007年的讲华语运动来说，推广华语理事会就采用了具挑战意味的口号“讲华语，你肯吗？”（Speak Mandarin, are you game?），向那些已有一点华文华语基础，但却没有信心使用华语的新加坡华人“下战书”。

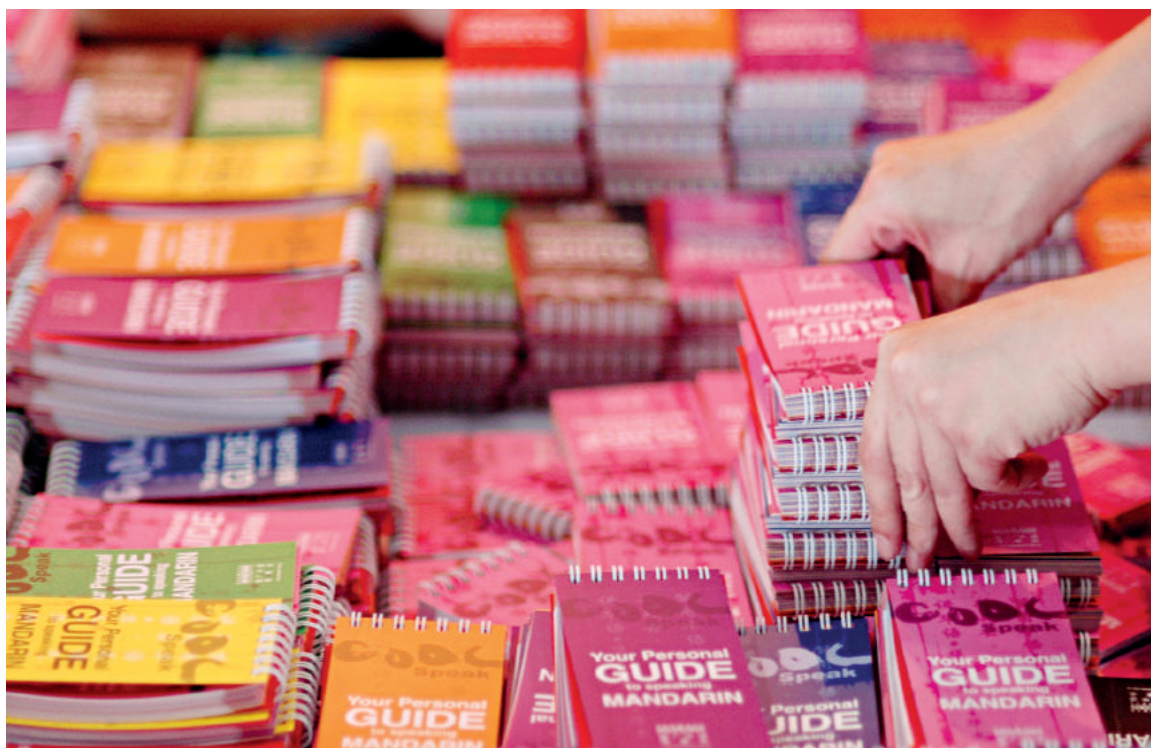
其中一个接受挑战的是当时的《海峡时报》执行级体育记者林国彪（Marc Lim）。

林国彪来自土生华人家庭，自小在讲英语的环境中长大，平时很少用华语交谈。

为了加强自己的华语程度以应付2008年到中国北京采访奥运的任务，他接受了挑战，用华语与24名本地运动健儿进行访问。《海峡时报》旗下的RazorTV还将这十多个星期的访问过程，录制成短片上载到STOMP网站，让人们见证林国彪华语进步的过程，希望借他的经验启发那些平日疏于使用华语的人多讲华语。



2006年讲华语运动沿用“华语Cool”主题，也继续将对象锁定在1965年新加坡独立后出生、受英文教育的华人。昭玮电影公司监制伍世雄（前排左起）和陈封侦，同演员杨雁雁和王欣及音乐人小寒和黄韵仁（后排站立者）完成了长达两分钟半的音乐短片《相思》，透过娱乐鼓励人们多使用华语。



《海峡时报》从2004至2007年刊登“Cool Speak”双语专栏的内容结集成书，印制成精美口袋词典在书局售卖。







## 陈继贤：主张透过娱乐活动学习华语

陈继贤在推广华语理事会服务长达14年。他最初是在1994年，受当时受委为主席的何光平邀请，成为推广华语委员会委员。

当时何光平主要是考虑到英校出身的他，背景跟讲华语运动新锁定的宣导对象相似，所以才会找上他来为这项运动出谋划策。

陈继贤在2006年接下讲华语运动领导棒子的时候，已协助主办过10届讲华语运动。

陈继贤是南洋小学和英华中学校友。尽管来自英华中学这个主要讲英语的环境，但是由于他本身自小热爱华文，加上他在踏入职场后，工作上经常用到中英语，因此无论英语或华语，他都说得十分流利。

他从身边许多例子看到，一些习惯讲英语的华人其实还保留

了一定的华文基础，只不过是因为他们离校后，在社交圈子和工作环境没有机会接触到华语的缘故，以致逐渐与华语脱节，因此在他看来，讲华语运动正好能给他们提供一个温习华语的机会。

这也是为何他认为已推行35年的讲华语运动，到今时今日还是有它存在的价值。

“你能否想象没有讲华语运动的后果？假设这项运动走入历史，对于那些生活或工作环境中没有机会接触华语、周围只有洋派朋友的人来说，他们将会在初级学院一年级完成最后一轮华文考试后，就此与华语绝缘。”

陈继贤认为：“我觉得这项一年一度的运动至少可以发挥一定的提醒作用，提高人们重拾华语的机会。只要每十人当中，有一两人会因讲华语运动而对学华语改观，那我想它就有继续存在的价值。”

# 让讲华语运动发挥影响力：2008年-2010年

**本**地知名广告才女林少芬形容自己当年是以知其不可为而为之的精神，接手讲华语运动的领导棒子。

也难怪她有这样的感触，摆在大家眼前的事实是：本地华文水平持续而且普遍低落，不要说学生，就连一些家长本身都十分抗拒学华文华语，想要改变本地学习华文环境的现状，单靠一个讲华语运动恐怕没法发挥多大作用。

林少芬清楚知道推广华语的工作任重道远，不可能在短时间内有立竿见影的成绩，但她希望自己至少能透过这项运动达到抛砖引玉的效果，为本地推广学习华文华语的工作付出一点贡献。

“讲华语运动不可能改变人们的态度，它只是能抛砖引玉，我希望我的一点小贡献，能够激发更多人投入（学习华文华语）的这件事情上……我们的语文光景是几十年来内外大环境演变所累计的结果。要扭转当下的语境或语文程度是不可能的。唯一能做的就是不间断地努力，尽力尽心做得更好。”

林少芬是在2008年5月出任推广华语理事会主席，2010年4月卸任。她担任主席的这三年，最为人津津乐道的是她与

其团队精心策划的电视游戏节目“华文？谁怕谁！”。

## “华文？谁怕谁！”获好评

当时她邀请到多名内阁部长和国会议员上节目，扮演不同角色出题考观众，这个宣传策略引起了话题，吸引不少观众追看，成功地让节目达到预期效果，收视率也创下佳绩。

当时他们以互动有趣出题机制推出的问答比赛也十分受欢迎，平均每周有1万5000人报名猜题。不过让人印象最为深刻的，肯定要数林少芬与她广告公司的团队制作推广华语的“外国人说华语”电视宣传短片。

观众在这一系列短片中看到来自世界各地的非华族小孩讲标准华语，短片背后的用意就是要提醒新加坡家长，其他各地家长都已意识到华文的重要性，纷纷让孩子把华语当第二或第三语文来学习。林少芬说，她希望借此刺激本地家长去思考，若此时让孩子放弃华文，只掌握英文，那三十年后，我们的新加坡孩子要怎么跟人家在世界舞台上竞争？

## 推广华语过程并非一帆风顺

林少芬与她所领导的团队给讲华语运动设计的宣传策略赢得了很好的口碑，但事实上他们这一路走来，并非一帆风顺。



李光耀资政为2009年讲华语运动主持开幕仪式。



她还记得，当年宣传活动展开初期发生的一段小插曲，让他们感到措手不及。

当时，他们制作了一系列印有问答题以及给这些字句注明汉语拼音的海报。其中一名设计人员一时大意，导致出街的海报在拼音符号方面出现了三个错误。

有些眼尖的公众发现了错误并通知报社，结果该报以“讲华语运动出师不利，错误百出”为标题，批评他们这项纰漏。团队漏夜撤换那些含错误的海报，并致力于确保将接下来的海报做好。

林少芬指出，他们接下推广讲华语运动的工作已经很辛苦了，需要各方的支持。在出现错误时，他们会尽力改正，也欢迎大家反馈，只是旁人不应该在此时落井下石。

“当你觉得新加坡的华文有问题的时候，不要站在那边笑、看热闹。身为新加坡人，你应该也站出来做点事。”

## 经费有限

林少芬说，她当时还面对的另一项挑战，那就是要如何经费有限的情况下，主办具有一定规模的全国性讲华语运动。

她指出，由于办一个电视问答游戏节目就已用尽了当局提供的几十万元预算，因此当时身为主席的她还得负责到处筹钱，要求通商中国、中华语言文化基金等不同机构提供赞助，以便应付其他宣传活动的开销。

负责推展讲华语运动的过程虽然辛苦，但是林少芬并没有怨言，她把这过程当作是一种应尽的“国民服役”。

“事实上，当我后来看到（这项运动所取得的）成绩，我觉得很有满足感，至少在新加坡推广学习华语的路上，我用了三年的时间做出一点贡献。这个贡献虽然不大，但起码能起正面作用。”

**“当你觉得新加坡的华文有问题的时候，不要站在那边笑、看热闹。身为新加坡人，你应该也站出来做点事。”——林少芬**



2009年讲华语运动推出《华文?谁怕谁!》趣味问答比赛的电视总决赛创下收视佳绩。

(图片来源:推广华语理事会)



人力部部长颜金勇在2010年讲华语运动开幕仪式上尝试《华文?谁怕谁!》趣味题目。







## 由精通双语的广告才女掌舵：林少芬

能说一口漂亮华语的广告创意人林少芬，自小就是学校演讲比赛和讲故事比赛的常胜军。

从新加坡国立大学中文系毕业后，她便到英华初级学院执教，当了一年的华文老师，之后一头栽入广告界，在那里找到属于自己的舞台。

她担任过知名广告公司如奥美和BBDO的创意总监，后来在2000年与朋友共同创办10AM广告公司。

当年她在BBDO任职时，为红舌狗黑啤酒制作了以香港艺人林子祥为主角的《你怕黑吗？》电视广告，这让她一举成名。

自立门户后，她在2002年为中国中央电视台制作的《心有多大，舞台就有多大》广告。这个作品为她赢得超过70个国际奖项，也从此让她在中国建立起了知名度。

后来她还被“钦点”与知名导演张艺谋合作，担任北京奥运会开幕仪式的创意委员。

林少芬育有两名儿子，两人都是主要讲英语的英华学校念书。她说，长子后来在美国升学，他主要是因为接触到台湾和中国的同学、喜欢上台湾歌手如周杰伦等等的歌，加上曾经陪她到北京开会，所以学会华语，也认识到华文的重要性。

不过至于她的小儿子则对学习华文没有多大兴趣。林少芬说，她只能尽力确保他不排斥华文。“我觉得（要培养对华文的兴趣方面）不能用逼的，你越是逼他们，他们越抗拒。”小儿子在学校假期时，也主动要求到上海太阳岛浸濡学习华文。

纵观整个大环境，林少芬认为，新加坡在推广和加强华文华语的工作上，恐怕还有一段很长的路要走。

“新加坡人华文也不好、英文也不好，这是我们最大的困扰。你的语文掌握能力，不管是英文也好，华文也好，你最大的目的是它能用来表达你最深层的思想，让你接触最广的知识。语文是你的武器，当新加坡人已经没有这个武器的时候，你恐怕就没有办法走向世界了。”

## 未来发展：2011年—现在

**在**新媒体当道的21世纪，推广华语理事会当然也积极利用新科技和新媒体，为学习华文创造有利条件。

2012年的讲华语运动就推出了崭新的iPhone免费应用程序“iHuayu”，方便年轻专业人士使用。

这个应用程序里头收录了5万个商业及本地常用的专有名词，如“hot money”、“Esplanade”、“void deck”等，供使用者查找中文翻译。里头另外还提供词汇的发音，以及相关例句，让使用者在学习新词汇的同时，能够了解词汇的用法。

最先推出的是iPhone版的应用程序，主办方后来也开发了Android版的程序，让不同智能手机的使用者能够享有随时语言转码的便利。

教育部长王瑞杰在2012年为讲华语运动主持开幕仪式时，就表示乐意见到像iHuayu这样的应用程序的推出，因为善用科技能够起到事半功倍的教学效果。

除了把焦点放在如何利用新科技鼓励人们提升华语水平，这几年的讲华语运动也再度强调父母在帮助孩子掌握母语时所能扮演的积极角色。

交通部长吕德耀于2011年为讲华语运动主持开幕时，就鼓励会说华语的家长选择华语为家里的沟通语言。他吁请家长说纯正的华语，以身作则，让孩子感受到父母对华语和华族文化的重视，从而鼓励他们学好自己的母语。

当年通过看《老夫子》学到一些华文词汇的吕德耀还建议家长，让孩子通过观赏华语电视节目、收听华语广播，并且阅读华文书籍报刊，甚至是漫画来学好华文华语。

在2011年接下讲华语运动领导棒子的新加坡报业控股华文报文化产业部执行副总裁萧作鸣也指出：“学习华语要自小从家里开始。我们处于一个讲英语的社会，如果家长不以身作则树立好榜样，小孩子就不会用心学习。只有让他们从小接触华语，他们以后才不会对华文产生抗拒心理。”

为了鼓励家长和孩子多使用华语，推广华语理事会特地在2013年7月举办亲子才艺比赛，让家长和孩子组队参加。他们必须用华语呈献五分钟的表演节目，如相声、讲故事或诗歌朗诵。

这项活动不单有助激发孩子学习华文的兴趣，也能促进亲子关系，可以说是一举两得。



教育部长王瑞杰（左三）同新闻、通讯及艺术部兼环境及水源部高级政务部长傅海燕（左二），外交部兼社会发展、青年及体育部高级政务次长陈振泉（右一），教育部兼律政部高级政务次长沈颖（左一）和主席萧作鸣（右二）于2012年讲华语运动开幕仪式上，推出崭新的iPhone免费应用程序“iHuayu”，让使用者学习新词汇。

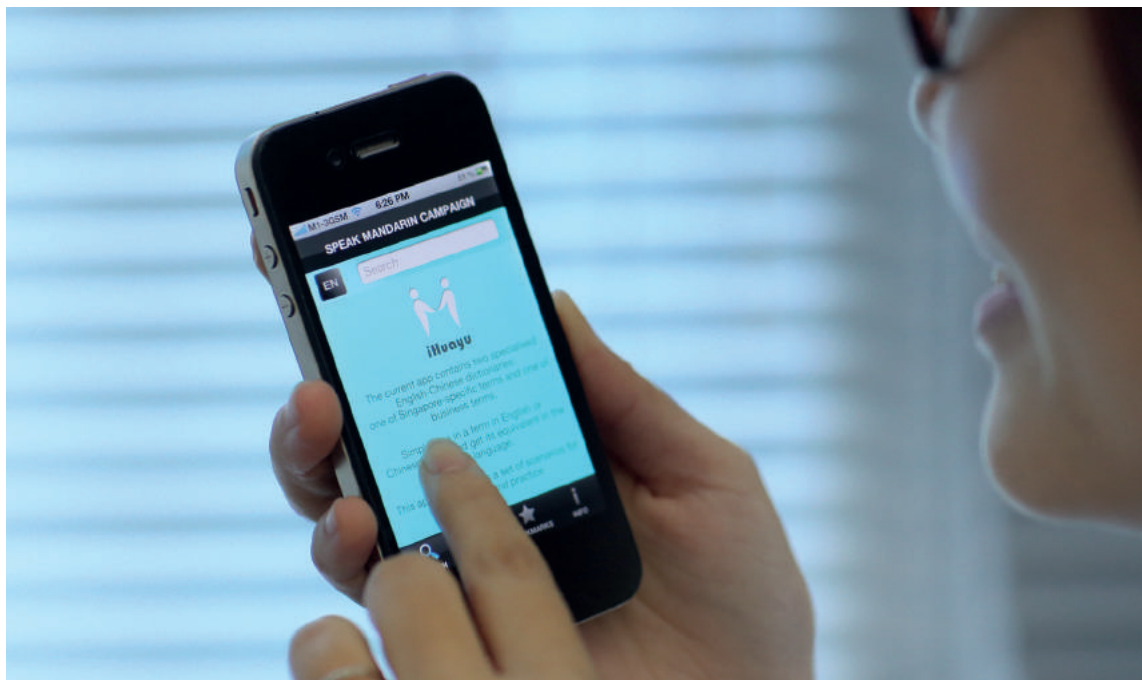


除了鼓励家长在家中多跟孩子讲华语，政府也致力为孩童提供有利学习华语的学习环境。

建国总理李光耀在2011年11月捐出了1000万元，设立了李光耀双语基金，利用这笔基金为学前教育孩童设计英语和母语教材，以及提升师资，借此为孩童从小打下扎实的双语基础。

李光耀当时是在为他中英版本的新书《我一生的挑战——新加坡双语之路》主持推介仪式时，宣布设立基金的消息。他当时称这本书为他“这一生最重要的一本著作”，并把售卖附上他签名的200本精装版新书所得，投入这个基金。

**当年通过看《老夫子》学到一些华文词汇的吕德耀还建议家长，让孩子通过观赏华语电视节目、收听华语广播，并且阅读华文书籍报刊，甚至是漫画来学好华文华语。**



讲华语运动2012年推出手机应用程序“iHuayu”。这个应用程序共有5万个商业及本地专有名词，除了中英对照、发音功能，也有例句，让使用者可以学习新词汇也了解这些词汇的使用法。



由推广华语理事会主办，《大拇指》、圣尼各拉女校和推广华文学习委员会协办的“全国讲华语运动亲子才艺比赛”，共吸引超过100支队伍参加。上图为家长及孩子在2013年亲子才艺比赛赛前工作坊中参与互动。



受英语教育的彭耀庆与妻子赵尹华以行动支持女儿彭译乐学习华语，一家人参加了2013年亲子才艺比赛，并在总决赛中获得亚军。







## 媒体界宿将：萧作鸣

萧作鸣已在推广华语理事会服务多年，所以当他在2011年受委担任主席时，他感觉义不容辞。

事实上，他可是主办华族文化活动的老手，过去30多年来，这名新加坡报业控股华文报文化产业部执行副总裁一直都在从事这方面的工作。

他参与主办的活动包括1986年新加坡首届世界华文书展、1987年首届春到河畔迎春活动，以及华族文化节。

除此以外，萧作鸣曾是国家艺术理事会董事会成员，并在华社和商界十分活跃。同时兼任新加坡中华总商会常务董事及董事会职位的萧作鸣说：“总商会向来在推广华文华语方面不遗余力，出钱出力地积极推动。中华总商会的会议也都是以华语进行，会议记录也都是以中文书写的。”

他指出，他本身以及他的家人都从讲华语运动中受惠。精通

双语的萧作鸣出身华文源流学校华义中学，后来升上新加坡大学化学系，并在1973/74年从大学毕业。

讲华语运动推展初期，他在当时的《星洲日报》担任行政及人事部经理。《星洲日报》后来在1983年与《南洋商报》合并。

他说，讲华语运动推动着他，为长女以及两名儿子提供一个有利学习双语的环境。他与太太在孩子还小的时候，就一直坚持用中英语与他们对话，这也是为何三个孩子如今能轻松地以华语和英语沟通。

“只要我们不担心犯错、经常多用华语，我们不单能很快掌握这个语言、说一口流利的华语，还能（为孩子）营造一个有利于学习华语的环境。”



# 走一条不同的路.....

过去三十多年来，新加坡华人社会的语言生态环境经历了快速的转型：讲华语运动虽然成功让华语取代了方言，成为基层民众的沟通语，不过随着实用性高的英语逐渐成为越来越多华族家庭的主要用语、年轻一代的华语水平又不断下降，这为讲华语运动提供了继续推展的动力。

在这一世代的语言转型中，讲华语运动对教育、商界、宗乡会馆、文化艺术，以及娱乐广播等领域产生了怎么样的影响？这些领域又是如何适应语言生态环境的改变？





图：蔡天宝提供

蔡天宝

## 【会馆篇】 由小认同升华为大认同

**方**言是宗乡组织建立彼此身份认同的一部分，也是这些组织凝聚乡亲的一个重要基础。

在政府大力推行讲华语运动之前，大多宗乡会馆的会员主要以他们最熟悉的方言交谈：无论是开会商讨会馆事务，

还是与老乡们喝茶话家常，几十年来他们都已习惯用家乡话沟通。

在那个时候，只要走进不同的会馆，你就可听到不同籍贯的乡音在耳际萦绕：福建会馆讲福建话、潮州八邑会馆讲潮州

话、广东会馆讲粤语、琼州会馆讲海南话、南洋客属总会讲客家话……

不过随着政府于1979年开始推广华语，鼓励新加坡华人改用华语取代方言，各个会馆也顺应了整个大环境的改变，调整了各自的语言习惯。

对老一辈的会馆会员来说，要他们改用华语并不容易，而当时，一些以地缘、方言、籍贯组成的同乡会也担心，不用方言、改用华语会导致它们失去凝聚乡亲的基础。

尽管在情感上感到万分纠结，但是大多会馆会员最终都能考虑到整体社会发展的实际需要，以大局为重，积极响应讲华语运动。

一项由当时的交通和新闻部于1988年所进行的调查就显示，讲华语运动推行还未满十周年，就已经有多达66%会馆会员使用华语沟通。

当时共有170个会馆组织、约6万名会馆会员接受这项调查访问。调查结果显示，在1979年以前，大约只有22%会馆理事以华语召开理事会议，到了1988年，这个比例已上升到82%；使用华语召开会员大会的会馆，也在同一个时期从21%提高到76%。

作为一个共通的语言，华语有效地打破了不同方言社群之间的沟通隔阂，也有助于淡化会馆之间的地方性帮派观念、加强会馆之间的合作。

新加坡宗乡会馆联合总会（简称宗乡总会）便是在这样的历史背景下成立。这个由福建会馆、潮州八邑会馆、广东会馆、南洋客属总会、海南会馆、三江会馆，以及福州会馆于1986年联合发起成立的组织，旨在加强宗乡会馆之间的合作，透过教育与文化活动，提高公众对华族语文、文化和传统的认识。

宗乡总会会长蔡天宝接受访问时指出：“在过去，方言确实是会馆身份认同的一部分。当时，许多华人社团的认同还在历史的初级阶段，停留在小范围内的认同。不过随着时代的变迁，新加坡宗乡会馆联合会的成立已经把这种‘小认同’带到了‘大认同’，在血缘和地缘的基础上，提升到新加坡国家层面的华社认同。”

在国家的推动和民间团体的支持下，有35年历史的讲华语运动已在一定的程度上统一了本地方言社群的语言习惯，加上政府双语教育政策的成功推行，这直接导致会讲方言的年轻人越来越少。

蕴含深厚文化底蕴的方言的式微令人感到惋惜，不过蔡天宝认为，若从理性务实的角度来看，“有一些损失，是无法不付出的代价”。

蔡天宝指出：“建国总理李光耀当年曾经谈到‘方言既然阻碍了双语教育的推行，放弃方言，减轻学生学习的额外负担，便成了无可奈何的选择’……我相信任何一个新加坡华人都不希望因语文问题失去优势。当初有不少人质疑政府出面推广华语的做法，直到后来随着中国经济的腾飞，全球

掀起学习华语热潮，很多人都称赞政府高瞻远瞩，能领导潮流。”

随着讲华语运动现在把重点转向提高人们对华族文化的鉴赏水平，宗乡总会也积极配合这项运动，每年举办各种如端午节嘉年华、宗乡之夜、认识新加坡知识竞赛等活动，大力推广华文华语，借活动弘扬中华文化与传统。

**“建国总理李光耀当年曾经谈到‘方言既然阻碍了双语教育的推行，放弃方言，减轻学生学习的额外负担，便成了无可奈何的选择’……我相信任何一个新加坡华人都不希望因语文问题失去优势。当初有不少人质疑政府出面推广华语的做法，直到后来随着中国经济的腾飞，全球掀起学习华语热潮，很多人都称赞政府高瞻远瞩，能领导潮流。”**

其中由宗乡总会与多个机构和民间团体联合主办的“春到河畔迎新年”常年迎春活动，就是最为盛大和充满华人节日气氛的一项活动。此外，常年举办的“华艺节”，以及两年一度的“华族文化节”则是集合了国内外优秀艺人呈献的大汇演，可让全民共享华族文化盛宴，这对提升新加坡华族文化艺术鉴赏水平起了非常积极的作用。

宗乡总会还在2006年与新加坡中华总商会共同设立中华语言文化基金，以便为那些以创意方式提升华文水平、弘扬华族文化的活动提高资助。

在2012年宣布设立、目前仍在筹建中的新加坡华族文化中心，则是宗乡总会为推动新加坡华族文化发展、促进族群融合与文化认同的另一项计划。

这些项目与计划显示出宗乡总会这些年来为保留和推广华族文化所付出的努力。

“我们应该保留和强化本地华族身份，鼓励和培养更多的年轻人对华文和华族文化的兴趣，让他们从小就能够说出流利的华语。让更多人可以用华语讨论政治、商业、经济和社会课题，在更高的层次使用华语，以提高新加坡社会的整体华语水平，让新加坡华族保留住自己的根。”





宗乡总会与多个民间团体联合主办“春到河畔迎新年”活动推广中华华语及弘扬中华文化与传统。宗乡总会会长蔡天宝与卫生部长颜金勇及我国总统陈庆炎博士于2013年的活动中主持亮灯式后，接受孩童的道贺并派发红包。



宗乡总会在华族文化研习开幕仪式上，向教育部提出传承华族文化必须获得官方的实际支持和参与，才能事半功倍。因此应当把宗乡组织和民间团体主办的活动，列为学校课外活动的一部分。





林茹萍

## 【娱乐广播篇】放下方言向前看

人们在一些电视节目、社区活动中，经常都可以看到草根艺人林茹萍（62岁）的身影，看她轻松地交替使用流利的中英双语主持节目，你很难想象她当年出道时原是一名方言广播员。

林茹萍在受访时透露，她小时候跟祖母住，因此自小便会说福建话。她在1972年参加了有线电台“丽的呼声”主办的第一届福建歌唱比赛，夺得了冠军，之后便加入该电台的厦语话剧组当兼职广播员。

那个年代可以说是方言广播的鼎盛期，“丽的呼声”有近六成的广播时段播放方言节目，而当中又以厦语和粤语节目的收听率最高。

当时有不少听众每天都守在“丽的呼声”的收音机旁，追听李大傻、黄正经以及王道分别以粤语、潮语和厦语讲故事，这也让这三名讲古大师成了声名大噪的广播红人。

后来，为配合政府于1979年开始推广的讲华语运动，电台和电视台陆续淘汰的方言节目，并在1983年1月1日全面禁止播放方言节目，这项政策对方言艺人和广播员造成了很大的影响。

方言广播员当时心中的不满与无奈大家可想而知。林茹萍说：“当时我们不明白，政府要推行讲华语运动，为什么一定要禁止电台播方言节目？一些老人家听了几十年的方言广播故事，你突然要他们改听华语广播，他们怎么会习惯？”林茹萍当时的正职是秘书，在“丽的呼声”厦语话剧组只是当兼职广播员。由于不完全靠广播员的工作赚取收入，她所受到的影响还不算太大，反倒是那些全职方言广播员，突然要面对失业危机。

据估计，单是在“丽的呼声”，受影响的方言广播员大约有一百多人。

林茹萍说，当时“丽的呼声”为了帮助方言广播员转到华语台工作，特地为他们开办了为期三个月的“华语速成班”，安排华语组的资深广播员负责授课，训练他们的华语发音。

不过报名上课的人不多，那些年长的方言广播员大多因为感觉很难改变工作语言，而选择退出广播界。

由于她当时对媒体工作还感兴趣，加上报读课程无需付费，她便毅然报名参加。当时跟她一起上课的还包括原本来自潮语组、后来跟她一样过档到电视台的陈澍承。

她随后在1984年加入了电视台，当时她大约只有20多岁。电视台因为要增加综艺节目《缤纷八三》的播映时段，因此招聘更多主持人。在电台完成华语语音训练的她，顺利地通过测试，当上兼职主持人，之后便一路朝综艺、戏剧、七月歌台等各方面发展。

现在，林茹萍已经62岁了，但是主持工作还是源源不断。不少基层组织都喜欢聘用她来主持社区活动，因为很少艺人像她这样有语言天分，不单会说流利的中英语，还会说福建、潮州、广东和海南话等草根民众熟悉的方言。

如今回头看政府当年禁止方言广播的举措，林茹萍虽然还是不完全认同政府当年的这个决定，认为当局不应该全面禁止方言节目，应允许电台保留一些时段播放方言广播剧，不过她也明白这项政策的用意是好的，目的为了给年轻一代创造更有利学习中英双语的环境。

“（讲华语运动推行至今）35年一路走来，我们看到国家的发展，下一代所取得的进步，我觉得是好的……为了我们的下一代，我们要向前看。”





曾宗敏

图：曾宗敏提供

## 【商界篇】 双语开启到中国经商的大门

**“到**中国做生意，如果你身为华人但却不会说华语，你肯定要让中国人看不起。”

这是东南亚最大的墙纸供应商优丽奇环球（Goodrich Global Pte Ltd）主席曾宗敏给予新加坡华族商人的忠告。他庆幸自己当年没有放弃学华语，否则他恐怕没法像现在这样跟中国

的生意伙伴打交道，更不可能把不断扩充的公司业务带入庞大的中国市场。

在曾宗敏看来，新加坡人之所以具备在中国大展拳脚的能力，很大程度上要归功于新加坡政府所推行的讲华语运动，以及双语教育政策。



“这为新加坡人创造了有利的学习环境，让国人具备到中国、台湾，甚至美国经商的条件。”

跟许多通晓中英双语的新加坡人一样，曾宗敏也是双语教育政策下的“产物”。新加坡政府在1966年开始推行以英语为第一语文、母语为第二语文的双语教育政策时，他还在军港中学念书。

他还记得，当时这项政策引起许多非华语源流家长的不满，他有不少同学就因为不愿意修读华文，而选择移民海外。

曾宗敏透露，幸好他母亲是一名华文教师，有能力帮助在英文源流教育体系下成长的他，克服学习华文的障碍，掌握好华语。

靠墙纸起家的曾宗敏是在1983年创立优丽奇。随着优丽奇的业务不断发展，这个以墙纸、地毯、布艺及地板为主要业务的公司已在新加坡、中国、香港、马来西亚、泰国、印度尼西亚、印度和阿联酋等八个国家和地区设立区域办事处。

优丽奇是于1996年开始进军中国市场。当时中国经济已在快速发展，不少人都想到这个巨大的市场挖掘商机。曾宗敏透露，当年他那些选修马来文为第二语文的同学都感到十分懊恼，后悔当初没有学讲华语，以致现在要到中国经商时，因语言不通而困难重重。

刚在2013年底卸下新加坡中小型企业商会会长职务的曾宗敏吁请在中国工作或经商的新加坡人，充分把握自己通晓双

语的优势，以及维护新加坡政府在中国所建立起的优良品牌形象。

“新加坡这个品牌在中国信誉良好。在中国深圳，甚至有私人房地产发展商以‘新加坡式管理’为（售卖私宅单位的）卖点，由此可见，中国人有多信赖新加坡品牌，几乎把它当成品质保证。”

在他看来，新加坡华人大多都能用华语沟通，即使最初华语说得不好，通常他们只要在中国呆上一年半载，一般就能说一口相当流利的华语，不过至于用华文书写的能力，这方面就还有很大的改进空间。

“毕竟在中国做生意，你不单要懂得说华语，还必须了解中国文化。比方说，当有人向你索贿时，你是否知道对方在向你索贿？而你又该怎么回应？在新加坡，我们（普遍把用餐）说‘吃饭’，但是对于中国人来说，‘饭’是贿赂的潜台词，若只是普通用餐，你应该说‘吃米饭’。因此，对于经商者来说，你不仅仅要懂得讲华语，也要了解当地的文化，而唯一方法是到那里浸濡。这些文化上的细微差别是你无法在学校学到的。”

曾宗敏认为，随着中国快速崛起、影响力不断扩大，在未来30到50年内，能用华语经商的这项技能将越来越重要。

“华文华语确实不容易掌握，所以人们有必要提早学好华语，并把这个语言融入生活，以充分掌握我们所拥有的这个优势。”



图：华侨银行提供

梁炜宁

## 【商界篇】了解中国文化，才能有共同话题

**精**通双语的新加坡人到中国经商或工作之所以占有优势，是因为他们能够融汇中西，为中国与西方搭桥。不过在接下来十年、二十年，新加坡人是否还能继续充当这座桥梁，这是一个问号。

提出这个观点的是新加坡银行环球业务管理部主管梁炜宁。

47岁梁炜宁是在2000年开始到中国工作，过去13年来驰骋于企业界和银行界，她先后在飞利浦电子中国集团和汇丰银



行中国有限公司担任要职，后来加入华侨银行（中国）担任执行官，2013年底返新。

作为较早一批到中国工作与生活的加坡人，梁炜宁对中国市场有深入了解，也对中国市场走向保有高度的敏感性。

她指出：“过去十年来，我很多中国同事也有机会接触国外的经营理念，他们当中有很多人在财富500强企业内工作、也有不少人累积了在国外留学和工作的经验。他们其实已经有能力建自己的桥了，不需要新加坡人来搭桥，所以我们如果真的要继续当这座桥，我们就有必要比这群中国人更具优势。”

梁炜宁是新加坡特选中学制度下培育出的最早一批能掌握中西文化的精英。

她小学就读于圣尼各拉女校，1979年升中学那一年，教育部刚推出特别辅助计划（Special Assistance Plan），在九所优秀的传统华校开办英文和华文都为第一语文水平的特别源流课程，当时圣尼各拉女校就是其中一所。

**“华文对我来说是一个生活语言，不是为应考而学习的语言，所以我学习华文的过程充满乐趣。”**

这个特别源流课程只接受小六会考成绩最顶尖8%的优秀生，政府开办这个课程的目的，是为培育一批双语人才，传承华族传统文化。

对于梁炜宁来说，以第一语文水平修读华文根本不成问题。梁炜宁的父母都是传统华校生，她自小习惯在家里用华语、广东话和福建话与家人交谈。她在圣尼各拉就读期间，也经常有机会代表学校参加演讲比赛、辩论赛、作文比赛。

家里的语言环境和入学后的这些经历，为她打下扎实的华文基础，也锻炼了她的思考和表达能力，她在新加坡国立大学修读商业管理期间，还两次被推荐担当亚洲大专辩论会的辩手。

梁炜宁指出：“华文对我来说是一个生活语言，不是为应考而学习的语言，所以我学习华文的过程充满乐趣。”

在她看来，新加坡人要到中国工作，一个先决条件是要掌握好华语，不过更重要的是，要对中国文化有所了解，这样一来，在跟中国人打交道时才能了解他的想法，与对方有共同的话题。

梁炜宁指出：“譬如说，那些50岁以上的中国人，很多都经历过文化大革命，如果你知道文革是怎么一回事，你就能理解为何他会做出某种决定或判断、为什么他的自我保护意识比较强。你不需要认可他的做法，但是你必须理解她的考量，因此如果你能够深一层去了解他们的文化背景，这将非常有用。”



郭践红

## 【文化艺术篇】不断播种才有望收成

**郭**践红自小就跟着父母在剧场打转，看着他们与其他戏剧工作者如何在剧坛耕耘，也亲眼见证了本地华语剧坛的起落。

她是在11年前从已故父亲郭宝崑手中，接过实践表演艺术学院的领导棒子，继承了在这片土壤上耕耘播种的重任。

回顾本地剧坛这几十年来发展，在她的印象中，上个世纪70年代是本地华语剧坛最繁盛的时期。

“当时的一些演出在可容纳900人的维多利亚剧院连续上演20多场之后，还继而进入国家剧院上演。一场戏可吸引两三万人买票观赏，有些观众还特地从柔佛新山包巴士来看戏。”

然而，这番繁华景象无法持续。随着新加坡教育制度改变，传统华校走入历史，新加坡华人整体华文水平不断下滑，种种因素在很大程度上导致华语剧坛在进入80年代时，开始走向下坡路。

在郭践红看来，语文政策对剧坛所造成的影响最大。

自政府在1966年推行以英语为第一语文、母语为第二语文的双语政策后，英语逐渐占据社会主流，也受到越来越多华人家庭的重视。许多务实的华族家长考虑到孩子的前途，纷纷把孩子的学习重心转向英文，此消彼长，年轻一代的华语水平也因而越见低落。

郭践红指出，整个社会华语语文程度下降对剧坛造成的最直接的冲击就是编剧、演员、导演，以及观众都不断减少。

“语言能力决定你的阅读、理解、分析和表达能力……当

华语程度普遍低落时，你要怎样培育出有能力写出剧本的编剧？”

虽然政府自1979年便开始年复一年推行讲华语运动，不过由于这项运动在推展初期主要为鼓励讲方言的华人改用华语，并非鼓励讲英语的华族新加坡人使用华语，因此这在当时对日益消沉的华语剧坛无法发挥提振作用。

为了促进华语戏剧界的团结，当时有12个戏剧团体于1989年联合组成了“新加坡华语戏剧团体联合会”（剧联），负起了协助属下团体克服困难，以及推动华语戏剧发展的工作。

不过由于大环境使然，这些努力最终也无法让华语剧场走出低潮。

**“语言只是一个工具，语言必须给孩子带来乐趣，他才会对语言有兴趣。若你跟一个幼小的孩子说，‘你一定要学好华语，因为中国很发达，不学好华语你以后找不到工作’。一个五岁的孩子，他才不理你。”**



剧联后来解散了，本地华语戏剧团体也不断减少。在当年剧坛的鼎盛时期，本地少说也有20多个团体，如今硕果仅存、全年还在搞演出的专业华语剧团就只剩下实践表演艺术学院、戏剧盒、TOY肥料厂、九年剧场等；业余的剧团则包括青少儿广播演艺组、新风相声学会、新加坡艺术剧场，以及海燕等人。

郭践红指出，这些年来之所以继续坚持下去，只因为相信要不断在这块土壤上播种，才有望收成果实。

“现在不时还有一些戏剧工作者上前来告诉我，他们当年看的第一出戏是我爸带到校园的演出。我们（实践）成立至今已经有49年，我们看到当年播下的种子，如何开花结果，所以还有能力，我们就要继续耕耘下去。”

近年来，随着中国的崛起、国人学习华文的热忱加温，这为逆境中求存的华语戏剧再现曙光。

郭践红指出，不少学校都积极借助华语剧团的力量，希望通过戏剧以及他们所主办的活动来增强学生学习华文的兴趣，这给剧场提供了更多观众，也让华语剧坛能够为提振本地华语水平出力。

以去年实践的华语儿童剧《当兵姑娘花木兰》，以及从台湾带来的偶戏《初生》为例，单是这两出戏就卖了5000张票，这让华语剧场再现活力。

除了通过学校向学生伸出触角，实践也以不同方式吸引观

众群走进剧场，如附上英文字幕，帮助华语没那么流利的观众理解对白，以及采用通俗的主题、以音乐剧的方式呈献戏剧。

郭践红认为，要让年轻一代不抗拒学华语，当局或许不应该一直强调语言的功用性，而应该从艺术文化入手，来引起孩子学习华文的兴趣。

“语言只是一个工具，语言必须给孩子带来乐趣，他才会对语言有兴趣。若你跟一个幼小的孩子说，‘你一定要学好华语，因为中国很发达，不学好华语你以后找不到工作’。一个五岁的孩子，他才不理你。”

这是为何实践积极主办多项活动，如让年幼孩童听故事、讲故事的“故事银行”活动，以及即兴讲故事比赛“故事擂台”等，来训练孩子的表达能力，培养孩子学习语文的兴趣。

作为一个关注本地华文华语发展的语言文化工作者，郭践红也提出了她对讲华语运动的期许。

“不要那么官方，应该可以更加天马行空，因为如果你感觉不到语言文化的快乐，它就不会有生命。”



“全国故事擂台赛”是实践剧场于2007年创办的即兴讲故事比赛。2014年公教中学的参赛团队，以幽默的演出博得不少笑声，赢得了2014年个人组与团体组的亚军。



实践表演艺术学院多年来不断推广华语戏剧。图为本地已故戏剧家郭宝崑创作《灵戏》的剧照。







# 那些年，我们一起学华文

他们都受惠于双语教育，在讲华语运动的潮流下成长，所以能够自由游走于中西领域，接受不同世界的文化熏陶。

他们是如何掌握好华语？学习华语过程中又有哪些难忘的经历？

教育部兼通讯及新闻部政务部长沈颖、专科医生林瑛鸿和林瑛润、跨界媒体人杨君伟、音乐人蔡健雅，以及学生张童琳和王立宁分享了他们学华语的经验。



沈颖

## 不让孩子把华语跟负面情绪联想在一起

**在** 教育部兼通讯及新闻部政务部长沈颖的记忆中，她小时候的周末时光大多是在人们俗称“书城”的百胜楼中度过。

书城泡书局：一到那里，她父亲通常就会径自往小书店钻，找他爱看的文学评论选或散文集，他们三人则会到大众书局看儿童书籍。

她父亲爱看书，周末一有空就带着沈颖她们姐弟三人一起到

沈颖还记得，由于大众书局的中文图书选择较多，加上价格

又比英文书籍便宜，因此他们逛书局的“战利品”主要是中文图书。

她尤其喜欢看中国民间故事，有一次还把故事书带到学校，上课时趁老师不注意偷偷追看，结果给老师发现了，还被罚站。

她不单爱看书，也喜欢在课余时间把故事书里头的故事讲述给同学听。老师后来获知她有这项专长，于是便在每次考试结束后、忙着批改考卷时，安排她在课堂上讲故事娱乐大家。

沈颖笑说，当时她一边讲故事，其他同学一边演绎故事情节，同学之间默契十足。“后来，就连隔壁班的老师也来把我们‘借过去’表演。”

沈颖当年先是就读于南洋小学，后来因为获选入高才班而转到莱佛士女校上课。从一个华文背景浓厚的学校，转入一个纯英语的环境，她当时感觉最大的差别是：新学校的同学英语怎么都说得这么流利？而且她们无论在课内课外都用英语而不是华语交谈。

“有一次老师在我的作业上留下了‘A good attempt’的评语，其他同学都明白，只有我看不懂‘attempt’这个字是什么意思，不过我那时猜想应该是指我做了很好的尝试，结果给我猜对了。”

由于她当时年纪还小、适应能力强，所以很快便适应新的语

言和学习环境，与周围那些精于英语的同学打成一片，也逐渐开始习惯以英语进行讨论和思考。

她后来获颁总统奖学金，留学英美。回国后，她曾在卫生部和内政部工作，在这段期间她比较少使用华语，不过随着她后来转到贸工部负责处理新中贸易相关事务，接着又被新加坡企业发展局派驻中国上海，她当年熟悉的语言华语再度派上用场。

虽然多年疏于使用华语，不过因为当年打下很好的华文底子，这让她能很快适应纯华语的工作环境，而且还能在短时间内顺应当地的用语习惯，调整自己的遣词用字。

精通双语的能力，不单让她能在工作上自由穿梭于不同领域，也让她在从政后，能用选民最熟悉的语言与他们沟通。

沈颖是荷兰-武吉知马集选区议员，主管武吉知马区基层事务。她透露，由于她所服务的选区内华族选民比例比全国平均来得高，而当中又有不少人以讲华语为主，因此能直接用华语与他们沟通，有助她拉近与选民之间的关系。

沈颖当年曾被李显龙总理点评为精通双语、代表新加坡新一代双语人才。她在2011年受委加入颜金勇部长所领导的华社联络组，出任华社联络组属下双文化工作小组组长。隔年，李光耀双语基金在成立后，她也受委为该基金董事会副主席。她目前也同时负责领导推广华文学习委员会。

肩负着推广与加强双语教育重任的沈颖指出，她希望能够尽



力为那些来自讲英语背景，不过却有意帮助孩子掌握华语的家长，提供他们所需的教育资源。

“有不少来自讲英语背景的家长向我表示，他们其实也很想让孩子学好华语，不过他们的疑问是：除了把孩子送去上华语补习班，还有什么其他的方法能让孩子掌握华语？我觉得这是一个很重要的问题，我们该怎么帮助孩子提升华语水平，同时让他对华语这个生活语言感兴趣？”

她觉得，要鼓励孩子学习华文华语，首先必须让他对这个语言产生好感。

“最起码他们不应该讨厌华语。我在探讨母语问题时发现，新加坡年轻一代中有不少对华语有两个先入为主的观念：一，认定华语难学；二，认为华语是让人讨厌的科目。这是一个奇怪的现象，而在我看来，关键在于家长对华语的态度。”

她认为，家长应该抱着积极的态度给在学习华语的孩子打气，而不应该打从一开始就让孩子感觉华语是一个难学的语言，因为这将导致孩子对华语产生偏见，认定这是一个需要费劲学习又没有趣味的语言。

“这就好比教孩子游泳，我们在让孩子学习这个重要生活技能的时候，总不会一开始就告诉孩子，要学会游泳不容易。既然如此，那为什么我们要让孩子感觉华语难学？”

不过她也坦承，随着越来越多孩子来自讲英语家庭，而这些

孩子又把自己的语言习惯带入学校，要如何确保那些在家中讲华语的孩子，继续维持这个习惯将是一个很大的挑战。

沈颖坦承，跟其他新加坡孩子一样，她自己的孩子也同样受学校环境影响，习惯以英语交谈，不过为了确保孩子从小打好双语基础，她一直想方设法鼓励他们在家里用华语沟通。

她育有两男一女，长子9岁，老二是女儿，今年7岁，老三则只有两岁。

她说，她儿子在她当年派驻上海期间，曾在当地幼稚园上过两年课，因此华语基础较强。相比之下，她女儿的华语就说得不太流利，所以女儿也不太爱说华语。

沈颖的母亲是本地资深华文媒体人朱亮亮。沈颖还记得小时候，母亲对他们三姐弟的语音要求很严格，只要一听到他们谈话时语音不对，马上就会纠正他们。

现在反而是由沈颖的妹妹扮演这个“语言警察”的角色。

沈颖透露，有时在用餐时，她妹妹若听到孩子们用英语交谈，就会瞪眼要他们讲华语，结果两个孩子就会心不甘、情不愿地转用华语，她女儿有时甚至会耍脾气，干脆什么都不说了。

沈颖从自己和家人教育孩子的经验得出的结论是：强迫孩子使用华语只会弄巧反拙，于是她便试着改用逆反心理学的方式，鼓励他们使用华语。

举例说，她女儿喜欢偷听家里的成人交谈，而由于她与家人通常用华语沟通，有时女儿听不懂内容，会好奇地发问。为了鼓励她女儿多讲华语，沈颖与家人“串通”好，在她女儿问起谈话内容时，直接向她表明：“对不起，我们是用华语讲的，我们不打算翻译。”

沈颖笑说，这一招还相当管用。不单如此，她也在家制定“奖励措施”，鼓励孩子多看华语节目。

她一般不允许孩子一面看电视节目，一面用餐。不过，她会破例允许孩子在吃饭时，观看电视上播映的华语连续剧《活佛济公》；前阵子她也让孩子延后晚上上床睡觉的时间，给他们追看本地制作的连续剧《边缘父子》。

她说：“孩子愿意看华语节目我们已经很高兴了，所以我

们不会以‘这个节目太暴力’为理由，阻止他们观看，反而会跟他们一起坐下来收看。要是暴力画面，我们就从旁辅导。”

在家中教导孩子华文华语时，她也尽量克制自己，提醒自己不要在孩子犯错时，太急于纠正或责备他们。

“要是我女儿长大后讨厌华语，这将是身为父母者的过失。我现在最首要的目标，是确保她对华语保持正常态度。若每当她用华语时犯错或读错读音时，我们就严厉纠正她，或取笑她，这将导致她日后每次想到华语，就会联想到被父母责备、紧张和缺乏自信等负面情绪。”

沈颖坦承，身为家长，她能体恤其他家长在鼓励孩子掌握双语方面所面对的压力，事实上，她本身也在学习如何帮助孩子打好双语基础。不过她希望勉励其他家长，一起在帮助孩子掌握双语的路上继续努力。

“我经常也听到一些家长分享，他们如何让孩子学习华语的过程更轻松愉快。在一些异族通婚的家庭中，孩子的其中一个家长虽然不是华族，也根本不会说华语，但是这些家长还是很积极地鼓励孩子掌握华语。这些例子让我有理由相信，只要下定决心，身为父母的我们绝对能够帮助孩子掌握好华语。”

教育部兼通讯及新闻部政务部长沈颖认为，要让孩子学习华语，必须让他对这个语言产生好感，图为她与小儿子在图书馆阅读。







蔡健雅

## 失而复得的能力

**本**地知名音乐人蔡健雅在华语乐坛荣获无数奖项肯定，所创作的作品也曾被天王后级的歌手如王菲、张惠妹、那英、林忆莲等收录专辑之中，但是你或许不知道，这名唱作俱佳的音乐人最初出道时，不太能用华语与媒体沟通，她当年接受台湾电台访问时，还曾经因为华语不行而闹过笑话。

蔡健雅多年来因疏于使用华语以致丧失利用华语沟通的能力，她为此感到十分遗憾，但她后来也决心把这份遗憾化为动力，下苦功学好华语，以便能在华语歌坛大展拳脚。

不说不知，其实蔡健雅小时候使用的主要沟通语是华语。她



小学的华文老师是台湾人，教他们说一口标准的华语。当时语音标准的蔡健雅，不单被老师点名为课文录音，还参加过诗歌朗诵比赛。

到了中学，她念圣尼各拉女校，华文程度还维持一定水平。她说，当时她华文科的成绩甚至还比英文好，不过后来因为接触较多主要讲英语的朋友，所以渐渐跟华文疏远了。

“当时我结交一些当DJ的朋友，他们都讲英语，我为了融入他们的圈子，便学习他们‘红毛派’的作风。一直到后来签约当歌手，需要使用华语时，我才发现自己的华语简直不行，我还因此问唱片公司他们是否确定想要跟我签约。”

蔡健雅坦承，刚出道的首几年，她学华语学得很辛苦。“那种无法用华文书写、用华语沟通的感觉真的很难受。”

有一次，她在台湾接受电台DJ访问时就因为词不达意而闹笑话。当时，对方结束访问后盛意拳拳拿出一件棉袄送她，她原本想礼貌回应对方说“*Oh, you shouldn't have!*”（你太客气了的意思）。不过她却错将这句话用华语直译为“你不应该”，结果对方听了有点不知所措，场面尴尬。事后，经她的同事指出她的失误，她才恍然发现自己失礼了。

为了学好华语，以发展自己的华语歌唱事业，她决心让自己完全沉浸在一个讲华语的环境，于是在2006年移居台湾。

“我既然选择要当一名华语歌手，我就有必要掌握如何用华语对话或书写。”

经过一番努力，她重新掌握了华语，这也让她能够从一名歌手发展成为全方位音乐人。她说：“能够说华语为我带来不同的工作机会，让我能够为歌曲填词、自由表达自己的想法，这对我来说很重要。”

为了鼓励年轻人掌握华语，推广华语理事会于2003年邀请蔡健雅担任讲华语运动电视宣传片的主角，让她与国人分享她重新学习华语的经验，以传达“能用华语是福气，别失去”的信息。

“我希望能以自己的经验，鼓励一些人从不同的角度看待华文华语。我觉得能说华语是很酷的一件事，而我也为自己能以中英语与他人沟通感到自豪。”



本地知名音乐人蔡健雅重新掌握华语后在华语乐坛绽放光芒。她也是讲华语运动2003年的宣传大使。



张童琳

## 文化活动激发了我对华文华语的兴趣

**张**童琳在2010年第二届“华文?谁怕谁!”问答游戏大决赛中，与另一名学生组代表一起过关斩将，勇夺亚军荣誉；她在隔年乘胜追击再度参赛，这次还拉了弟弟一起来闯关。

虽然他们都进了决赛，她最终只拿到安慰奖，弟弟康霖却青

出于蓝，获得了亚军，而且这名当时年仅13岁的小男生，还是历届决赛中年龄最轻的参赛者。

这对姐弟对中华文化、语文和历史的认识让人刮目相看，与姐姐张童琳做了访问后得出的结论是：他们姐弟之所以有这样文化素养，跟他们的成长背景有很大的关系。

张童琳（18岁）透露，他们自小便有机会接触各式各样的文化活动，这让他们跟华文结下了不解之缘。

以她的情况为例，她在念幼稚园时，她父母就让她参加华语演艺班，这激发了她对华文华语的兴趣。

她在小学三年级那年也开始学习书法，从习字过程中认识中国文字之美，学习欣赏古诗词的优雅意境。到了小五那年，她还报名参加华语广播班，培养用华语表达的自信。

这些跟华文华语相关的课外辅助活动可以说是占满了她的童年，对于参加这些活动，她一点都不抗拒，反而乐在其中。

“这些好玩有趣的活动，让我自小就对华文华语产生好感，也激发了我的兴趣，让我想要去进一步去认识中华文化。相信是因为这个缘故，所以我感觉自己学习华文华语的过程十分轻松自然，从来都不觉得学华语很难。”

在访问过程中，张童琳不单能用流利的华语表达自己的想法，也能轻松转换英语作答。谈到她能轻松驾驭中英双语的能力，张童琳说，这都是她父母的功劳。

她父亲是国立大学的兼职讲师，有时也到中国授课。母亲则在小学担任英语和数学老师，她父母一直致力于为她 and 弟弟和妹妹三人营造有利学习中英双语的环境，而在他们小时候给他们参加各种华语课外活动，就是为了确保他们不会忽略母语的学习。

也多亏父母当年为她打下的良好双语基础，张童琳现在才有能力，自由穿梭于中西文化世界进行探索。

目前在德明政府中学直通车课程念高二的张童琳，因成绩优秀而获选参加教育部特设的双文化课程，有机会修读中国通识深广课，这门课也让她对中国时事课题有了进一步的了解。在2013年，她还随校方主办的浸濡团，到中国北京和上海学习长

**“这些好玩有趣的活动，让我自小就对华文华语产生好感，也激发了我的兴趣，让我想要去进一步去认识中华文化。相信是因为这个缘故，所以我感觉自己学习华文华语的过程十分轻松自然，从来都不觉得学华语很难。”**



达一个月。张童琳自小到大一直都对华文华语以及中华文化感兴趣。她当初也是因为这份兴趣，而参加“华文?谁怕谁!”问答游戏。

张童琳记得她第一次参加这项游戏时她念中二。当时主办单位在校园内做了不少宣传，在她印象中，那些印有题目的海报设计十分吸引人，加上问题很有趣，所以她和周围一些同学纷纷报名参加。

主办单位当时每星期都会出十道选择题让学生上网作答，出过的题目就包括：歇后语“矮子坐高凳”的下一句是什么？纸币的使用最早出现在中国哪个朝代？

当时张童琳和弟弟每个星期都积极上网找答案，比赛看谁能最快为所有问题解答。她没料到自己后来竟然能打入总决赛，上电视与其他决赛参赛者较劲。

她认为，这些参赛经验不仅有助提升她的华语水平，也让她增进了不少知识。

她认为推广华语理事会或许可以多主办这类好玩又有趣的活  
动，以鼓励更多生长在讲英语环境的年轻一代，对华文华语  
感兴趣。



张童琳在2010年“华文?谁怕谁!”问答游戏大决赛中与另一位学生搭档赖昌耀（左一）一路过关斩将，最后夺下亚军。



王立宁

## 自小心中便种下华文的种子

**王**立宁在她升上初院的那一年，经历了在她看来是她求学生涯中最大的一场“文化冲击”。

她第一次接触在纯英语环境中长大的华族同学，这些同学自小对于华语没有好感，因此也不太会说华语，所以当他

们听到王立宁在班上以华语发表看法时，作出很大的反应：“哇，你竟然能说这么流利的华语！”

同学的这番反应听起来像是对她语文能力的一种赞赏，但是却也让她感觉自己因为华语能力较强，而成了班上的“异



类”。这是她自小学到中学从未有过的经历。

这是因为土生土长的王立宁（21岁）自小就读于相对较重视华文华语的学校，小学念公立培群学校、中学念圣尼各拉女校。在校内校外，她和同学都习惯用华语交谈，从不觉得用华语来表达想法是一件难事。

在课堂上，老师要他们学唐诗、背诵《满江红》，他们也习以为常，不会有半点怨言，同学之间甚至还会在私底下较劲，看谁能最快熟背这些诗词。

由于已经习惯在这样的语言环境中学习，也难怪她转入维多利亚初级学院念直通车课程、接触来自不同学习背景的同学时，会感觉无所适从。

她为了接触更多跟自己一样热爱华文华语的朋友，便报名参加新加坡报业控股属下的联合学生通讯员俱乐部，从中认识了不少志同道合的学生通讯员，一起为学生专刊撰写文章。

她当时有感而发，在学生报《逗号》撰写了一篇题为“华人，你为什么不讲华语？”的专题，针对这个课题访问了多名学生与家长，尝试了解他们不讲华语的理由。

其中一位受访的学生是她的堂弟。她的堂弟告诉她，他跟许多他身边的同学一样，觉得单是要学好一种语言已经不容易了，他们自认无法同时掌握中英两种语言，加上考虑到新加坡是以英语为主要工作语言，所以他们决定选英弃中。

王立宁说：“我这才发现，在现实生活中、我的生活圈子以外，原来有不少人因为觉得华文难学或是学华文没用，而讨厌华文。我庆幸自己过去就读的学校，给我提供有利学习华语的环境，这让我自小就对华文有好感。”

王立宁还记得，她念小学时陈经源担任校长，这名学生口中的“老校长”非常注重华文教育，规定每名学生都必须购买一本图文并茂的唐诗选，而且还要求所有学生熟背里头的36首唐诗，让他们透过诗句认识文字之美。

她念小四那一年，华文老师为了让华文课更有趣，便教导他们背诵《满江红》，然后在课堂上让他们默写。除此以外，老师也在上周会（assembly）时，教学生背诵台湾艺人卜学亮演唱的《子曰》。王立宁说，后来她在中学上中华文学与历史课时，老师也引用《子曰》这首歌来跟他们讲解孔子和论语，而且还利用歌词给他们做填充作业，她也因此更好地理解小时候琅琅上口的歌词背后的道理。



身为学生通讯员的王立宁曾在学生报《逗号》撰写文章，探讨学生和家長不讲华语的原因。



**“在现实生活中、我的生活圈子以外，原来有不少人因为觉得华文难学或是学华文没用，而讨厌华文。我庆幸自己过去就读的学校，给我提供有利学习华语的环境，这让我自小就对华文有好感。”**

王立宁也参加过学校跟华初（现称华侨中学高中部）母语部语言特选课程联合主办的“小小作家培训计划”，在华初高中学长的指导下学习如何创作。

王立宁说：“印象最深刻的是他们引用了台湾歌手欧得洋演唱的歌曲、著名作词人方文山创作的歌词，来教导我们不同的写作手法。我还记得，当时他们用了欧得洋演唱、Benny C作词及方文良作曲的《孤单北半球》里那句‘看我的问候骑着魔毯’，以及由陈静楠作词的那首《咻咻咻》中，那句‘街边路灯一整排低着头为谁默哀’来解释写作时可运用的拟人手法，这类活动激发我用华文创作的兴趣。”

培群不单为她打下扎实的华文基础，也向她灌输了正确的传统价值观。她说，她透过小学的校歌和学生誓约认识到什么

叫做“礼义廉耻”，陈经源校长也经常提醒他们要懂得饮水思源，这些教诲她至今仍谨记在心，她从小学毕业后偶尔还会回母校探望师长，她也时时提醒自己，“要待人有礼、做人要讲义气、要诚实、要虚心学习不耻下问”。

要让年轻一代对华文华语产生兴趣，学校环境很重要，不过同等重要的是父母在家里给孩子营造的语言环境。

以王立宁为例，她母亲是华文老师、父亲是工程经理，父母两人在家中主要用华语与她 and 妹妹交谈，这让她从小就对华语有亲切感。另外加上她母亲爱听华文流行歌曲，也允许她收看本地电视连续剧以及中国和台湾的偶像剧，因此她有机会从流行文化中学好华文华语。

谈到她所熟悉的华文流行歌曲，她如数家珍：“如果按照时间顺序来看，我最先是跟着妈妈一起听周华健的歌，后来在我四五岁那年开始听阿牛陈庆祥以及苏慧伦的歌曲，上小学后喜欢S.H.E，中一去了台湾之后开始听五月天的歌。”

她看过的本地和海外连续剧更是多不胜数，无论是由本地电视台制作的《出路》、《豆腐街》、《敢敢做个开心人》，还是中港台制作的偶像剧和连续剧如《我可能不会爱你》、《步步惊心》、《冲上云霄II》等她都爱看。

王立宁目前在国大医学院念医科三年级，日后准备朝医疗领域发展。回望自己过去学习华文华语的过程，她有很大的满足感，也庆幸自己具备讲华语的能力，因为这将能让她日后在行医时，更好地与讲华语的病人沟通。



林瑛鸿和林瑛润医生

## 受孩子启发 学习领略古典文学之美

**那**些仍在苦思如何让孩子对中华华语感兴趣的父母，相信会对耳鼻喉专科顾问林瑛润医生的育儿经验大表羡慕。

林瑛润医生育有两个儿子庄嘉宇（8岁）和庄嘉昊（7岁）。长子庄嘉宇在他四岁那年，在逛大众书局时，突然对书架上

的《三字经》感兴趣。他要求父母让他把这套书买回家后，还自己动手把随书附赠的光碟反复播放来看，借助字幕完整地背下三字经全文。

背完1500多字的三字经后，他从书籍的封套上看到同个系

列中还有其他古文丛书如《弟子规》、《千字文》、《百家姓》等，于是便要求父母给他买，后来他也逐一把这些古文熟背如流。

看到年幼的儿子对这些古典读物如此感兴趣，而且还自发自动熟读内容，林瑛润医生最初的反应是：太奇怪了。这是因为她本身从没有读过这些古典作品，家里长辈也没有向她儿子介绍过这些书籍，他为何会对这些古文感兴趣令她百思不解。

不过无论如何，庄嘉宇阅读古典作品的兴趣，倒是在他们家中掀起了一阵“古文热”。不单他弟弟庄嘉昊以及表哥梁忠安（9岁）开始跟着他看光碟、背诵三字经，林瑛润医生笑说，就连她自己以及她的双胞胎姐姐、内科和心脏专科顾问林瑛鸿医生也受到启发，开始接触古典名著。

相对于许多无法让孩子对学习华文感兴趣的本地家长，林瑛

润和林瑛鸿医生帮助孩子学习华文的过程算是相当顺利的，这一方面是因为她们的孩子学习动力强，但是更重要的是，身为家长的她们，一直都抱着积极的态度，为孩子营造有利学习华文华语的环境。

林瑛润医生指出，她周围不少朋友都有先入为主的观念，认为华文华语难学，这导致他们的孩子自小就对华文持有偏见，甚至对华文感到反感，这自然导致孩子长大后失去学习华文的意愿。

林瑛鸿医生也赞同这一点：“这就跟鼓励孩子多吃蔬菜一样，要是你打从一开始就让他知道你自己不喜欢吃菜，不过却表示希望他多吃菜，他又怎么可能会对蔬菜有好感呢？相反的，要是你从小就告诉孩子你爱吃菜，孩子自然而然也会受到你的影响。”

以她们的情况为例，为了让孩子感觉会讲华语是再自然不过

**林瑛润医生指出，她周围不少朋友都有先入为主的观念，认为华文华语难学，这导致他们的孩子自小就对华文持有偏见，甚至对华文感到反感，这自然导致孩子长大后失去学习华文的意愿。**



**“我们根本没有刻意去学华语，因为一直都沉浸在华语的环境，全家人都是用华语沟通。”**

的事，她们在家中坚持用华语跟孩子交谈，她们的丈夫则因为习惯，通常选择用英语跟孩子沟通。

林瑛鸿医生透露，她是直到儿子梁忠安在两年前入小学之后，才开始也用英语与他交谈，不过她发现，也许因为学校的主要用语是英语，她孩子的华语在他升学后似乎有退步的迹象。

这也是为何她们积极让孩子接触不同的华文辅助教材，书房中除了有《三国演义》、《水浒传》、《西游记》、《红楼梦》等由四大名著改编而成的漫画书，也有多种多媒体华文教材，她们善于利用这些轻松有趣的教材，来维持孩子对学习华文华语的兴趣。

林瑛润医生指出：“那些多媒体教材对孩子有很大的吸引力，他们可以播放光碟来看，通过看动画片来学华文。另外，孩子们也对一些从iPad下载的互动式华文程序感兴趣。”

不仅如此，这对双胞胎姐妹也积极从生活中给孩子制造各种学习华文的机会。

林瑛鸿医生不久前刚带儿子到罗马旅行，出发前，她特地带他到图书馆借阅中文的旅游指南，借机会让他认识旅游景点的中文名称。她指出，她儿子相当依赖汉语拼音来阅读中文刊物，她当时刻意让孩子翻阅没有给内容配上注音的旅游指南，以推动他学习生字新词。

林瑛鸿和林瑛润医生之所以落尽心思，给孩子打造有利学习华文的环境，是因为她们当年也是在耳濡目染的情况下掌握华语。

她们出身书香世家，父亲林丰贵是一名教师，在公教中学教导文史地理长达40多年，桃李满天下；外婆郭昌鹤则是一位名声显赫的学者，也是中国国民党高官，她当年因为国共战争而逃到新加坡落户，曾在中正中学执教。不过对她们影响最大的是她们的母亲张绿漪。林瑛润医生说，她母亲是一名典型的教育家，非常重视她们姐妹俩的教育，若不是母亲的用心栽培，她们也无法像现在这样精通双语。

她们两人当年在文化氛围浓厚的家庭中长大，家人之间的话题主要围绕文化艺术，而且有好些知名艺术家、书法家跟她



双胞胎姐妹林瑛鸿和林瑛润医生认为家长应该抱着积极的态度以营造一个有利于孩子学习华文华语的环境。

们家是世交，也因为长时间沉浸在这样的环境，所以她们自小便打下扎实的华文基础。

林瑛润医生指出，小时候，在家里讲华语是最自然不过的事，她们都是在潜移默化中掌握这个语言。“我们根本没有刻意去学华语，因为一直都沉浸在华语的环境，全家人都是用华语沟通。”

她们的外婆郭昌鹤当年原本给她们报读华文背景浓厚的南洋小学，不过她们的父母亲因为考虑到她们的华文根基已经够强，为确保她们能够平衡掌握中英双语，于是改而为她们报读天主教嘉诺撒仁爱会小学（Canossa Convent Primary School）。姐妹两人后来升上新加坡女子学校念中学。

虽然她们在升学的过程中，跟华文华语接触的机会减少了，但是由于她们自小已建立起一定的华文根基，因此她们一直都保持使用华文华语的能力。

林瑛鸿医生指出，她有时会受邀到中国施手术，若需要用华语发表跟她的专科相关的演讲，她也胜任有余。

回顾她们学习华文华语的过程，当年修读英国文学的林瑛润医生说，她们姐妹俩唯一的遗憾是念书时没有接触中国古典文学，没有更早地认识到古典文学中所蕴含的丰富思想文化。

不过她们决心不再遗憾下去，姐姐林瑛鸿医生不久前刚买了一套古典小说《三国演义》，两人准备好好“进补”，一起领略古典文学名著的精华。





杨君伟

## 推广华语 一项逆流而上的工作

**华**语和英语都说得十分流利的杨君伟，是本地少有的双语主持人，不少大型活动上都经常可以看到他的身影。

无论是用华语主持影坛巨星刘德华主演电影《盲探》在新加坡的首映礼，还是用英语主持CNBC财经台在本地与其他机

构协办的大型研讨会，他都胜任有余。他在舞台上自然又富有自信的表现，让人不得不佩服他轻松驾驭中英两种语言的能力。

不说不知，这名知名的跨界媒体人小时候较常接触的语言倒



不是华语，而是马来语。

这是因为他父母亲都出外工作，一个星期五天把他交给马来保姆照顾，他几乎每天跟马来以及印度玩伴玩在一起，所以直到上幼稚园之前，他都不太会说华语。

杨君伟的父母都是传统华校生，在家里主要用华语和广东话与他沟通。他上幼稚园时，正好碰上政府开始推行讲华语运动，他父母倒没有因此要他少讲广东话，反而是他们的亲戚主动顺应时势作出改变，改用华语与他们交谈。

当时令他印象最深刻的转变，是电视连续剧里头的角色都“变音”了。他说：“我当时还没意识到电视台禁播方言节目，只是感到奇怪，为什么周润发和郑裕玲的声音变了，而且还变得这么不自然又生硬？”

跟当时许多华文教育背景出身的家长一样，杨君伟的父母也

因为担心儿子无法掌握英语，而选择把他送入英校上课，结果他在英华从小学一路升上初院，在这个非常传统的英校完成了他的本地教育。

他后来还到美国深造，念大众传播。在那段留美的日子，他沉浸在一个纯英语的环境。以英语进行讨论和思考，他游刃有余，不过他始终还是觉得华语是最能表达他内心深处想法的语言。

“我觉得华语更贴近思考。写作成了我工作的很大一部分之后，我还是觉得用华文来写作让我感觉更舒服。”

这些年来，杨君伟除了为《联合早报》、时尚杂志写专栏，也经常在他的“伟所欲为”博客上（[blog.omy.sg/dannyyeo](http://blog.omy.sg/dannyyeo)）分享他对一些课题的看法。

身为文化人，他一直都十分关注本地华文教育课题。

**“我觉得华语更贴近思考。写作成了我工作的很大一部分之后，我还是觉得用华文来写作让我感觉更舒服。”**

令人印象深刻的是他在2010年跟一群文化界名人发起的联署请愿活动，当时不少关注本地华文教育的民众在他们的号召下聚集芳林公园，要求政府不要减少母语在小六会考总分中的比重。

另外，杨君伟于2012年在《早报星期天》想法版发表的一篇文章为《燃烧吧，华文!》的专栏，也引起了很大的反响。

他在这篇专栏中，借由友人的女儿在完成华文会考后，效仿秦始皇焚书，把华文课本烧掉以发泄她们痛恨华文，带出本地不少学生学习华语的态度，以及华文教学所面对的问题。

杨君伟曾经在义安理工学院人文学院中文系担任讲师，在校园内亲身感受到许多学生对华文华语所持有的轻视态度。

“我能够感受到我的学生所面对的质疑和压力。只要你是中文系的学生，人们都会有‘你读这科有什么用?’或‘以后能找到什么样的工作?’之类的疑问。”

他还记得，当时第一批报读中文系的学生，经常要忍受英文系学生的白眼。

杨君伟说：“英文媒体系的学生觉得自己高人一等，看不起中文系的学生。不过让英文媒体系学生意料不到的是，两年后，当我们派学生到企业去实习的时候，老板们都宁愿选择中文系的学生。”

原来，这些企业老板考虑到所有学生其实都是英文教育制度

出身，而中文系的学生而还兼具能用华文说写的能力，所以偏向雇用他们来实习，由此可见，掌握中英双语的学生占有一定优势。

杨君伟在2006年受邀担任推广华语理事会委员，为讲华语运动的主题和活动出点子，他的任期在2011年结束。

在推广华语理事会服务的这段时间，让他深切体会“在本地推广华语是一项很艰苦的工作，有点像逆流而上的鱼”。

不过他也指出，他在与前任主席林少芬合作时，参与感很强，也有机会亲自上阵主持“华文?谁怕谁!”问答比赛，这让他有很大满足感。

他认为，随着讲英语的家庭越来越多，年轻一代对华文华语缺乏好感，讲华语运动接下来要面临的挑战更为艰巨。

他认为推广华语理事会不应该只着重主办活动，同时也应该好好思考要如何通过潜移默化的方式，改变国人对华文华语的态度，甚至可以考虑鼓励更多政治领袖，在公开场合多讲华语，借以提升讲华语的形象。



杨君伟在义安理工学院就任中文系讲师时发现，企业在英文媒体系和中文系的学生之间偏向选择聘用中文系学生当实习生。由此可见，掌握中英双语的学生占有一定优势。

**在推广华语理事会服务的这段时间，让他深切体会“在本地推广华语是一项很艰苦的工作，有点像逆流而上的鱼”。**





讲华语运动：立足现在，展望未来



**讲** 华语运动从1979年推展至今已有35年，可以说是新加坡最“长寿”的全国运动之一。

这项运动实行这么多年来仍年年推行，除了彰显政府对华族人掌握母语的坚持，也说明这项运动的任务尚未达成，因此还不能“功成身退”。

上一届推广华语理事会主席林少芬及新加坡华文教研中心副院长、南洋理工大学助理教授陈志锐双双都表示：“如果有一天我们不再需要讲华语运动，那才代表我们成功了。”

当年由建国总理李光耀掀开序幕的讲华语运动最初主要有两大目标：即让不同方言社群拥有共同的沟通语言，以及鼓励华族人掌握母语以传承传统华族文化价值观。

事实上，讲华语运动在推行十年后，就已达到鼓励华族人用华语取代方言的第一个目标。

根据政府当时公布的调查数据，来自讲方言家庭的华族小一生，从1980年的64.4%下降至1989年的7.2%；而在巴刹和小贩中心用华语与顾客对谈的小贩，也从1979年的1.2%增至1989年的21.9%。

## 目前的挑战

讲华语运动虽然成功地使华语更为普及，不过英语也快速成为年轻新加坡人习惯使用的语言。

这是因为在英语为主、母语为辅的双语教育政策下，不少华

族家长因考虑到英语的实用性高，而选择在家中跟孩子讲英语，这导致英语逐渐成为越来越多华族家庭的主要用语。

教育部在2010年对华族小六生展开的一项调查发现，来自主要讲英语家庭的学生所占比例，已超出讲华语家庭的学生。

接受调查的华族小六生中，有38%在家中以英语为主要沟通语，这比来自讲华语家庭的小六生多了一个百分点。其余的华族小六生则是在家里华语和英语并用。

在这样一个背景下，要如何向这些讲英语长大的华族新加坡人推广华语、提升他们的华文水平，从而达到传承传统华族价值观的第二个目标，这是讲华语运动这些年来所一直面对的最大挑战。

陈志锐观察到，现在就算是在一些有较浓厚华文背景的学校，学生之间都主要以英语对谈。他发现到：“就连中国学生也跟本地学生讲英语，本地学生即使选择用华语跟中国同学交谈，他们的中国同学也宁可用英语回答。”

除此以外，年轻新加坡人的华文程度和学习意愿江河日下的情况，也令关注本地华文华语前景者感到担忧。

新加坡银行行政总裁办公室，环球业务管理部主管梁炜宁指出，她跟朋友的孩子用华语交谈时，他一个句子里面就掺杂了不少英语，于是她建议他用英语回答，不过没想到他竟然也无法用正统英语说出一个完整的句子。





建国总理李光耀2011年捐款设立“李光耀双语基金”，为本地学前幼儿教育设计母语和英语教材，让新加坡儿童从小把双语学好。

梁炜宁说：“很多孩子都是这样。我不知道我们的环境究竟出了什么问题，为什么会这样？难道年轻人觉得这是很‘酷’的事？在对话中用些中文、加些英文，最后搞得只有我们新加坡人听得懂，这是值得骄傲的事吗？”

面对学生学习华语的兴趣不高，华语程度低落的情况，不少学校和教师不得不从校外寻求援助，希望透过其他新鲜有趣的学习方式，改变华族学生学习华语的心态。

实践剧场艺术总监郭践红指出，不少学校就借由推广华文学习委员会“文化随意门”计划提供的拨款，安排学生走入剧场观看华文文化表演。

郭践红指出：“若学校纯粹只是借此扩大原有华文教学的方法和范围，这绝对是好事，但是这也可能是因为学校已黔驴技穷了，只好通过这种方式，尝试引起学生学习华语的兴趣。我当然希望学校带学生走进剧场的原因是因为前者而非后者，不过老实说，我相信一些学校确实是因为已无计可施，所以找我们合作。”

## 如何提升年轻人学习华语的兴趣

推广华语理事会清楚意识到有这样的情况，这也是为何过去这些年来，该理事会积极构思和设计具时代感的主题，以及新鲜有趣的活动，以提高年轻华族国人对学习和使用华语的兴趣。

从近年来推出的宣传口号，如2004年的“能用华语是福气，别失去”、2005年的“华语Cool！”，以及2009年的“华文？谁怕谁！”不难看出，推广华语理事会把宣导对象锁定在双语教育下成长的年轻一代。

推广华语理事会这些年来就作出了各种不同尝试，以确保讲华语运动对年轻新加坡人保有吸引力。

在2006年至2008年期间担任推广华语理事会主席的陈继贤，当年就以电影、流行歌曲等通俗文化，尝试吸引来自讲英语背景的年轻华族国人走进华文世界。

上一届主席林少芬则是通过“华文？谁怕谁！”问答游戏挑

**“我觉得这项一年一度的运动至少可以发挥一定的提醒作用，提高人们重拾华语的机会。只要每十人当中，有一两人会因讲华语运动而对学华语改观，那我想它就有继续存在的价值。”——陈继贤**



战国人的常识，让国人在寻找答案的过程中，感受中华文化的博大精深，深化他们对华文华语的认识。

考虑到年轻一代热衷于使用新媒体、新科技，现任主席萧作鸣选择投其所好，为智能手机使用者推出免费应用程序“iHuayu”，方便他们随时随地学习华文华语。

在新加坡媒体发展管理局担任助理营运局长、历届推广华语理事会主席陈继贤看来，已推行35年的讲华语运动到今时今日还是有它存在的价值。

陈继贤说：“你能否想象没有讲华语运动的后果？假设这项运动走入历史，对于那些生活或工作环境中没有机会

接触华语、周围只有洋派朋友的人来说，他们将会在初级学院一年级甚至中四完成最后一轮华文考试后，就此与华语绝缘。”

他认为：“我觉得这项一年一度的运动至少可以发挥一定的提醒作用，提高人们重拾华语的机会。只要每十人当中，有一两人会因讲华语运动而对学华语改观，那我想它就有继续存在的价值。”

## 未来方向：让华语成为生活语言

展望未来，多数受访者都强调，要帮助年轻新加坡人更好地掌握华文华语，最重要还是要让华语成为他们的生活语言，而不是一个只有在他们上华文课时才运用的语言。



新加坡华文教研中心副院长、南洋理工大学助理教授陈志锐提到，要让学生对一个语言感兴趣，可以应用文学教材，让学生认识文化背后的意思、背景和魅力。（图片来源：陈志锐）

陈志锐指出：“这要单靠讲华语运动是不够的。孩子不应该感觉讲华语是需要很刻意做的一件事，反而应该是很自然的。”

在他看来，要做到这一点，家长扮演着最重要的角色。

陈志锐指出，这是因为孩子成长的首六年是学习语言的黄金期，若家长能自小就给孩子营造有利学习双语的环境，为他们打下良好的双语基础，这将有助孩子日后更轻松地掌握中英双语。

育有三个女儿的陈志锐，本身就在家中实行“一个家长，一种语言”的教学法：他在家中只跟孩子讲华语，而太太则专讲英语。



他说：“有时孩子会直接用英语问我问题，我会跟她说我听不懂，所以她就必须想办法用中文来跟我解释。她在这个思考和翻译的过程中，语文就形成了。”

陈志锐笑说，她的长女是到五岁左右，才知道原来爸爸也会说英语，不过由于她已经形成跟爸爸说华语的习惯，所以她到现在还是继续用华语跟他沟通。

## 学校也致力改善华文教学法

除了鼓励家长尽量在家里制造更多讲华语的机会，学校方面多年来也一直不遗余力，提升和改善学习华文华语的方式。

多年来从事语言教学研究、负责教导职前和在职华文教师的陈志锐指出，这几年他们大力推动的华文教学法，着重于为学生制造真实语境，如模拟在餐馆用中文点菜的情况，让语言更紧密地跟学生的生活有所连接。

他说，采用真实性语料教学，虽然有助加强学生的口语，但是他却也担心教师在教学中过度强调口语互动，而忽略给予学生文学的养分。

他认为，要让学生对一个语言感兴趣，采用具文学性的教材很重要，教师不应该认为学生的程度还不达某种水平，而不敢选用文学教材。

事实上，他过去的教学经验显示，很多时候，反而是这些生活实用性不高的故事和文学教材，能让学生喜欢上这个语文，这也是为何他个人向来坚持要用文学来帮助教学。

陈志锐举例说，他当年在华侨中学高中部任教时，曾教导全校华文最弱的人文特选课程学生。

他还记得，当他要求学生用华语做自我介绍，并给这些学生提供简单的华文教材时，学生都感觉华文课枯燥乏味，相反的，当他以翻译的方式给学生介绍中国最早的诗歌总集《诗经》时，学生反而都睁大眼睛专心听讲。

他说，其中一名后来负笈海外、回国后当英文教师的学生，在毕业多年后还特地跑来向他道谢，这名学生告诉他，当年在课堂上学到的那些诗文令他印象深刻，也让他首次领略到中华文化之美。

陈志锐认为：“语文水平和文化深度应该是不一样的……每一个人都希望得到文化的滋养，希望了解文化背后的意思。很多人觉得这些学生（的华文程度不够高）不可能理解内容，但是他可能会在长大后发现文化背后的精彩。假如我们能在学校给他接触这些内容，为什么不要呢？”

不过他也认为，要激发学生掌握华文华语的兴趣，教师必须不断增强自己的素养，这也是为何华文教研中心积极推出不同课程，供华文教师进修，以增进教师们对语文、文化和历史的认识。

“我们这几年发现，老师喜欢上的课主要跟教学法有关，因为他们上了课回去后，马上可以学以致用，但是教学法只是一种手段、一种操作，内容是什么，要看你的素养。你必须提高你的素养，你用这些东西时才能得心应手。”

他指出：“我可以教你很多教学法，可是当你在实际教学的时候，若你不能举一反三，没办法立刻讲一个很有趣的故事、一段历史，或是一个传统或文化事件，你很难吸引学生的注意，因为往往学生记住的不是你的教学法，而是你说过的有趣的故事。”

## 营造讲华语的氛围

较令他感到担心的是，社会上讲华语的风气似乎越来越淡，这对鼓励年轻一代新加坡人掌握华文华语不利。

不过随着中国快速崛起，华语的商用价值提高，外国人都纷纷开始学习华文华语，他相信这个趋势会对务实的新加坡人产生一定的“刺激作用”。



华文教学法着重为学生制造真实语境，并营造一个能以华语沟通的氛围。

历届推广华语理事会主席陈继贤则认为，中国新移民的出现，或许也有助于提升国人的华语水平。

他说：“现在我们周围有很多习惯讲华语的人，无论是搭乘电梯或地铁、在食阁买食物或是与来自中国的家长一起出席学校的家长会，我们都应该尽量利用这个机会练习华语。”

## 改变年轻人对华文华语的负面印象

在一些受访者看来，要吸引年轻新加坡人学习华语，或许还有必要进一步改变年轻人觉得华文华语“俗气”的印象。

知名广告人、历届推广华语理事会主席林少芬指出：“很多人都觉得学华文不是一件很光彩的事情，凡事跟华文有关的事都不是很好看：农历新年就咚咚锵，丑得不能再丑。当你看到这种东西的时候，你自然不想跟它牵扯在一起，因为‘不酷’。如果我们要改变整个学华文的环境，就应该让年轻一代看到很精致的华文文化，这样他们就会被吸引。这就是为什么很多人哈日、很崇拜日本文化，因为他们在日本文化中看到很精致、很美丽的东西。”

林少芬指出，像台湾就让人看到很精致的华文文化，如24小时营业的诚品书店、誉为全球最美图书馆之一的北投图书馆等。

她认为，人们都会被高贵、精致的文化所吸引，因此，若我国的教育体系能多向学生强调华文之美，这或许有助于引起学生学习华文华语的兴趣。



访教育部长王瑞杰

访问：陈能端（联合早报） 摄影：何家俊（联合早报）

## 学华语的价值是掌握华族文化的价值观

### 1 可否先谈谈您个人对讲华语运动的印象？

早期我就记得“多讲华语，少说方言”这个口号，当时我的祖母还（用福建话）问“讲什么？不知道”。

这是在早期，过后还有“华人华语”的标语，我对那个标语的印象就比较深。几年前，当我还在金融管理局时，罗杰斯

（Jim Rogers，美国著名投资家）正在考虑是否要把全家迁到新加坡、中国上海或香港，因为他想让女儿学习华语。刚好他来新加坡，我有机会见到他。我就把金融管理局为配合讲华语运动制作的便利贴送给他。罗杰斯看到便利贴就很惊讶，他觉得我们对学习华语非常认真，还展开推广华语的运动。我回答他说：“是啊，金融管理局也推动这个项目。”



过后，罗杰斯自己做进一步的资料收集，最终决定搬来新加坡，因为他觉得新加坡是一个学习双语非常好的地方。

最近，我就问他他是否觉得来新加坡是个正确的决定，他说：“当然。”

所以谈到推广华语的运动，或许有些新加坡人会觉得我们还可以做得更多，但整体而言，和其他国家相比，我们做的实在不少。

## 2 从更广的视角来看讲华语运动的历程，您觉得讲华语运动对新加坡社会的影响是什么？

我们应该从为何要推广母语教育和运用华语来讨论这个课题。我觉得最基本理由与目的是传承华族文化、华族传统和价值观的意识和认同。所以在推广华语方面，就是怎样促进整个华族社会来了解语言和文化传统价值观的关系。也就是说，这个运动对整个社会的影响是在文化层面的。

## 3 官方提倡“学华语”的论述随着时代的变迁、中国的崛起有些变化，在你看来，华族学华语的价值是什么？

学习华语的价值在于掌握本身的文化价值观。所以无论是50年前中国尚未崛起的时候或是50年后，这是持久不变的目标，而且以华族文化几千年的悠久历史，若要更好地了解这个文化传统，学习华语是很重要的。更何况，这是有几千年的历史的传统，不容易改变。中国现在经济的崛起会带来新的推动力，因为不论中国接下来如何发展，中国对整个国际的

经济和政治的影响是很大的。我们毕竟是个小国，而小国必须了解国际形势。如果我们能更好地了解中国民众和领导的思维、更好地了解他们社会的变迁，我们在拟定政策方面或跟中国发展经济或政治联系时，会有更好的效果。中国接下来的发展，对整个区域和新加坡影响会很大。若我们能更好地掌握华语，这将给新加坡和我们的国民带来一定的优势。现在学华文是有一定的经济和商业价值，但我相信接下来拥有这个能力的价值会超越这些方面。

## 4 虽然现在世界各地延烧学华语的热潮，但中国民众学英语的热忱一直都没有退过。一些人认为，其实即便是有意到中国发展的新加坡华族，并无需要太在意是否能讲华语，因为中国人以后普遍也能以英语沟通。您同意这样的看法吗？您可否以自己的工作经验谈谈掌握华语对您的帮助？

我不同意这样的看法。

第一，在中国虽然有学习英语的热忱，不过整个大环境并不十分利于学习英语，而我们知道大环境对学习语言是很重要的。相比之下，新加坡就有更多年的经历。在中国这样的大国，无论你到哪个城市，主要的语言还是华语，无论是在电视、报章或新媒体上。街头巷尾，大家都会讲华语。很多大国学习另一个语言是非常辛苦的，日本和韩国就是例子。中国的精英必定能够掌握双语，因为他们拥有高语言能力，也有很大的决心。但若要整个社会都能以双语沟通就不同了。

第二，我们的优势不在于只是能够用英语和华语，我们的优

势在于新加坡是一个多元种族、文化和语言的社会。以我自己的经历而言，我在贸工部和金融管理局的时候，会和很多国家商讨自由贸易协议或经济和金融合作项目。我不但到过中国、也到过印度、我们和亚细安和中东也有很多不同的项目。当时我们的官员都能很灵活地和其他国家的官员和商家讨论怎样合作、怎样把区域拉得更近一点。我们能做到这点不只是因为我们能讲双语，而是因为我们对于区域形势和文化交流的敏感度都相对较深。许多人也相当信任新加坡，这就是我们的优势。这个优势源自我们本身开放的态度，而我們也有这个能力了解不同族群的文化特点，所以我们跟其他国家打交道比较容易。

第三，我跟很多中国官员讨论时，他们的英语讲得非常好。比如我当时和中国中央领导谈到合作项目时，我们通常用英语，因为英语是国际语言。但我们吃饭谈到社会发展课题时，就用华语。虽然我们也能用英语交流，但那种亲切感是很不同的。我们很多商家都会有同样的经历。所以尽管现在中国有学习英语的热潮，新加坡也要保持我们的优势。

## 5 所以你刚才提到新加坡人的多元性也源自我们对语言的开放度？

对。所以我们说双语的政策中的（母语部分）不只是华语，还有马来语和淡米尔语。这是保持新加坡多元性的关键。我们要做的是既要广又要深。广是我们有共同的语言，我们不同的种族能灵活地沟通，建立交流平台。以深度而言，就是要培养我们的精英掌握良好的双文化涵养。所以这样一来，他们不仅能游走在双语之间，也是拥有多元文化意识的精英。

一个很好的例子是王赓武教授。他出生在印尼，曾经在马来西亚和新加坡度过成长时期，然后又到香港，而他对中国的文化历史有很深的了解。他在分析中国的课题时就包含西方和南洋的视角，所以他的学问比很多历史家深得多，因为他的视野不仅深且广。

## 6 除了华语的商业价值，对您而言，华文华语的魅力是什么？

就是这个语言的美感。虽然我现在没有什么时间阅读文学作品，但我求学时很喜欢看鲁迅的作品和散文。华文文字的含义不容易翻译，翻译过后很多时候含义是不同的。

## 7 和10年前的母语教育相比，现在的华文教育特点是什么？

我们近几年主要提倡华语活学活用，这是很重要的方针。你要语言有活力，活学活用很重要。我们不要华语成为西欧人学拉丁语文一样。除非你是专研历史或考古，拉丁文已经是一个不实用的语言。华语就不应该是这样的。强调活学活用是要让学生领悟到这是一个很有意义，很有用的语言，在生活中的运用是很重要的。以前我们只注重听说读写，现在我们也强调语言的互动，怎样和日常生活接轨。

我们也在教学方面下功夫，怎样使教材和教学更有趣味。这是很重要的，尤其对小学生而言。如果他们觉得学习这个语言是个有趣和快乐的事，就能容易上手。所以我们做的是不断探讨怎样使教材更灵活，使活动更生动有趣。

另外，我们近几年和接下来也会在学前教育方面更广泛地推



教育部长王瑞杰认为虽然世界各地延烧学华语和英语的热潮，新加坡的优势在于拥有较利于学习双语的大环境。另外，本地因为多元种族文化和语言的关系，国人拥有高文化敏感度，较容易与其它国家打交道。因此，国人应保持自己的双语优势。



**“为什么我们有这么多学生学习韩语和日语？因为他们受到韩国和日本流行文化的影响，是哈韩哈日一族。如果孩子觉得一个语言是有趣的语言，他可以听到好听的歌曲，看到好看的戏剧或电影，这会对整个学习的热忱起到事半功倍的效果。”**

动双语教育。在李光耀双语基金的资助下，我们最近出版了很多新的教学资源，而且都是相当有实验意义的。这是我和民众共同探讨的结果，看有什么更好地学习方式。例如我们看到报业控股华文集团推出的《小小拇指》，我本身觉得做得非常好。当孩子很小的时候就为他打下良好的基础，我觉得接下来学习就会比较容易。

不过，最终家庭和整个大环境也扮演重要的角色。我们也要鼓励家长在家里，如果他们有这个能力，跟孩子多讲华语。有些年轻的家长有比较好的双语基础，他们现在也有这样的意识。他们知道学习双语的重要性。再者，推动讲华语运动也有助于加强大环境，为学生和成人创造更多运用华语的机会。让他们能够多使用华语讨论课题、以华语参与艺术活动和欣赏文化展览及戏剧表演等。

**8 最新的母语检讨报告在2011年出炉，受报告影响的学生2016年之后陆续进入中**

**学、高中就读。所以您希望通过活学活用的策略培养他们有不断学习华语的热忱？**

对，所以这方面如果我们在学校给他们奠定良好的基础，希望他们过后也会有机会运用华语。在这方面，我们刚才谈到中国的崛起，中国在文化的发展方面也下了很多努力。所以接下来我们可能会看到更多的华文的文化产品。在很多中国城市，他们都在大力推广文化产业。为什么我们有这么多学生学习韩语和日语？因为他们受到韩国和日本流行文化的影响，是哈韩哈日一族。如果孩子觉得一个语言是有趣的语言，他可以听到好听的歌曲，看到好看的戏剧或电影，这会对整个学习的热忱起到事半功倍的效果。

你看台湾和香港的文化产业都做得不错，再看中国的市场这么大，所以它未来发展的潜力是不可估量的。

当然，我们自己在这方面也要多努力。例如郭践红（实践剧场艺术总监）最近就推出相当多的作品，这些都是很有利的趋势。

## 9 针对母语教育，教育部一向采取“保底不封顶”的政策。除了鼓励优秀的学生进入语特、双文化课程及参加更多的学校增益课程，教育部是否在探讨还能通过怎样的途径支援母语学习能力强的学生？

我们要通过不同的方式让他们有更深层的学习。例如华侨中学在北京有个卫星学校，我们要让学生到中国、台湾、香港等地浸濡。我们也有些语文和文化的特别学习营，这些都是非常好的一些活动。另一方面，宗乡会馆正在筹办华族文化中心，所以如果我们配合这样的发展举办更多有意义的活动，可以为学生创造多接触这个语言文化的机会，使他们能对自己的根有更深入的理解。我们的华文老师也很有热忱，所

以他们也会积极主办活动。如果我们能和社区多合作，做些规模较大的项目，将使整个大环境变得更有利。

## 10 政府一再重申双语教育是新加坡的基石，教育部近年来也更着重培养学生的听说能力，讲华语运动为何还需要存在？

其实两者有相辅相成的作用。我刚才不断提到大环境。讲华语运动不只是针对学生也面向整个新加坡的华族群体。例如有个时期，这个运动用“华语Cool”来做标语，鼓励惯于讲英语的人也多使用华语。如果能加强使用华语的环境，将协助教育部进一步落实活学活用的方针。

**“我们也在教学方面下功夫，怎样使教材和教学更有趣味。这是很重要的，尤其对小学生而言。如果他们觉得学习这个语言是个有趣和快乐的事，就能容易上手。所以我们做的是不断探讨怎样使教材更灵活，使活动更生动有趣。”**

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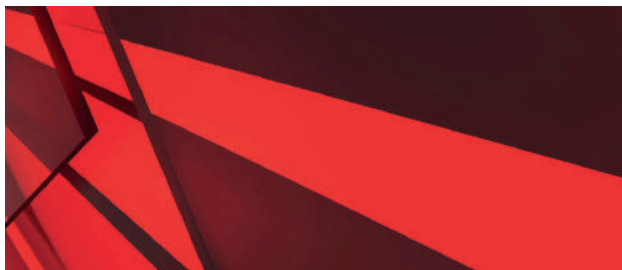
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**the language to take up the Chinese Language Elective Programme and bicultural courses, and to enrol in more enrichment courses in schools, is the Education Ministry also looking at other ways to support students with strong mother tongue abilities?**

We want them to learn more deeply through various ways. For instance, Hwa Chong Institution has set up a satellite campus in Beijing. We want our students to go to China, Taiwan and Hong Kong for immersion. We also have special learning camps for Chinese language and culture, and these are all very good activities. The Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations is in the midst of setting up the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre, and if we can organise more meaningful activities in conjunction with this development, we will be able to create more opportunities for students to be exposed to the Chinese language and culture, to enable them to gain a deeper understanding of their roots. Our Chinese language teachers are also very passionate about their work and will also actively organise activities. If we can work more closely with the

community to come up with projects that have a wider outreach, it will make our environment more conducive in the learning of Mandarin.

**10 The Government has reiterated many times that bilingualism is the cornerstone of our education system. In recent years, the Education Ministry has also focused on nurturing the ability of students to listen and speak Mandarin. Why then is there still a need for the Speak Mandarin Campaign?**

Our bilingual education and the Speak Mandarin Campaign complement each other. I talked quite a lot about the environment earlier. The Speak Mandarin Campaign is not only targeted at students but also the entire Chinese community here. At one time, the campaign slogan was “Mandarin Cool!”, which was aimed at encouraging English-speaking Chinese Singaporeans to speak Mandarin more often. If we could make the environment more conducive for using Mandarin, it will support the Ministry of Education in making Mandarin a living language for the students.



especially for primary school students. If they find learning Mandarin a fun and enjoyable experience, it will be easier for them to learn. Hence, what we are doing now is to think of ways to make teaching materials more engaging and learning more fun.

In recent years, we have also been promoting bilingual education more widely in pre-schools and will continue to do so going forward. Recently, with funding from the Lee Kuan Yew Fund for Bilingualism, we have developed several new teaching resources for pre-school children. These are the results that we and the community have worked together to achieve, as we seek out better learning methods. For instance, the Chinese Newspaper Division of the Singapore Press Holdings has launched “Thumbs Up Little Junior”, which I think is a good publication. If we are able to help our children lay a strong foundation for Mandarin at a young age, I think it will make their learning of the language easier.

In addition, the environment at home and in the larger society also play an important role. As such, we encourage parents, if they could, to use Mandarin more often at home. Some of the younger parents have a strong foundation in bilingualism, and they are also more mindful of the need to speak Mandarin to their children, as they understand the importance of bilingualism. Furthermore, the Speak Mandarin Campaign is also helpful in building an environment that is conducive to the learning and use of Mandarin and enable more people to participate in Chinese art events such as cultural exhibitions and theatre productions.

**8 The latest review committee report on mother tongue languages was released in 2011. From 2016,**

**affected students will be entering secondary schools and pre-university level. So you would hope to nurture and sustain their interest in learning Mandarin through this strategy to make Mandarin a living language for the students?**

That’s right. If we are able to give them a good foundation in school, it is hoped that they will have opportunities to continue using Mandarin later in life. We have just talked about the rise of China. China is making strenuous efforts in developing its cultural industry, so we should see more Chinese cultural products coming onto the market. Why are so many of our students learning Korean and Japanese? This is because they are influenced by the popular cultures of these countries. They are K-pop and J-pop fans. If a child finds a particular language interesting, and he can listen to nice music and watch good drama or movies in that language, it would be much easier to nurture a child’s passion in learning the language.

We see that Taiwan and Hong Kong are also doing well in their cultural industries. And China has such a huge market, so its development potential is immense.

Of course, we must also make greater efforts ourselves. For instance, Ms Kuo Jian Hong (Artistic Director of The Theatre Practice) has recently produced many works, and this is a very positive trend.

**9 With regard to mother tongue education, the Education Ministry has always adopted the policy of helping students attain as high a standard as they can. Besides encouraging students who have a flair for**

## **7 Compared with the teaching of mother tongue languages 10 years ago, what are the characteristics of teaching Mandarin now?**

In recent years, we have been focusing on developing students to become active learners and proficient users of Mandarin who can communicate effectively in real-life contexts. This is an important policy direction. If you want the language to be alive, it is important to make sure that it is used in our daily lives. In Western Europe, the Latin language is not a living language

unless you are a researcher in history or archaeology. The focus on Mandarin as a living language is to make students realise that this is a very meaningful and useful language and that it is very important to use it in their daily lives. In the past, we focused more on listening, speaking, reading and writing when teaching Mandarin, but now we are also emphasising the interactive aspect of the language, and how it can be used in daily life.

We are also making efforts to make teaching materials and learning more interesting and fun. This is very important,



Education Minister Heng Swee Keat (third from right) at a Thumbs Up Little Junior event. The Chinese publication is catered for lower primary students and can be used as a teaching resource.





Schools are using fun and interactive educational materials and approaches to teach Mandarin.

our various ethnic groups to communicate proficiently with one another. As for depth, I am talking about nurturing our talents to be strong in biculturalism. In this way, they will possess not only mastery of two languages but also a strong multi-cultural outlook.

A good example is Professor Wang Gungwu. He was born in Indonesia and grew up in Malaysia and Singapore, and later moved to Hong Kong. Professor Wang has a deep understanding of Chinese history and culture. And when he analyses issues pertaining to China, he would include Western

and Southeast Asian perspectives. His knowledge is therefore deeper as well as broader than many historians.

## **6** Apart from its commercial value, what is the draw of the Chinese language to you?

That would be the beauty of the language. Although I do not have time now to read literary works, I was very fond of the works and essays of Lu Xun when I was in school. Mandarin is not an easy language to translate from and the essence is often lost in translation.



**whether they are proficient in Mandarin, as soon it will be common for the Chinese to be able to communicate in English. Do you agree with such a view? Can you speak from your experience how your mastery of Mandarin has helped you?**

I do not agree with such a view for the following reasons:

First, while the Chinese people do possess a passion for learning English, the environment in the country might not be very conducive for that learning. We all know that the environment is important for learning languages. In comparison, Singapore has more years of experience in creating a supportive environment for bilingual learning. In a big country like China, no matter which city you are in, the dominant language is Mandarin, be it on television, in the newspapers and the new media. On the streets, wherever you go, everybody speaks Mandarin. In many big countries, learning another language takes tremendous effort, as seen in Japan and South Korea. Despite this, the elite in China will definitely be able to master two languages, given their high level of language ability and strong determination. But to expect most people in society to be bilingual, that's a very different matter.

Second, our edge lies not only in the ability to use both English and Mandarin, but also in the fact that we are a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-lingual society. Speaking from personal experience, during the time when I was with the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Monetary Authority of Singapore, I had to negotiate free trade agreements as well as discuss economic and financial cooperation projects with many countries, including China, India and countries in ASEAN and

the Middle East. Our officials were proficient when discussing with their regional counterparts on how we could cooperate and bring the region closer together. We were able to do this not only because we spoke two languages, but also because we had a keener appreciation of regional developments and cultural sensitivity. Many people also have a great deal of trust in Singapore, and this is an advantage that comes about because of our openness. Also, because of our ability to understand the cultural characteristics of different ethnic groups, it is easier for us to engage other countries.

Third, I find that in my discussions with many Chinese officials, they were able to speak excellent English. For instance, I once had a discussion with China's central bank governor about a cooperation project. We spoke mostly in English, as it is an international language. But when talking over a meal about social development topics, we conversed in Mandarin instead. We could have conversed in English, but the sense of closeness would be very different. Many of our businessmen have similar experiences. Hence, even though there is a trend in China to learn English, Singapore must continue to keep its bilingual advantage.

**5 You mentioned the multi-cultural and multi-lingual characteristics of Singaporeans just now, are those also a result of our openness towards language?**

That's right. The mother tongue languages in our bilingual policy do not just refer to Mandarin, but also Malay and Tamil. This is crucial for maintaining the multi-cultural and multi-lingual nature of Singapore's society. We are going for breadth as well as depth. By breadth, I meant a common language that allows

I was working at the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) at that time. He happened to be in Singapore so I had the opportunity to meet him. I gave him a pad of sticky notes produced specially by the MAS in conjunction with the Speak Mandarin Campaign. He was surprised by it, and thought we were very serious about learning Mandarin and had even launched a campaign to promote Mandarin. I said to him: "That's right, the MAS is also taking part in the campaign." Mr Rogers did his own research and subsequently decided to move here, a place he believed to be conducive to bilingual learning.

Recently, I asked him if he thought coming to Singapore was a right decision. He answered: "Yes, of course." Hence, with regard to the effort to promote Mandarin, while some Singaporeans may feel that we can do more, as a whole, we are doing a lot compared to other countries.

## **2 Looking from a wider perspective at the way the Speak Mandarin Campaign has evolved since its inception, what do you think is the impact of the campaign on the Singapore society?**

We should approach the issue by examining why we would want to promote mother tongue education and Mandarin. I think the fundamental objective for this is to ensure that we stay connected to our culture, heritage and values, and identify with them. This is the fundamental reason. Hence, in promoting Mandarin, it is not just to enable students but also the entire Chinese community to understand the linkage between language and cultural values. In other words, the impact of this campaign on society is cultural.

## **3 The official narrative on learning Mandarin has changed with the times and with the rise of China.**

### **In your view, what is the value of Chinese Singaporeans learning Mandarin?**

The value of Chinese Singaporeans learning Mandarin is centred around understanding the values associated with the Chinese culture. Hence, whether it was 50 years ago before the rise of China or 50 years from now, this was and will be an enduring and unchanging target. Furthermore, the Chinese culture has a long history dating back several thousand years, so all the more the learning of Mandarin is important if one is to better understand this culture. With such a long history, Chinese traditions and culture are deeply rooted. The economic rise of China has brought new impetus to the world. Regardless of how it is developing, its impact on world economy and politics will be great. We are after all a small country and it is essential for small countries to grasp global trends. If we can better understand the way the Chinese people and their leaders think, and better understand the changes in their society, we will have better outcomes when formulating policies and developing economic or political ties with China. As such, having a stronger mastery of Mandarin will give Singapore and Singaporeans an advantage. Of course, while learning Mandarin does have its economic and commercial value, I also believe the value of possessing such a capability goes beyond these aspects.

## **4 The world right now may be gripped by the "learn Mandarin" fever, but the Chinese themselves have never lost their passion for learning English. In fact, some people think that Chinese Singaporeans interested in venturing into China need not be unduly concerned about**



Photo: Douglas Ho (Lianhe Zaobao)

## THE VALUE OF LEARNING MANDARIN IS IN ITS VALUES

– An interview with Education Minister Heng Swee Keat

Interview: Tan Leng Tuan (Lianhe Zaobao)

### **1** First, can you share with us your impressions of the Speak Mandarin Campaign?

I remember this slogan “Speak more Mandarin, Speak less dialect” which was launched in the early days of the campaign, and my grandmother asking (in Hokkien): “Speak what? Don’t

know what it is.” Later, there was another slogan “Mandarin is Chinese”, which struck me more deeply.

A few years ago, American investor Jim Rogers was contemplating to move his family to Singapore, Shanghai or Hong Kong, as he had wanted his daughters to learn Mandarin.



He added that Singapore's leaders, those who often speak on a public platform, should speak in Mandarin if they are able to. "These are good role models for the rest of the population," he said.

### **Family Influence**

But ultimately, those interviewed suggest that the far more sustainable way forward for the campaign is to focus on helping parents to help their children, so the children grow up with a good Chinese foundation.

Said Dr Tan: "Children should not feel that they have to make an extra effort to speak Mandarin, it should feel natural. Therefore it is very important for the campaign to influence the family's usage of Mandarin."

Dr Tan's three daughters, aged seven, nine and 11, grew up hearing their father speak only Mandarin and their mother only English. "I stubbornly insisted on the 'one parent, one language' policy. They didn't realise until they were older that I could actually speak English. But since they already formed the habit of speaking Mandarin to me, that didn't change."

He adds that this is particularly crucial as language acquisition is at its peak in a child's early years. "The first six years of a child's life is the golden age for absorption of language. Parents must know, through the campaign or other means that if they can speak Mandarin, just speak Mandarin."

Current Campaign Chairman Mr Seow Choke Meng – who also feels strongly that Mandarin can be learnt and mastered if one starts from a young age – points out that the campaign's key

activities centre around a few weeks in the year.

"This momentum is best carried over into the home, so parents can consciously and consistently speak Mandarin at least some of the time to their children," he said.

In his case, his daughter and two sons are effectively bilingual. "My wife and I spoke to them in English and Mandarin equally from when they were little," he said.

"Parents are in fact their children's best language teachers. In this regard, the campaign will serve as a reminder to parents on the importance of speaking Mandarin.

"Moving forward, we will continue to involve families in the activities we organise, and equip parents with the tools they need to inspire their children to speak good Mandarin. I am confident that in the years to come, as parents and the wider community continue emphasising the need for Singaporeans to be effectively bilingual, our efforts will bear fruit."



To promote bilingualism among pre-schoolers, Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew set up a fund in 2011 which is dedicated to developing new teaching approaches that aid in building the language foundation of pre-schoolers.





Technology can be used in teaching and learning the Chinese language. Today, resources and tools are readily available.



She said: “Take Taiwan, for instance. If you visit, you will see many small streets with many small beautifully curated bookshops. The Beitou Public Library in Taipei was named as one of the most beautiful libraries in the world.

“We are attracted to elegant, sophisticated cultures. If our educational system starts to recognise and emphasise the beauty of Chinese, it will attract respect and admiration.”

### Higher-level Mandarin

Instead of just focusing on functional Mandarin, some suggest it is time that the campaign encourages Singaporeans to speak higher-level Mandarin, or appreciate Chinese at a higher cultural level.

But if Singaporeans are already struggling with basic Mandarin, can they do this?

In Dr Tan’s experience with students, yes. As the saying goes, in reaching for the stars, one gets to the moon.

When his students at Hwa Chong Institution were taught only functional Mandarin, there was little which inspired them to go further. But when he introduced Chinese literature and poetry to them – even if some translation and explanation was required – these made an impression.

A student told him long after he graduated that what he remembered from Dr Tan’s class was the Chinese poems he taught.

“If we keep emphasising the functional use of language, we

forget why we appreciate the Chinese language. It’s because of the culture,” he said. “That is why I strongly believe in using literature to teach. It will enable students to like culture and the language.

“And even though a lot of people think that the students cannot handle it, that’s not true.”

Mr Kenneth Tan suggests that the presence of international talents from China in Singapore can also boost the level of spoken Mandarin.

He said: “There are a lot of native speakers now around us. We should take the opportunity to practice speaking Mandarin with them whether it be in the lifts, on the train, in the food court.”

### Environmental Influence

Another aspect concerns the standard of Mandarin which is heard in the environment. In order to cultivate people who can speak good Mandarin, standards need to be improved.

Said Ms Lim Sau Hoong: “Media plays an important part. Currently the standard of Mandarin heard on television is poor, with some grammatical mistakes. It saddens me to watch these programmes because when we don’t care about quality, standards drop.”

Chinese radio, television and theatre personality Mr Danny Yeo agreed. “We should not be afraid of using deeper Mandarin phrases and proverbs in our mass media, the way they do in Taiwan.”

### Future Strategies

Given this background environment, the campaign organisers face the real challenge of keeping the campaign continually fresh, engaging and relevant.

How can it move forward in the years to come?

### Beauty of Chinese Culture

Some suggest that perhaps, these days, Chinese is not “appealing” enough.

The reality is that Mandarin is not a living language for many Chinese Singaporeans and they have to make a conscious choice to be proficient in it.

Former Campaign Chairman Kenneth Tan notes that nowadays, there is a growing segment of Singaporeans who are drawn to Korean or Japanese culture and who try to learn the language. This, said Mr Tan, is due in part to the growing popularity of Korean and Japanese television dramas and pop music.

This does not seem to be the case for Chinese culture.

Advertising veteran and former Campaign Chairman Ms Lim Sau Hoong suggests that from a branding perspective, Chinese is largely associated with loud “*dong dong chang*” music of the



Source: Tan Chee Lay

Dr Tan Chee Lay strongly believes in using literature when teaching the Chinese language, as it will enable students to look beyond the functional aspects of a language and appreciate it at a deeper cultural level.

sort heard during Chinese New Year and garish red and gold opulence.

Yet there is another side she is familiar with and which she hopes more Singaporeans can be exposed to and appreciate, perhaps via the Speak Mandarin Campaign or other channels.

**“We should not be afraid of using deeper Mandarin phrases and proverbs in our mass media, the way they do in Taiwan.”**

– Mr Danny Yeo

At 35 years old, the Speak Mandarin Campaign is one of the longest-running campaigns in Singapore.

The unspoken question is this: Is it still needed?

After all, the campaign has already fulfilled its original intent of shifting the chosen language of the Chinese community from many different dialects to Mandarin. This was accomplished ten years after it was launched in 1979.

As former Campaign Chairman Lim Sau Hoong and Dr Tan Chee Lay, Deputy Executive Director of the Singapore Centre for Chinese Language both put it, “The day the campaign is deemed to have succeeded, we would no longer need it.”

And yet, the campaign is still very relevant today.

More Chinese Singaporean families are speaking English at home. The proportion of children from Mandarin-speaking homes fell from 70 per cent in 1989 to 54 per cent in 1999. At the same time, the proportion of children from English-speaking homes rose from 26 per cent in 1990 to 42 per cent in 1999. There is still much work to be done.

Former Campaign Chairman Kenneth Tan, currently the Assistant Chief Executive at the Media Development Authority, mused: “What would happen in the absence of the campaign? Would people leave Chinese behind once they finish their Chinese examinations in junior college? At the very least, even if the campaign doesn’t compel you to start using Mandarin in your life, it serves as a trigger, a stimulus, a reminder.”

### Challenges Today

The work of the campaign organisers – to get more Chinese Singaporeans to speak good Mandarin and get in touch with their cultural roots – will not get any easier.

Dr Tan Chee Lay, who is also an Assistant Professor at the Nanyang Technological University, echoes what many Chinese teachers have noticed: The spoken language of choice amongst even students in traditional Chinese schools is English. “Even students from China, unless they are speaking amongst themselves, speak English.”

Because young people are increasingly speaking, reading and thinking in English, there is a risk that they are therefore becoming disconnected from Chinese culture and its values. This creates a vicious cycle that makes Chinese language and culture even less attractive.

For instance, Ms Kuo Jian Hong, Artistic Director of The Theatre Practice, notes that young adults would rather watch Broadway musicals like *Cats* and *Les Misérables* than Chinese productions. Some also note that language standards in general have fallen over the years. A common bugbear amongst those interviewed for this book is how young Singaporeans tend to mix sub-standard English or Singlish with Mandarin. For instance, they might say: “*Wo yao qu shopping* (I want to go shopping).”

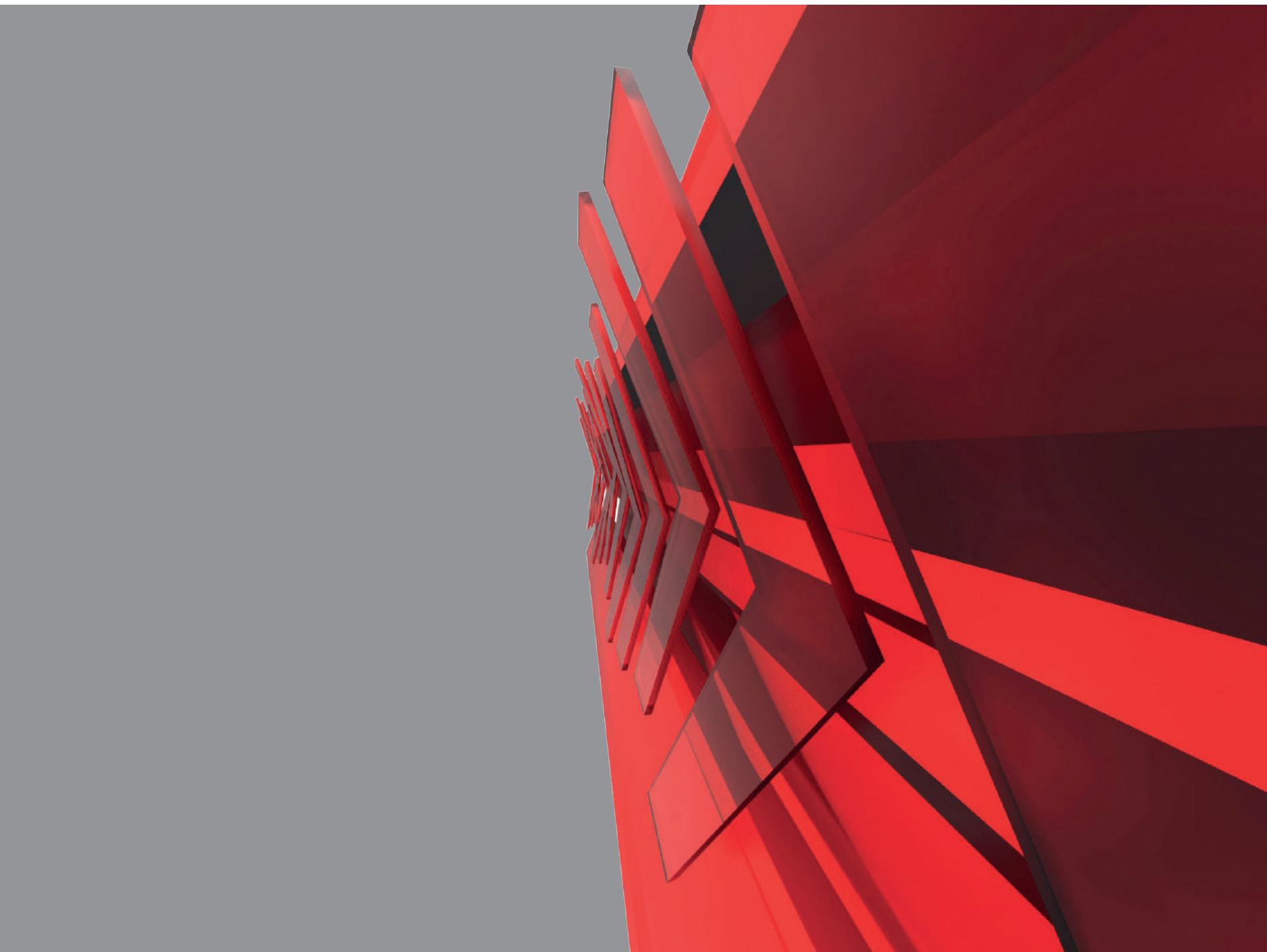
Said Ms Leong Wai Leng, Head of Business Management Unit, CEO’s Office at Bank of Singapore: “Most people cannot switch effectively. I don’t know what the problem is. It’s not a simple issue that can be solved by a campaign. Perhaps it comes down to family upbringing and school background.”





5

Speak Mandarin Campaign  
**Looking Ahead**





Dr Lim Ing Haan and Dr Lim Ing Ruen introduced their children to Chinese classics at an early age because they believe that parental interest and encouragement will stimulate a child's interest and love towards the language.



**“Constant and subliminal exposure to both audio and visual renditions of the language is key to acquisition. The subtitling in a movie is a realtime translation of the movie’s script. Just by making sure that the subtitles are on, the child would be immersed in a truly audio-visual world of language.”**

– Dr Lim Ing Ruen

when the children were preschoolers.

Unfortunately, their children’s spoken Chinese started deteriorating in school.

“I was quite perturbed to learn that *hanyu pinyin* is the main focal learning point for Chinese in the first year of primary school. I find it mindboggling. Sometimes, a sentence may even be partly in Chinese and partly in *hanyu pinyin*. You have to be really smart to toggle your mind at will. This two-step way to learning creates a learning hurdle for the child,” said Ing Ruen.

Both sisters feel that it is easier to pick up a language at a younger age. Says Ing Haan, “From the medical standpoint, one should learn a language before the brain completes its maturation process by the age of seven. This is especially so for a pictorial language like Chinese. The English language is

acquired differently by the brain due to its alphabetical structure. It is easy to learn English even when you are older as you can cross reference to other languages of similar types.”

Ing Ruen feels that learning a language need not always be deliberate. “Constant and subliminal exposure to both audio and visual renditions of the language is key to acquisition. The subtitling in a movie is a realtime translation of the movie’s script. Just by making sure that the subtitles are on, the child would be immersed in a truly audio-visual world of language.

Parents can also seize learning opportunities. For instance, when Ing Haan’s family was preparing for a trip to Rome, she borrowed Chinese guide books from the library for her son to browse. “There is no *hanyu pinyin* in these guidebooks, which is good because otherwise he would be reading these instead of the Chinese characters,” she said.

two sons aged seven and eight: “Chinese classics were not part of Singapore’s curriculum. This blind spot in my education makes it even more refreshing for me to start reading these classics now.”

The sisters recently started immersing the family in Chinese classical scripts such as *Di Zi Gui* – Standards for being a Good Pupil and Child – which originated in the Qing Dynasty and is based on the teachings of Confucius. Or *San Zi Jing* – Three-Character Classic – which encapsulates Confucian values into three-character verses traditionally recited aloud by children.

Ing Ruen said: “We discovered an innovative way of introducing the Chinese classical scripts to our kids in a most engaging manner by simply making use of animated videos on the iPads and DVD audiobooks.”

Her son was particularly mesmerised. At the age of four, he started devouring the *San Zi Jing*. On watching the VCD, he soon memorised the verses and clamoured for more. “We felt strangely surprised but elated nonetheless,” said Ing Ruen. “His enthusiasm spread to his cousin and to all of us.”

Learning how to speak Mandarin and Chinese these days, they reckon, is somewhat easier because of the prevalence of engaging materials like VCDs, DVDs and Chinese audiobooks which can be downloaded onto iPads.

In their case, they did not shy away from introducing their children to Chinese classics, because they do not think Chinese is a difficult language to learn.

“It’s like getting children to eat their vegetables. If the child grows up with the idea that his parents love vegetables and really eats them, the child will also grow to love vegetables. It’s the same with Chinese. If parents show that they love and speak Mandarin, the child will do the same,” said Ing Haan.

Both Ing Haan and Ing Ruen spoke Mandarin exclusively from young. Said Ing Ruen: “Speaking Mandarin comes naturally to us. We were simply just immersed in an exclusively Chinese environment.”

Their maternal grandmother, Madam Kuo Chang Ho, was a famous Chinese intellectual and politician with the former Chinese ruling party, the *Kuomintang*. Their father, Mr Lim Hong Quee, taught History and Geography in Chinese as well as Chinese for 40 years at the Catholic High School. Their mother, Chang Lu Yee, was instrumental in her daughters’ education and upbringing, teaching them subjects exclusively in Chinese and placing great emphasis on the inculcation of values and ideals in line with the teachings of Confucius. Says Ing Haan: “We still speak in perfect Mandarin, with an accent that belies our heritage, because of our dedicated parents.”

Because of their strong background in Mandarin, their parents bucked the family’s historical affiliation to Chinese-streamed schools and enrolled them in a missionary school – Canossa Convent. They later went on to the Singapore Chinese Girls’ School.

Similarly, for their own children, Ing Haan and Ing Ruen strive to balance English and Mandarin in the household. They used to speak only Mandarin while their husbands spoke only English



## DR LIM ING HAAN & DR LIM ING RUEN, 42

WHO: Twins, doctors, mothers

Growing up in the late 70s and 80s, twin sisters Dr Lim Ing Haan and Dr Lim Ing Ruen were proficient in Mandarin. But they did not go far beyond the daily semantics of the Chinese language.

Like many, it was only when they became mothers that they felt the cultural imperative to dig deeper for the sake of their

children. Says Ing Haan, a consultant cardiologist with a nine-year-old boy: "I feel that I need to make a conscious effort to put my children in touch with their cultural roots. Children should not just read Western literature."

Adds Ing Ruen, a consultant ear, nose and throat surgeon with





Mr Danny Yeo feels that more can be done to encourage Chinese Singaporeans to speak Mandarin. He relates his personal experience as a lecturer at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, where Chinese Studies students are in greater demand than their English counterparts, as employers recognised their bilingual abilities.

do not seem to be interested in Chinese,” said Mr Yeo. “They would learn a third language like Japanese or Korean instead of mastering Chinese.”

He talks about his experience lecturing Chinese Studies students at Ngee Ann Polytechnic. “I can feel the pressure they are under, because they are asked: ‘Why did you enroll in the Chinese Studies course? What future do you have?’ ”

When the department was started in 2006, the students had a hard time. Mr Yeo said: “The English media students felt they were superior and it came across through strange looks or whispered words. Some Chinese Studies students would even come crying to me.

“In Singapore, if you work in a Chinese-language industry, it’s a challenge, you face a lot of pressure. Even our country’s leaders who were Chinese-educated have to demonstrate proficiency in English. I’m not sure what more can change in the next few years, in order for people to muster up courage to speak Mandarin.”

He does see a glimmer of light: “I think young people are willing to communicate in Mandarin. But once you start working, it is different.”

There is, however, a happy ending for his polytechnic students.

“When they had to do their internships, employers preferred the Chinese Studies students. Why? Because they felt that these students had benefited from many years of English education in the Singapore system, and yet were also proficient in Chinese.

Many of these companies were starting to go into Chinese market. Hence the Chinese Studies students were more valuable.”

Mr Yeo acknowledges that such examples boost the Chinese appeal. “But I wouldn’t want to make a case for mastering Chinese just for economic or pragmatic reasons,” he said.

Going forward, he feels that changing attitudes is more than just a matter of organising Chinese-related activities. “Political and business leaders can be encouraged to speak Mandarin more often. They will be good role models,” he said.

As a media practitioner, he also feels that the media, particularly television and radio, can play a bigger role. They can ensure that people who are on TV and radio, particularly hosts, are speaking good Mandarin. “There is perhaps the fear that when standardised Mandarin is spoken, it will alienate the masses who tune in. But I do not agree with this.”

Referring to Taiwanese TV programme host Dee Hsu, he said: “She is humorous. But at the same time, her Mandarin is of a high standard. Some of my students who watch her programmes would use her colourful vocabulary in their daily lives, enriching their interactions.”

looked after by a Malay family after school as his parents were both working. “My playmates were Malays and Indians,” shared Mr Yeo. “I could speak Malay and could even count in Tamil.

“With my relatives, I spoke Mandarin and Cantonese. There is a greater sense of intimacy and warmth when one speaks in Cantonese. Even up till secondary school, I spoke Cantonese with close friends, watched Cantonese shows from Hong Kong, and listened to Cantonese songs.”

It was to balance his Chinese upbringing that his parents – who attended Chinese High and Nanyang Girls’ High, both traditional Chinese schools – decided to send him to Anglo-Chinese Primary.

“My parents had vision,” he said. “They believed in speaking Mandarin at home but sent me to an English school.”

His excellent Mandarin enunciation was partly honed by his mother who took pains to correct him. He also learnt from television and radio programmes. “The Chinese standards in the media were very high then,” he said.

In ACS, he naturally topped the class in Chinese, in every assessment from spelling to composition. The Chinese teachers were fond of him. Friends clamoured to copy his work. Defying the notion that Chinese speakers were looked down on, no one gave him any grief. “The worst they would do was to call me “*cheena*” (derogatory slang to describe a Chinese) but I regarded it as if they were mis-pronouncing ‘China’,” he quipped.

He honed his command of the English language when he was in

his teens, which until then trailed behind his mastery of Chinese. Said Mr Yeo, who is today able to host events in perfectly-enunciated English just as comfortably as he does in Mandarin: “In secondary school, I had a English literature teacher who inspired me. She taught me to appreciate the beauty and poetry of English.”

He went on to study mass communications and journalism in the United States.

Once he started working, however, he quickly realised that Mandarin was the language he felt closer to.

Over the last 15 years, he has carved a niche for himself as a primarily Chinese media personality who is equally versatile in English. A popular award-winning DJ, he has also published books – two in English, two in Chinese and one bilingual – and was a lecturer at Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

He was also a member of the Promote Mandarin Council.

On the Speak Mandarin Campaign (SMC), which was launched during his childhood, he said: “The greatest impact the SMC has had on me is how the use of dialects has been greatly reduced.” Mr Yeo, who can still speak fluent Cantonese, added: “I do not agree that a person’s ability to learn languages is limited. I have many friends who can master English, Chinese and dialects.”

Ask about the current or future state of Chinese in Singapore, however, and he is largely pessimistic.

“What I find disheartening is how many Chinese young people





## MR DANNY YEO, 41

WHO: Cross-media personality, event host, columnist, writer, theatre practitioner, speech and presentation trainer

Danny Yeo is a true blue Anglo-Chinese School (ACS) boy.

Having attended what is popularly regarded as one of the most *kantang* (colloquial slang for Westernised) schools in Singapore at the primary, secondary and junior-college levels, it may come as a surprise to know that he is much at ease with speaking Mandarin, as with English.

During this interview, which was conducted entirely in Mandarin, he said: “English has always been my first language and Chinese a second language, but Chinese holds a special place in my heart.”

As a child, his upbringing reflects Singapore’s multi-cultural texture. While he grew up speaking Mandarin at home, he was





Ms Sim Ann (first from right) believes that parents have a crucial role in cultivating an environment conducive for their children to explore Chinese and speak Mandarin. She is seen here with Minister for Education, Mr Heng Swee Keat (second from right).

other changes all the time. It is important for the campaign to update itself.”

She notes that the rising number of marriages between Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans will cast a bigger spotlight on mother tongue and identity.

“Right now, I feel that it’s very important to reach out to families and Singaporeans who are primarily English-speaking but who want their children to learn Mandarin well. I feel there is a strong demand for resources and more help in this area,” said Ms

Sim. She feels that currently, marketing materials – mostly in Chinese – do not reach this group. It’s about access and reaching out.” She also feels that the various groups involved in promoting Chinese language and culture in one way or another can come together to make a greater impact. “I have the opportunity to interact with many people and groups who are very interested in promoting Chinese language and culture. I see it as very energising, and I’m always looking for opportunities to bring people together so that we can bounce ideas off each other. We can do so much more if we combine forces and work together.”

use it at home. Despite my dad spending eight years in America, he never considered English his natural choice of language. He was Chinese-educated,” she said.

Ms Sim’s mother lived in Beijing for 10 years as a child, when she aged three to 13, and was exacting in how her children spoke Mandarin. “When it came to the pronunciation of Chinese words, she had high expectations. For instance, when eating fish, we had to say *chi yu* (吃鱼) and not *chi yi* (吃疑). Even today, we sometimes scramble to check the dictionary when she questions the way we pronounce certain words,” said Ms Sim.

When it came to cultivating a love for Chinese books, however, her father was more influential. His favourite weekend activity of choice was to park Ms Sim and her siblings at the Popular Bookstore’s Chinese children’s section for a few hours while he browsed for his books.

Ms Sim’s favourites were Chinese folk tales which were lovingly stored in the family home and which, after over three decades, are now being read by her children. She is particularly fond of *Zhang Tian Yi Tong Hua Xuan* (《张天翼童话选》), a selection of children’s tales by Zhang Tian Yi, an author from China. “These were written in the 1930s, but today, they still resonate with my children, who enjoy the rhymes and humour.”

Why did she and her siblings gravitate toward Chinese books? Apart from the fact that they spoke Mandarin at home, there were practical reasons. “The bookstores we went to simply stocked more Chinese books. Also, Chinese books were much cheaper,” she said.

If there was a time when Chinese fell by the wayside in her life, it would be when she started work and English was the main language of communication. “My jobs were very domestic in nature. I first worked at the Ministry of Health, then the Ministry of Home Affairs.”

However, when she was later posted to the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) to work on Singapore-China trade relations, she started using Mandarin regularly at work. “If you’ve not been using Mandarin in a work context regularly, then it takes a bit of polishing up. But when I travelled to China for MTI work, and later worked in Shanghai for IE Singapore, I was completely immersed in a Chinese-speaking environment. We also had some Chinese nationals working in our Shanghai office. Our e-mails and text messages were in Chinese. You pick up very quickly.”

She has been involved in various national initiatives to promote the Chinese language, including chairing the Committee to Promote Chinese Language Learning, leading the Bicultural Task Force (comprising Members of Parliament coming together to promote Chinese language and culture) and joining the Board of the Lee Kuan Yew Fund for Bilingualism.

The Speak Mandarin Campaign is one which Ms Sim is fond of, not least because she remembers being filmed in a coffeeshop for one of the campaign’s music videos.

“Having grown up with the campaign, I have a lot of fondness for it. I honestly think if we didn’t have it, we’ll be missing something.

“We live in a very diverse society and how we interact with each



Mandarin these days, they tend to start speaking English once they enter pre-school, possibly negating parental efforts.

Statistics from the Education Ministry show that the percentage of children entering primary school who spoke Mandarin at home reached a peak in 1989, then started falling to 67.9 per cent (1990), 66.6 per cent (1991) and 64.7 per cent (1992).

Ms Sim pondered: “It also seems very easy for Singaporean children to somehow develop the notion that Chinese is hard and it is something to be disliked. I think the parents’ role is important. Once parents believe that it is hard and we communicate that directly or indirectly to the child, the child will absorb it and feel that Chinese is hard to learn. That creates a huge obstacle to learning.”

She therefore refuses to force her children to speak Mandarin, and believes in the carrot rather than the stick approach.

For instance, she employs what she calls “reverse psychology”. She said: “I notice that my children love to eavesdrop on grown-up conversations. All our grown-up conversations are in Mandarin. When the kids interrupt and ask ‘What did you say?’ we’d just say in Mandarin, ‘Sorry, we have no intention of repeating ourselves in English’. But the thing is, they are following the conversation.”

Then there is the “incentive policy”.

“This is for anything related to Mandarin. For instance, we generally don’t let the kids eat dinner in front of the TV or stay up late for TV. But if it’s a Chinese programme we make an exception.”

Her younger sister, the “language policeman” of the family, tends toward the stick approach. She admonishes Ms Sim’s children when they speak English at home and orders them to switch to Mandarin. “It doesn’t work,” said Ms Sim. “They’ll switch to Chinese reluctantly and they’ll pull a long face.”

This applies in particular to Ms Sim’s daughter, who finds Chinese difficult. “If I am fierce, over time, she will just think Mandarin is the language she gets scolded in. It has to be something she herself wants to learn.

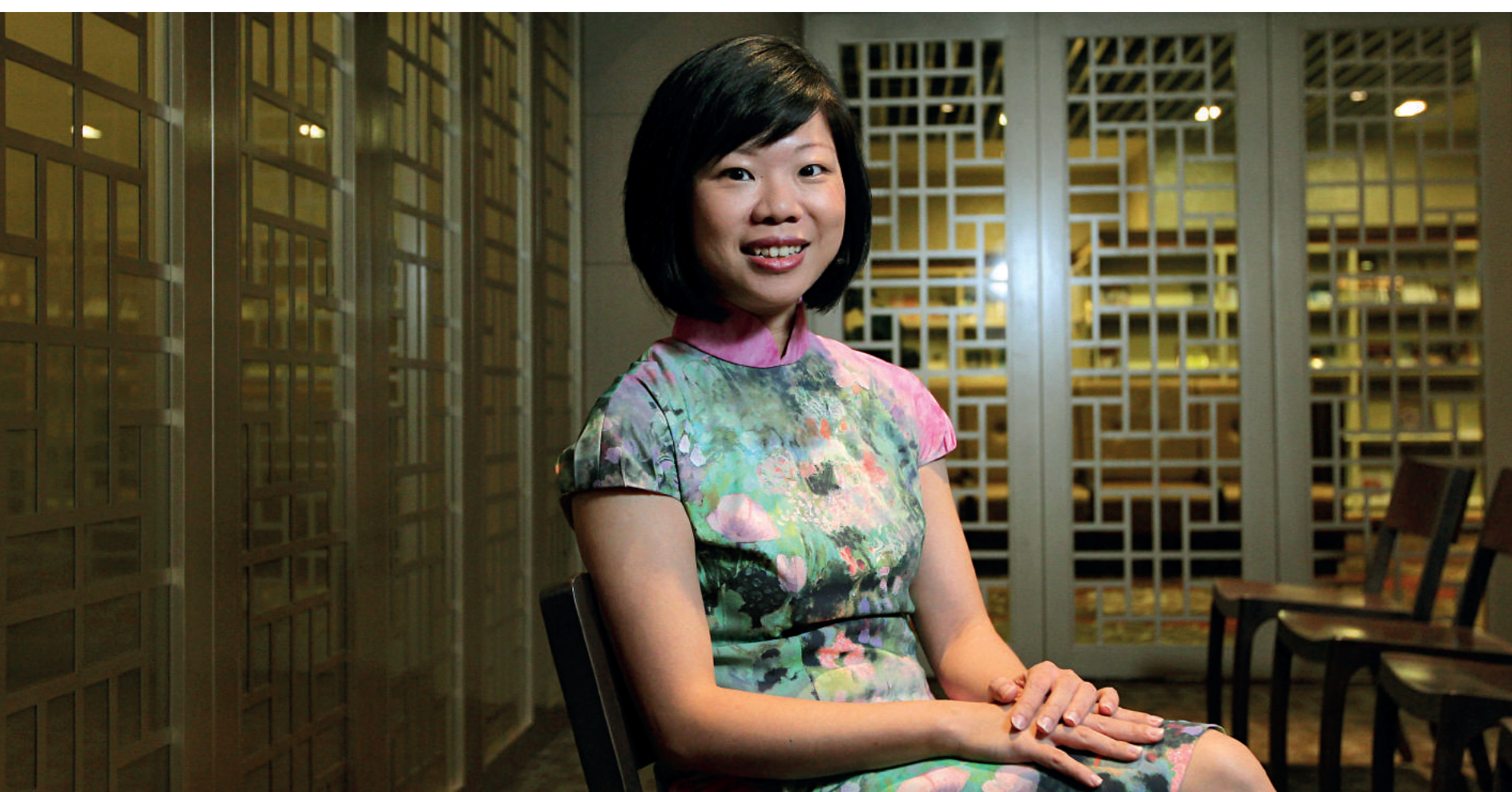
“If my girl grows up disliking Chinese, I will consider it our failing as parents. My goal is to ensure, minimally, that my children are neutral towards the language.”

Her older son had spent two years in a pre-school in China when Ms Sim was working there, and therefore has a better grasp of the language. “He is more confident, his pronunciation is better, his foundation is more robust. Even if it was just two years, it made a difference.”

Ms Sim had a strong Chinese foundation.

“The most important factor was that my family spoke Mandarin at home,” said Ms Sim, who has a younger sister and brother. “It was really the language that we used for everyday communication, to ask after each other, to squabble with and celebrate in.”

Her father is Hokkien and mother, Teochew. But at home, the family stuck to Mandarin. “Even though my parents used English at work, they never felt comfortable enough with the language to



## MS SIM ANN, 39

WHO: Minister of State for the Ministry of Communications and Information & Ministry of Education, Member of Parliament for Holland-Bukit Timah GRC, bilingual politician, mother of three

Sim Ann is the paragon of an effectively bilingual Singaporean, equally eloquent in her spoken English and Mandarin.

It may then come as a surprise to learn that she, like many Chinese Singaporean mothers, finds it challenging to inspire that same love for Chinese in her children.

She has three children aged two, seven and nine, of which the eldest and youngest are boys. Her eldest is proficient in Chinese, but her daughter is relatively resistant. Amongst themselves, the trio converse in English.

She acknowledges that even if parents speak to their toddlers in





Ms Teo Tong Lin and her teammate Mr Lay Chang Yao (left) won the second prize in the Chinese Challenge TV Grand Finals in 2010.

abilities. The Special Assistance Plan (SAP) Scholarship is offered by the Ministry of Education to encourage outstanding students, who have the interest and capacity to engage China's culture and contemporary society, to pursue the Chinese language.

In 2013, for instance, Ms Teo went to Beijing and Shanghai for a month-long immersion trip for which costs were subsidised. She attended current affairs classes at the renowned Peking University and Fudan University in the mornings and toured Chinese cities in the afternoon. They also met up with Dunman

High alumni who were studying in China.

She said: "Learning Chinese is not just about reaping economic value. If we can think about learning Chinese from a cultural standpoint, it is much more meaningful."

Ms Teo feels that she is in good company. Amongst her peers at Dunman High, most are enthusiastic about learning the language. "Students no longer look down on those who speak or write Mandarin well, unlike in the past, perhaps. We are inspired by those who are effectively bilingual," she said.



school. Piqued by the questions featured on the posters, she went online to check it out and soon roped in her brother and her parents.

On the family effort, she said: “Over the weekends, my brother and I would conduct research online to try and answer the questions. Sometimes when we disagreed, we would go to our parents for help. The questions were very interesting, about the origins of proverbs for instance.”

Her efforts paid off: From a field of over 14,000 registered participants, she made it to the televised finals.

Ms Teo, together with Mr Lay Chang Yao from Raffles Institution, played as a team against five other adult contestants who took part in the Open Category and emerged as first runners-up in the final round.

The following year, she took part again. But this time, it was her brother who was first runner-up.

“My understanding of Chinese culture improved after the competition,” she said. “I think Chinese Challenge effectively fulfilled its objectives as it really reached the masses, sparking interest in the general public and helping them to improve their Chinese. As for those who were already proficient, it helped them to understand more about Chinese culture.”

Even though Ms Teo is generally more comfortable speaking and writing in English, she is a proficient Mandarin speaker.

Her mother, an English and Mathematics primary school

teacher, and her father, a management lecturer, made sure that Ms Teo and her younger sister and brother grew up in a bilingual environment.

Both English and Mandarin were spoken at home.

“I would say my parents were my greatest influence when it comes to Mandarin. They made it natural for us to want to master both languages. I wanted to be as good as they were, especially my father who sometimes conducts lectures in China,” she said.

Her parents also took pains to bring Ms Teo to Chinese-based classes. She attended Chinese drama classes run by the Hokkien clan association from the time she was in kindergarten, and a Chinese broadcasting class when she was aged 11 which honed her pronunciation.

Coincidentally, Gong Shang Primary School where she was studying then, started a broadcasting co-curricular activity at the same time. Teachers would help the pupils to record radio programmes such as cross-talks. “I remember all the fun we had taking part in these activities. Speaking Mandarin was hence something enjoyable to me.”

When she went to Dunman High, she chose to join the Chinese drama and calligraphy co-curricular activities.

“Taking part in all these activities made me very interested in Chinese culture,” said Ms Teo.

At Dunman High, she is also part of a special Bicultural Studies Programme which has further strengthened her linguistic



## MS TEO TONG LIN, 18

WHO: Dunman High Integrated Programme Year 6 student

Every year, many people come away from the Speak Mandarin Campaign inspired.

One of them was Teo Tong Lin.

She was aware of the Speak Mandarin Campaign, but had no lasting impressions of the campaign, until the Chinese Challenge

online quiz was launched in 2010.

The quiz consisted of a series of questions posed over 12 weeks on subjects including language, history, literary arts, local knowledge, contemporary and popular culture.

She first saw posters advertising Chinese Challenge in her

**“It’s not just a language. It helps me to express my thoughts and is part of my culture. It is my identity. I see students who have no understanding or enthusiasm for the language, and I have to ask myself why?”**

– Ms Ong Lynn

steeped in Chinese culture as her previous schools.

In reaction to her culture shock, Ms Ong joined the Lianhe Zaobao Student Correspondents’ Club in 2008, in the hope of meeting people who were as fond of Chinese as she was.

“I was disappointed,” she said. “A lot of people spoke English too but the good thing was they did not shun Chinese.”

Her articles did make a difference in one regard: When she wrote about things that went on in VJC, her classmates would make an effort to read the Chinese text.

It is much the same now in the National University of Singapore’s medical faculty, where she is surrounded by peers who prefer to speak English. Some who find it challenging to speak to Mandarin-speaking patients may require assistance from a translator to explain complex medical terms.

Amongst her generation, she is somewhat of an anomaly. Why? She chafes when no one around her is willing to speak in Mandarin.

So much so that in 2009, in reaction to a Speak Mandarin Campaign which featured children of different ethnic backgrounds speaking fluent Mandarin, she wrote an article for Lianhe Zaobao’s student paper, ‘Comma’. The headline reflects her lament to her readers: Why won’t you speak Mandarin?

“It’s not just a language. It helps me to express my thoughts and is part of my culture. It is my identity. I see students who have no understanding or enthusiasm for the language, and I have to ask myself, why?”

Warming up to the subject, Lynn mounts a passionate defence: “Mandarin words have background meanings. Learning Chinese words is also about learning Chinese culture. Moreover, East and West have different perspectives. The same news in the English and Chinese newspapers is presented differently.

“Chinese is a very important part of my life, just like my limbs and eyes, it is part of me. Without Chinese, Ong Lynn is incomplete.”



In her Chinese class, her fellow classmates could order food in Mandarin, but had difficulties reading their textbooks or the newspapers. She said: “I really pitied my Chinese teacher; I had never seen a teacher try so hard.”

“You realise who you are when you mix with people who do not feel the same way. My love and passion for Chinese became obvious when I went to VJC.”

Unsurprisingly, her parents played a crucial role in her linguistic development. From the time she was born, they spoke Mandarin at home to her and her younger sister.

In addition, her mother, a Chinese teacher, used to tag items in the house with labels in English and Mandarin. Said Ms Ong: “I could associate *Bing Xiang* (冰箱) with ‘refrigerator’, ‘fan’ with *Feng Shan* (风扇). Picking up both languages became something very natural to me.”

Her father, a project manager in the engineering industry, who speaks both English and Mandarin, was instrumental in broadening her Chinese horizons. He introduced her to Chinese novels.

On a personal level, she was drawn to Chinese cultural entertainment. She watched Taiwanese dramas and television series based on the stories of famed Chinese-language novelist Jin Yong, such as *Heavenly Sword and Dragon Sabre*. She also listened to pop songs from Taiwanese pop groups like S.H.E. and Mayday.

She even wrote her diary entries in Chinese.

When she entered the school system, her English was worse than that of her peers. Her Chinese, however, was clearly superior.

The way Chinese was taught at Pei Chun Public School – where the school anthem is still sung in Mandarin – and later St Nicholas Girls’ School, reinforced her Chinese grounding.

In Pei Chun Public School in particular, where Mr Chen Keng Juan was principal, she and her classmates competed to see who could memorise the most from a book of 36 Tang poems. “At that age, it was more about having fun,” she said. “But when I got older, I understood the meanings and even today, I can still remember the first few poems from the book.”

In Primary Four, she recalls that her entire class was told to recite a poem *Man Jiang Hong* (满江红). The poem was written by Yue Fei, a famous Chinese general who lived in the Song Dynasty. “We memorised it, and I felt very proud when we recited it during assembly,” she said.

Then there were the annual Chinese book fairs at school. Her favourite book? “You Jin’s *Ting · Qing Chun Zai Ku Qi* (《听。青春在哭泣》) left me with the deepest impression. I would buy one of You Jin’s book each year,” she says.

She remembers that some of her secondary school peers then, even those who came from English-speaking homes, were keen on Chinese and willingly participated in Chinese activities.

Then she went to VJC, which, in her opinion, was not as strongly



## MS ONG LYNN, 21

WHO: National University of Singapore Year 3 medical undergraduate,  
student reporter, Chinese stalwart

Ong Lynn has had a unique linguistic upbringing.

But the staunch defender of all things Chinese did not realise just how unique it was, until she joined the Integrated Programme at Victoria Junior College (VJC) at the age of 15. There, she received what she calls a “culture shock”.

“I met classmates who hated Chinese and I felt it strange that

they did not want to learn the language,” said Ms Ong, who speaks eloquently in both Mandarin and English. “I felt put off by people who said they learnt Chinese to pass the examinations.”

Every time she expressed herself in Mandarin, her classmates would gasp. She recalled: “They looked at me as if to say ‘wah, she can speak Chinese!’”

being rude or scolding the DJ. My colleagues later explained to me the boo-boo that I made and I felt so silly.”

These days, the effectively bilingual artiste would correctly reply – 你太客气了 (*ni tai ke qi le*, which means “You’re welcome”) – without batting an eyelid.

Since her Taiwan venture, she has struck gold in the Chinese music industry. In 2012, she won the Best Mandarin Female Artist in Taiwan’s Golden Melody Awards for the third time, distinguishing herself as the first female artist to win three times in the category.

Contrary to those who may think she is *jiak kantang* (colloquial phrase to mean one who is Westernised), Ms Chua mostly spoke in Mandarin as a child. Fortuitously, she had a Chinese teacher from Taiwan who insisted that her pupils spoke ‘*biao zhun hua yu*’ – phonetically correct, perfectly enunciated Mandarin.

She was often asked by the teacher to make Chinese textbook audio recordings and even took part in poem recital competitions. As a result, the St Nicholas Girls’ School alumna did not struggle with Chinese. She shared: “In fact, my grades in CL1 and CL2 were pretty good throughout my primary and secondary school years, much better than my English!”

What reversed the trend was when she was in her teens. In secondary school, she started spending more time with friends who were deejays. “Everyone spoke English and I felt I needed to fit in so I became the so-called ‘*ang mor pai*’ (Westernised).” This continued at Singapore Polytechnic, where she was studying for a Diploma in Business Administration and spoke

mostly English to her friends. By the time she started singing in pubs, she hardly spoke Mandarin. “With no practice, I completely ‘forgot’ how to use the Mandarin language!” she said.

It was only when she became a recording artiste that she was obliged to polish up her rusty Mandarin. “At the time, my Mandarin was so rusty that I even asked the record company if they were sure they wanted to sign me. I really struggled with Mandarin in the first few years of my Mandarin singing career. I couldn’t communicate nor write in Mandarin! It was an awful feeling.”

The turning point came when she decided to move to Taiwan in 2006 to jumpstart her career. How did she boost her Mandarin fluency? “Just speak it and use it,” she quipped.

Re-acquainting herself with Mandarin has since become one of her stepping stones to success.

“Speaking Mandarin opened up so many other opportunities for me, such as writing my own lyrics and expressing myself as I want to in all situations. That to me is really important.”

She added: “There are just some expressions in Mandarin that cannot be expressed well in English or any other languages.”

For a music artiste like Ms Chua, being able to speak and sing in Mandarin also opens up the door to the huge Chinese market.

Her parting shot: “Speak Mandarin not because it is a campaign, but because it is part of who we are and we should be proud of it.”





## MS TANYA CHUA, 39

WHO: Award-winning Singaporean singer-songwriter

On her road to finding success as a Mandarin music artiste, local songbird Tanya Chua encountered a stumbling block: her rusty spoken Mandarin.

Better known as an English singer-songwriter at the time, she hardly spoke the Mandarin she learnt in school.

Recounting an embarrassing mistake she made in 2006 when

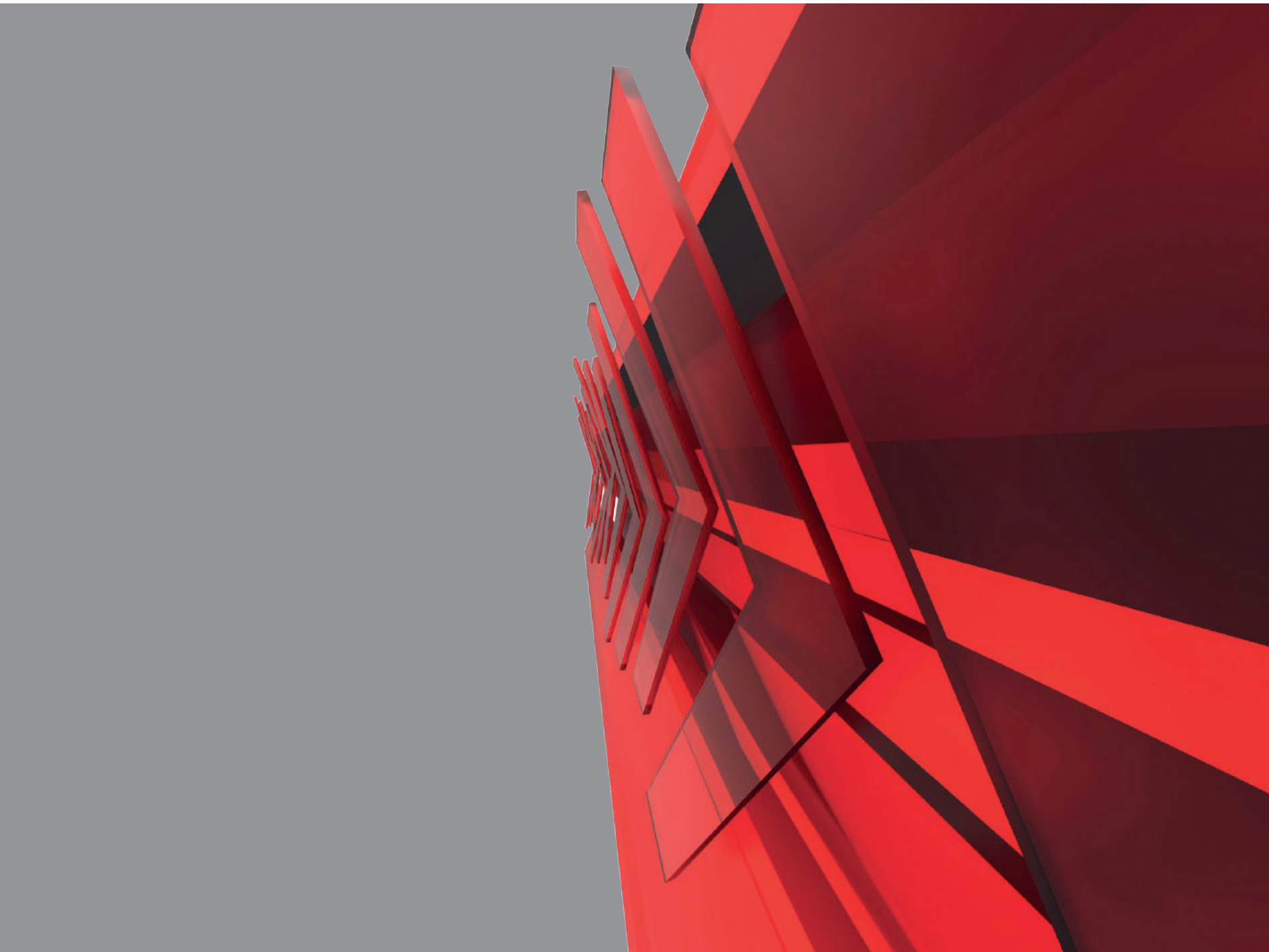
she was in Taiwan, she said: “Once after a radio interview in Taiwan, the DJ gave me a quilted vest as a present to keep me warm. It was winter then. I was so shy and just wanted to say ‘Oh you shouldn’t have!’ I literally translated that into Chinese which became 你不应该. (*ni bu ying gai*, which means ‘You shouldn’t’)

“Of course everyone looked at me funny and thought I was



4

Speak Mandarin Campaign  
**Personal Stories**





## **“Other campaigns have come and gone, but the Speak Mandarin Campaign is still steadily carrying on.”**

activities can reach the rest of Southeast Asia and even to the rest of the world.”

Giving his take on the evolution of the campaign, he said: “Other campaigns have come and gone, but the Speak Mandarin Campaign is still steadily carrying on.”

He said that having successfully made Mandarin the main language of communication in the Chinese community by its 20th year, the campaign had gone on to focus on building up an appreciation of Chinese culture and tradition.

“In recent years, the Speak Mandarin Campaign has focused on getting a new generation of young people to use the Chinese language. Clearly, in a globalised world, being bilingual offers all kinds of cultural and economic advantages.”

The Federation works hand-in-hand with campaign organisers. For instance, its Chinese Language and Culture Fund (CLCF), which was launched in 2006, funds creative projects and activities organised by local educational institutions, companies or organisations which raise the level of competence in the Chinese language or deepens the appreciation of Chinese culture.

CLCF also worked with SIM University to launch a scholarship in 2011. The scholarship funds SFCCA members who wish to study Chinese Language and Literature, Chinese Language

Education, Translation and Interpretation, or Early Childhood and Language Education at SIM University.

“The purpose of this funding is to encourage lifelong learning and nurture bilingual and bicultural talents. We want to help our members realise their dream,” said Mr Chua.

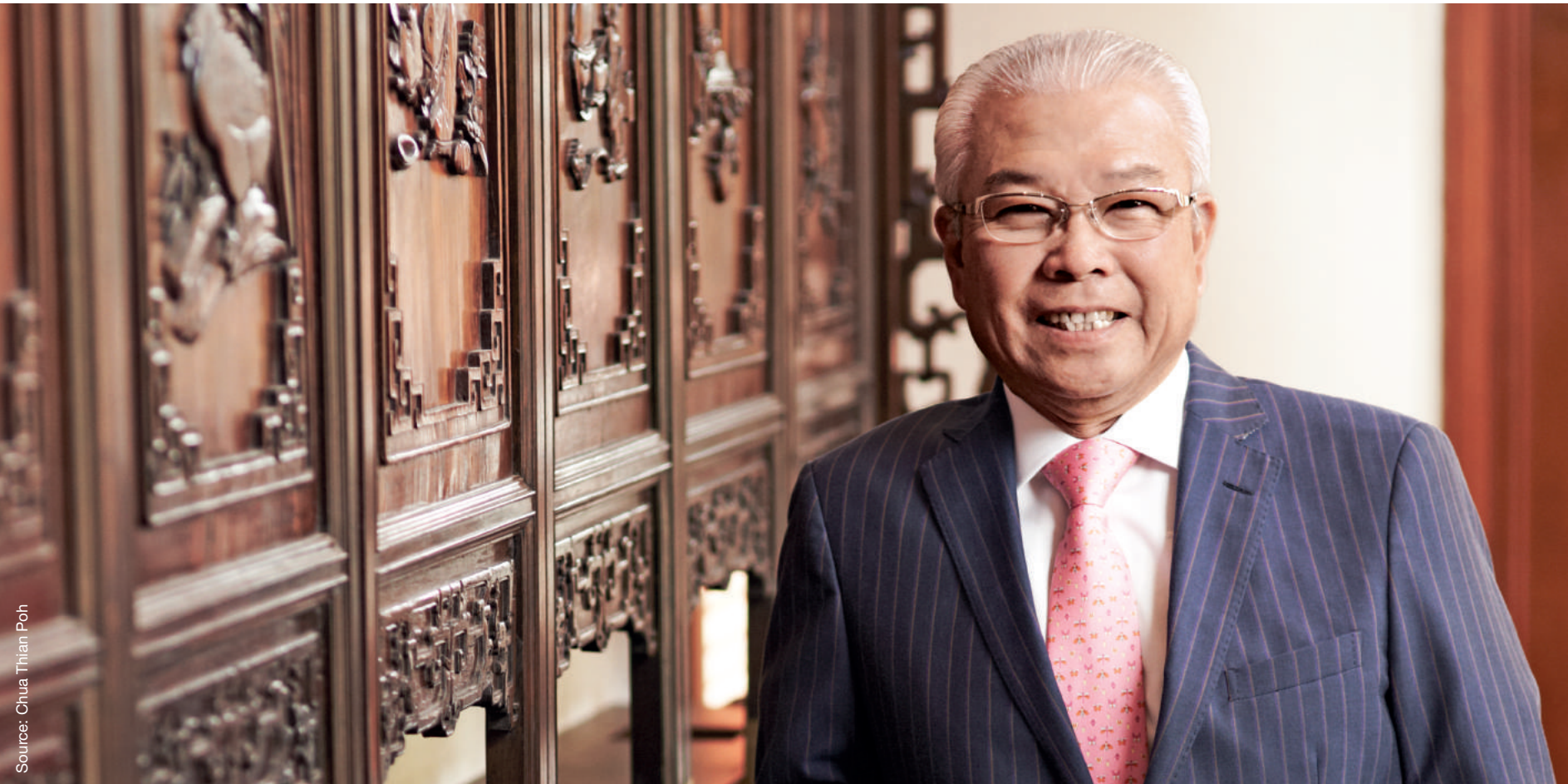
SFCCA has also set up a scholarship to subsidise five outstanding undergraduates to China’s top universities every year.

Mr Chua added: “In addition, the Federation always organises activities to promote Chinese.”

To those who lament the loss of dialects, Mr Chua said: “Former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew has said that dialects hamper the implementation of bilingual education. I believe that Singaporeans would not want to lose out because of language issues.”

He said that while there were those who may have questioned the Government at the start of the campaign, once China took off economically, they lauded the Government for its vision.

While he agrees with Singapore’s bilingual policy, he hopes that Singapore can emphasise more on Chinese. “Today’s young people are relatively less interested in the Chinese language, because most of their subjects are taught in English. We should build up more interest in Chinese values and culture.”



## CLAN ASSOCIATIONS

WHO: Mr Chua Tian Poh, President of Singapore Federation of Chinese Clans Association

In the past, there were many clan associations in Singapore, representing the different dialect communities.

Because of the Speak Mandarin Campaign, however, these associations have since come together to work together in partnership.

Said Mr Chua: "Clan associations should always adapt to the

changing times. In the past, dialects were part of the clan identity. But with the establishment of the Federation of Chinese Clan Associations, the barriers have been broken down. The groups have since come together on a bigger platform and it is a transformation of identity."

This has its advantages. "Overall, there is cohesion. As a bigger group, we can also go beyond Singapore to the region. Our





In the same vein, pre-schoolers should not be made to write out pages of Chinese words. Instead, they should be taught to recite fun poems or nursery rhymes. “Children must learn in a happy environment,” she said.

She created that same environment at home. Mdm Heng is proud of how her daughter and son are effectively bilingual. Her daughter, now in university, did her GCE ‘A’ Level History paper in Chinese. Her son, now studying for his GCE ‘A’ Levels,

is taking China Studies and Chinese Literature, alongside Economics and Mathematics.

She speaks English and Mandarin to them at home. “In my mind, there is no compromise. We need English to be connected to the rest of the world but we need Chinese because we are Chinese. If you are a Chinese teacher and your own child’s Chinese is bad, how can you convince me that you are a good Chinese teacher?”



### Changing Ways of Teaching Chinese

Consequently, the way Chinese is taught in school has been re-looked and reviewed several times over the years.

In particular, Mdm Heng was involved in an educational review in 1996, where the Chinese Language 'B' syllabus was introduced to help students who faced exceptional difficulties with Chinese.

"At the time, at a systemic level, we had to address the fact that some students who did very well in other subjects, but were weak in their mother tongue, may opt to go overseas for their studies. We needed a different way to engage them and stop the brain drain," she said.

### School Strategies

At the school level, different schools employ different strategies to cope.

At Nanyang Girls' High, teachers create a conducive environment where Mandarin is incorporated into daily school life. Mdm Heng, for instance, addresses the girls in both Mandarin and English. She is quick to clarify that she does not mix both languages in the same speech, but insists on using pure English and Mandarin in two separate speeches.

"I set an example, they know their principal is bilingual. I want them to realise that language is a communication tool," she said. All teachers, even those who teach subjects like Mathematics and Science, are encouraged to speak Mandarin when relevant. Mdm Heng's Chinese department, comprising teachers who come from Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan and China are a strong team.

They have come up with innovative teaching aids over the years using 'fun' methods like movies, newspapers, learning songs and using technology such as iPads to teach the language. "The more they use the language, the better they become and then they become more willing to use it," said Mdm Heng.

In its teaching, the school emphasises on listening, speaking, reading and writing as well as critical thinking. For instance, the teacher might present a Chinese newspaper article and ask the students how they would perceive the article from different points of view.

The school has expanded its translation module – once only offered to linguistically strong students – to all students in Secondary 1 and 2. They learn how to translate English to Chinese and vice versa. "We want to raise their sensitivity to language and learn that when it comes to translation, you cannot do it literally or it will be very strange," said Mdm Heng.

Ultimately, she feels strongly that there is no need to be pessimistic and lament the current state of affairs. "As Chinese teachers, we should not look back. Instead we should look forward and think about what strategies we can use to teach our children so they can better grasp the language."

Off the top of her head, she says drilling and completing one assessment book after another is not the way to go. "I feel strongly that reading aloud is most important. Because you can hear your own voice, you will slowly have a sense for the language."

“My English was very poor at that time. I wanted to resign. When I gave my first lecture in English, I didn’t know if the students understood me but I certainly didn’t understand myself.”

But he persisted and even went to the Glasgow University on a scholarship to study English in 1978.

He has since become known as the principal who transformed Xinmin Secondary School.

To Chinese teachers like him and Nanyang Girls’ High School Principal Mdm Heng Boey Hong, Mandarin standards have dropped over the years.

Every time Mdm Heng steps into a taxi and tells the driver her destination in flawless Mandarin, she gets a sobering reality check when the driver turns around to ask: Are you from China? Said Mdm Heng, “As a Chinese teacher, I feel so sad, that if I speak good Mandarin, they assume I am not from Singapore!”

Mdm Heng, who now heads one of the best Chinese girls’ schools in Singapore, graduated with a master’s degree in Chinese Studies from the National University of Singapore and has been teaching the subject for over 20 years.

She was based at the Jurong Institute from 1990 to 1999 before she was posted to Nanyang Primary, and then her alma mater Nanyang Girls’ High in 2009.

“During my school days, I met many outstanding teachers. Since young, I have worked hard to become a Chinese teacher,” she said.

But teaching Chinese, unlike in the 70s and despite the Speak Mandarin Campaign, has become increasingly challenging.

### **Challenges of a Chinese Teacher**

The challenge which schools face today is that we have a whole generation of parents who don’t speak Mandarin to their kids at home.

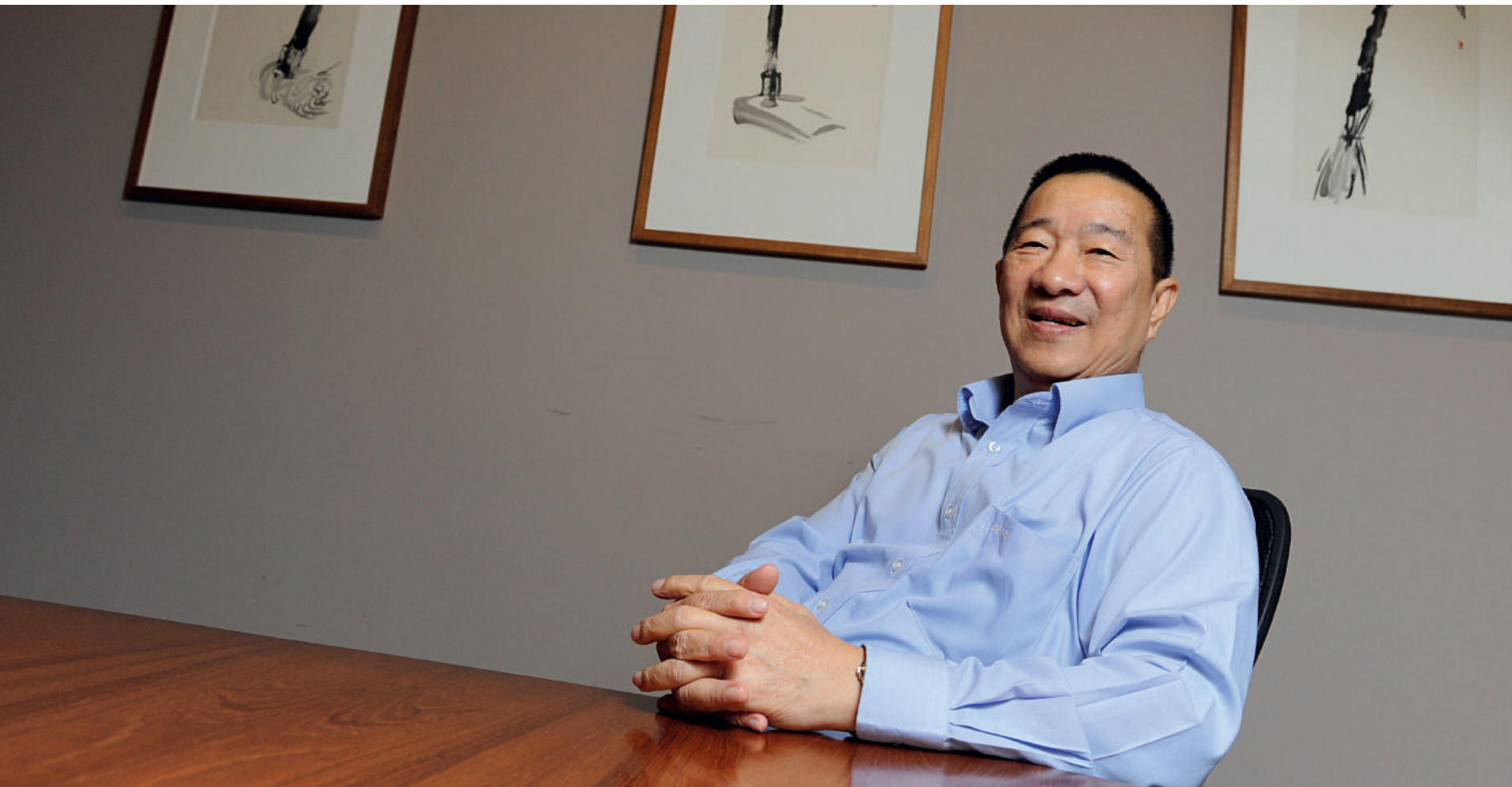
“Nanyang Girls’ High School is already at the top when it comes to Chinese. Even then, they have to put in effort to learn the language,” she said, adding that in the school the girls generally converse in English amongst themselves even though they have no problems switching to Mandarin if required.

It is a far cry from when Mdm Heng was young, when Chinese was a living language. When she started reading the Chinese newspapers at eight years old, it was completely natural to her.

Another obstacle is mindset. “Chinese has become foreign,” she said. “Chinese today is like English in the past. The thinking is that learning it well is a challenge.”

She also points out that the quality of Chinese teachers is not the same as it was before. “In my time, Chinese language teachers could only speak Mandarin. The purity of the language was 100 per cent with no English influence. For my younger teachers, the degree of ‘pureness may be lesser’.”

She hires teachers from China to mitigate this, but at the same time she insists on hiring locals who have an understanding of local culture. “We strive for a balance of expatriate and local teachers. It is really a big challenge.”



## EDUCATION

WHO: Mdm Heng Boey Hong, Principal of Nanyang Girls' High School

Mr Goh Tong Pak, veteran educator, President of the BreadTalk Group

When the bilingual education policy was introduced in the mid-1970s, Chinese-language teachers like Mr Goh Tong Pak, suffered.

Between 1974 and 1976, he was teaching economics in Mandarin at Hwa Chong Junior College.

"The lecture hall could accommodate 300 but more students ran in to listen to my class, auditorium seats were packed and students even sat on the stairs," said Mr Goh with pride.

But in 1977, they were all told to teach in English. It was a dark moment for him.



also lost one of their main sources of entertainment.”

She has a sentimental attachment to the dialects she once made her living from, and wishes the Government could have promoted Mandarin without banning dialects.

“Or perhaps cut down dialects at a slower pace instead of such a sudden ban,” she said.

But there is a silver lining.

Because of the Speak Mandarin Campaign, Ms Lin and other dialect-speaking talents like Chen Shucheng eventually found their way to television where she is, today, a regular host and actress.

Well aware that she would have to speak Mandarin to find work in future, she attended Mandarin classes to polish up her enunciation in the 1980s.

It worked to her advantage when, in 1984, she started hosting Chinese programmes on television. “In a way, you can say the campaign ultimately led to my appearing on television for without it, I would have stayed in Rediffusion,” she mused.

Because of her multi-lingual abilities – she can speak Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew and Hainanese apart from English and Mandarin – she continues to be a popular host today on television, at events and at *getai* shows which are boisterous live stage performances held during the Hungry Ghost Festival.

Despite her sentimental attachment to dialects, the language



Lin Ruping attended Mandarin classes to polish up her enunciation in the 1980s and eventually became a host for Chinese programmes. Today, she is a popular host for TV programmes, events and even *getai* shows.

medium she started out working in, she does not think it should be revived. “Times have changed. Many from the older generation who spoke it are already gone. The young do not speak it. We need to look ahead.”



## CHINESE ENTERTAINMENT

WHO: Ms Lin Ruping, actress and *getai* compere

When the Speak Mandarin Campaign was launched, Ms Lin Ruping lost a stream of income.

At the time, the secretary was a part-time broadcaster with dialect radio station, Rediffusion. It was the first cable radio station in Singapore when it was founded in 1949.

But by 1983, in line with the phasing out of dialects, the station was discontinued.

Recalled Ms Lin: "Our broadcasts were very popular. We were all very upset; our entire group was disbanded," she recalled. "It was a pity because we had been working for years. Our listeners





A scene from Kuo Pao Kun's "The Spirits Play". Ms Kuo Jian Hong feels that there is a need to take a less structured, more organic and free-flowing approach when it comes to promoting and teaching Chinese.



**“Using shows as a means to spark a love for language is a good tool because the children enjoy it. It brings them joy. No five-year-old will listen if you tell them that they have to speak Mandarin because China is a major world economy.”**

It puts up more accessible shows, and musicals like *Lao Jiu* which can attract a wider audience.

Its shows are drawing more students, as schools are sending more students to attend Chinese plays, drama and theatre to help spark their love for Chinese culture.

Parents, recognising that their children need to speak Mandarin, are doing the same.

TTP has also introduced shows for pre-schoolers – like French-Taiwanese production *La Naissance* – which are as popular as their adult shows.

She said: “Using shows as a means to spark a love for language is a good tool because the children enjoy it. It brings them joy.

No five-year-old will listen if you tell them that they have to speak Mandarin because China is a major world economy.”

Her hope for the Speak Mandarin Campaign, and even in the bigger picture for the way Chinese is taught in schools, is that it would take a less structured, more organic, and free-flowing approach to sow the seeds of the Chinese language.

Failure, she says, is acceptable. The way language is used need not follow a rigid structure. “The way a child uses language, for instance, may not be grammatically correct, but it should first be about expression.

“The love of language cannot be engineered. If you cannot experience the joy of language, it won’t live.”

English and one's mother tongue – was introduced.

Fundamentally, she feels that language, while serving a functional purpose, is inextricably linked to one's sense of culture and identity.

Even today, when speaking to her sister, she uses English for business, for work and for logical discourse. At home, or when it comes to talking about matters of the heart, they converse in Mandarin. "Mandarin is more comfortable between us," she said.

### **Evolution of Chinese Theatre in Singapore**

Those who are above 50 may well remember the golden age of Chinese theatre in the 1970s and before.

At the time, Ms Kuo recalls that the 900-seat Victoria Theatre was packed to the brim for over 20 shows. She was then a young child, but as the daughter of theatre great Kuo Pao Kun and dancer Goh Lay Kuan, she was exposed to the arts from a young age.

"There were easily 20,000 to 30,000 people watching one production," she said.

But as the focus slowly shifted to English, it caused what she calls the 'thinning out' of the link between language and identity. Chinese theatre took a beating, particularly in the mid-80s.

This was despite the Speak Mandarin Campaign being launched in 1979, as the impact from the macro language policies were greater.

"We didn't have enough scripts, actors, directors or audience," she recalled. "Just on scripts alone: If students are not using Mandarin other than to pass their examinations, how do you have good scriptwriters? Quality suffered."

She acknowledges that Chinese theatre may have also declined due to other factors, such as the early focus on sciences rather than the arts, and lifestyle changes, as Singapore developed.

But there was also a cultural shift. "If people went to the theatre, it was to see Western musicals like *Cats* and *Les Miserables*. They were not culturally connected to their own local Chinese productions," she said.

As a result, the Chinese theatre groups combined to pool their resources together. From what she estimates there were over 10 groups in the early 80s. Currently, there are fewer than five professional Chinese theatre outfits, including Toy Factory, Drama Box, Nine Years Theatre and her group.

The Chinese theatre groups have fought back. In the last decade, following the nadir in the 1980s, audiences are slowly returning.

This is partly due to an acknowledgement that cultural roots are disappearing, and efforts from the theatre groups to bring back the audience.

### **Winning Back the Audience**

TTP, for instance, captions all its shows with English subtitles so it can be understood by audiences who are not proficient in Mandarin.



## CHINESE THEATRE

WHO: Ms Kuo Jian Hong, Artistic Director, The Theatre Practice (TTP)

Chinese theatre in post-independence Singapore, explains Ms Kuo Jian Hong, reached a peak in the 1970s, hit rock bottom in the mid-1980s, and then slowly made its way up to where it is today.

Ms Kuo Jian Hong feels that changes in Singapore's language

policy was one of the reasons for this dramatic trajectory.

"Language is linked to who we are. When we chose English to be the functional language, it was not a decision based on our own cultural identities," said Ms Kuo, referring to the sweeping language changes during the 1970s when bilingual education –





Source: OCBC

## **“The Speak Mandarin Campaign is but one campaign. If in the bigger picture, more effort is not made to make Mandarin a living language, our future is worrying,”**

– Ms Leong Wai Leng

what do you say or do when you are faced with a situation of bribery? Even the kind of words used in Singapore and China are different. In Singapore, for instance, when we eat rice we say ‘*chi fan*’. But to the Chinese, ‘*fan*’ has connotations of bribery and vice. In China, you have to say, ‘*chi mi fan*’ to correctly express that you are eating rice. Such cultural nuances cannot be taught in school.”

In fact, Mr Chan said that in the 1980s and 1990s, many people who tried doing business in China lost money not because they could not speak the language, but because they did not understand how business was conducted in China.

Ms Leong brings up the need to understand the cultural or historical reasons behind why some decisions are made. “For instance, if you work with people in China who are aged above 50, they would have experienced the Cultural Revolution. Understanding this cultural backdrop is useful,” she said.

### **Future Growth in China**

From her personal observation, however, Singaporeans are increasingly at a disadvantage when it comes to doing business in China. “When it comes to the standard of Mandarin, each generation seems to be worse than the last,” said Ms Leong, without mincing her words.

She feels that businessmen currently in China, those above 40, started out with a better grasp of Mandarin than youths today. She said: “The question is, what is the problem? I don’t know. Perhaps it has to do with family upbringing and education. We have invested so much into boosting the level of Mandarin and yet it’s getting worse.”

What riles her is how Singaporean youths mix basic English and Mandarin together when speaking.

“The Speak Mandarin Campaign is but one campaign. If in the bigger picture, more effort is not made to make Mandarin a living language, our future is worrying,” she said.

“Our advantage as Singaporeans, when it comes to doing business in China, is that we are a bridge between East and West. But there are many Chinese people who are studying, living and working outside of China. They themselves can bridge East and West. Can we still preserve our advantage in the next 10 or 20 years?”

But Mr Chan is hopeful that Singaporean youths, who would at least have studied Chinese in school, will make the leap if they need to. He said: “China is a very attractive market. If there is a need, they will rise to the occasion.”

Between 1990 and 2010, trade between Singapore and China soared from \$5.2 billion to \$95.3 billion.

According to a 2012 Straits Times article, there are currently about 20,000 Singaporeans living and working in China.

Recruitment experts interviewed in the article said that Singaporean professionals are sought after in China as they are bilingual and highly skilled. They tend to be employed in middle to senior management positions in sectors such as property development, financial services and manufacturing.

### **Bilingual Advantage**

To do business in China, speaking good Mandarin is a must.

Said Mr Chan: “In China, if you are non-Chinese and can speak Mandarin, they will admire you. But if you are a Chinese who cannot speak Mandarin properly, they will look down on you.”

Ms Leong Wai Leng, who was CEO of OCBC China before she returned to Singapore in 2013, added: “We look like Chinese. We are Chinese. They expect us to speak Mandarin.”

Ms Leong, who spent 13 years in China, is effectively bilingual and she says Mandarin is her first language. The St Nicholas Girls’ School alumna spoke to her parents in Mandarin, Cantonese and Hokkien.

“Chinese was a living language for me. I had a lot of exposure to Chinese and represented the school in speech competitions and inter-school debates. It was great fun,” she recalled.

She started her banking career in Singapore, where she spent 12 years. In 2000, she was sent to China by her then-employer, Philips.

Her bilingual advantage was clear from the start as she quickly adjusted to working with the locals. Language challenges, if at all, stemmed from getting familiar with technical business terms. But this was overcome in several months.

Once the language bridges are established, it is usually not difficult for Singaporeans to gain a foothold in China.

Said Mr Chan: “The Singapore brand is very well-regarded and trusted in China. For instance, if you go to Shenzhen, you will see that the advertisements for residential private housing say: ‘Singapore-style management’. The Chinese believe in Singapore, it’s a premium brand.”

Even for Singaporeans who were not proficient in Mandarin in school, Mr Chan said that three to six months of residing in China would do the trick. “Usually after a year they end up being able to speak like the native Chinese.”

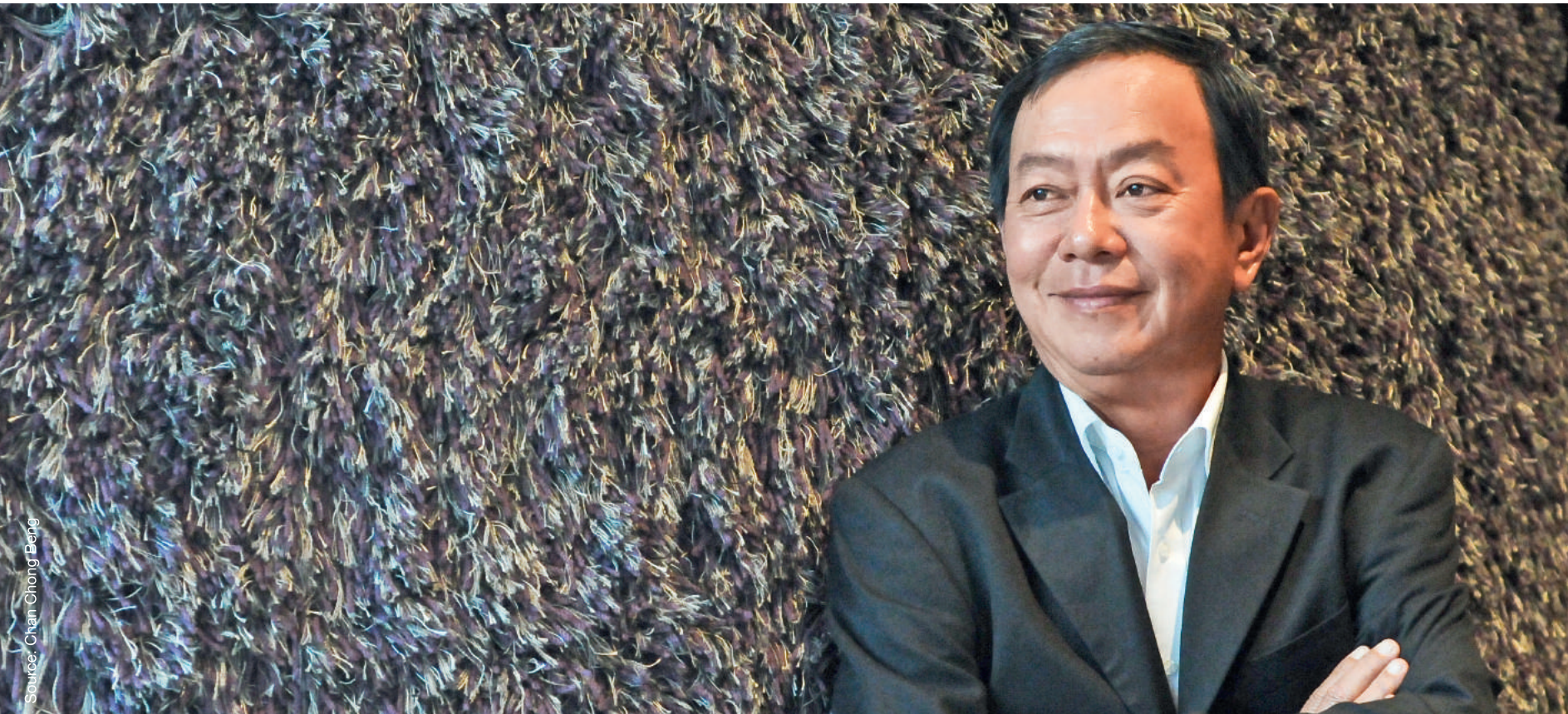
Immersion in order to speak fluent Mandarin, however, is the easy part.

In Mr Chan’s opinion, Singaporeans still lag behind when it comes to writing.

### **Fostering Cultural Understanding**

Cultural understanding is also a matter of intuition which goes beyond just speaking the language. Said Mr Chan: “For instance,





## BUSINESS

WHO: Mr Chan Chong Beng, Chairman of Goodrich Global,  
President of the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (November 2011 to November 2013)

Ms Leong Wai Leng, Head of Business Management Unit, CEO's Office, Bank of Singapore

The Speak Mandarin Campaign has proved instrumental in helping Singaporean businessmen to place a firm foothold in China when it opened its doors.

Acknowledging that the campaign is part of a larger language policy which includes efforts in schools and workplaces, Mr Chan Chong Beng said that from a business perspective, the campaign was one of great foresight.

"All these efforts created a very good bilingual environment for Singaporeans, who ended up being able to do business in countries from China to Taiwan and the USA," said Mr Chan.

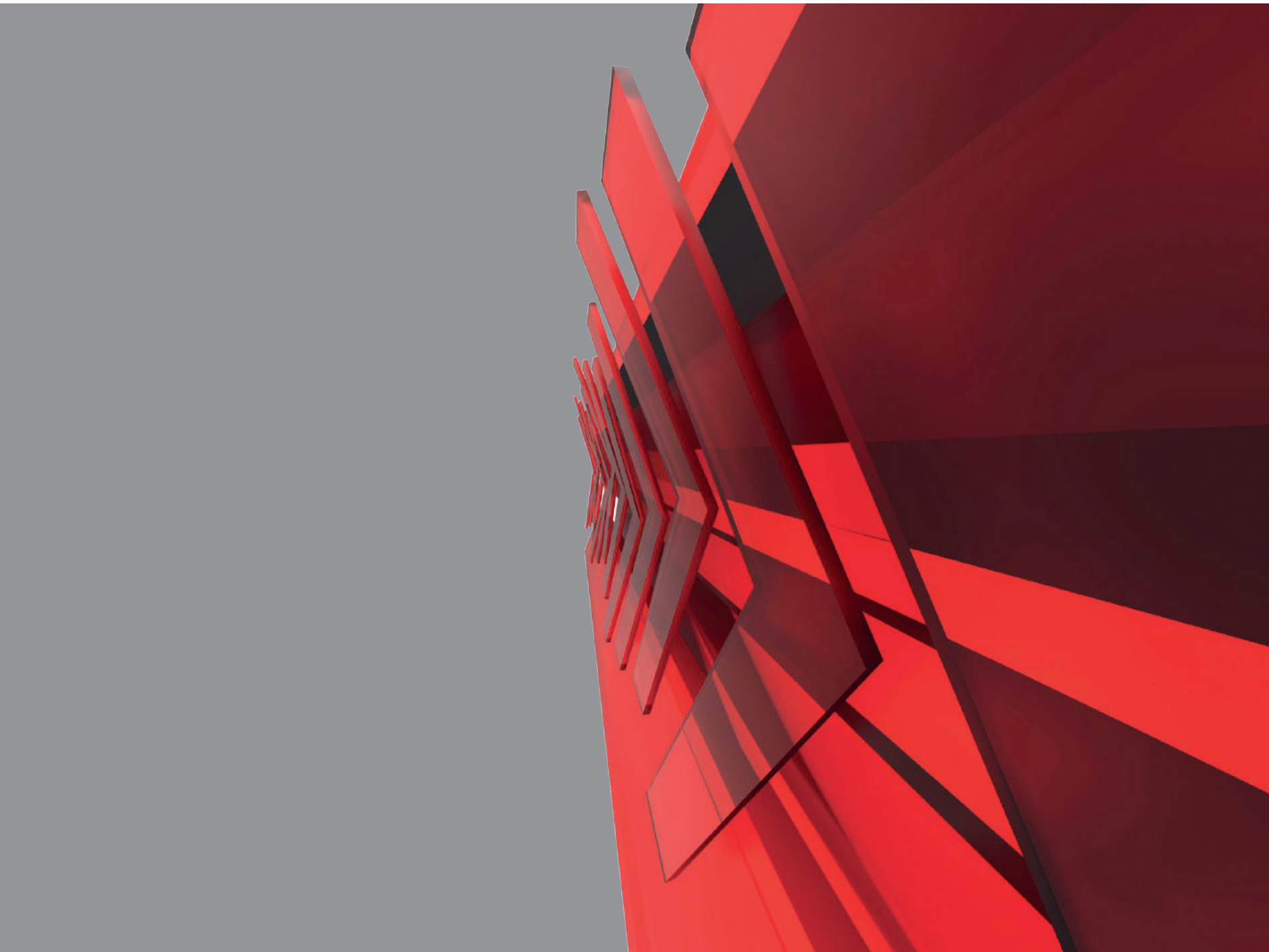
### China's Growth

Mr Chan reckons that it was in the soul-searching and reforms introduced in the wake of the Tiananmen Incident in 1989, that the wheels of economic development in China picked up speed.



3

Speak Mandarin Campaign  
**Impact**





## Mr Seow Choke Meng

### Media Veteran

For personal and professional reasons, Mr Seow Choke Meng did not hesitate to say yes when asked to helm the Campaign.

Professionally, the Executive Vice-President of Cultural Industry Promotion at Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) had been involved in organising Chinese cultural activities and engaging the Chinese community for the better part of his three-decade-long career with the company.

Some of the initiatives he helped to bring about included Singapore's first World Chinese Book Fair in 1986, the first River Hongbao Chinese New Year festivities in 1987 and the Chinese Cultural Festival.

Mr Seow is an active Chinese community and business leader and was a long-time board member of the National Arts Council for eight years.

As a standing committee member of Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry, he shared that SCCCI has been very active in the promotion of Chinese language and culture. Its regular council meetings are conducted in Mandarin and the minutes are captured in Chinese too.

Personally, he and his family members have benefited from the Campaign. Mr Seow, a Chinese-stream Hua Yi Secondary schoolboy who graduated from the former University of Singapore with a Bachelor of Science (Honours) degree in 1974, is effectively bilingual in Mandarin and English.

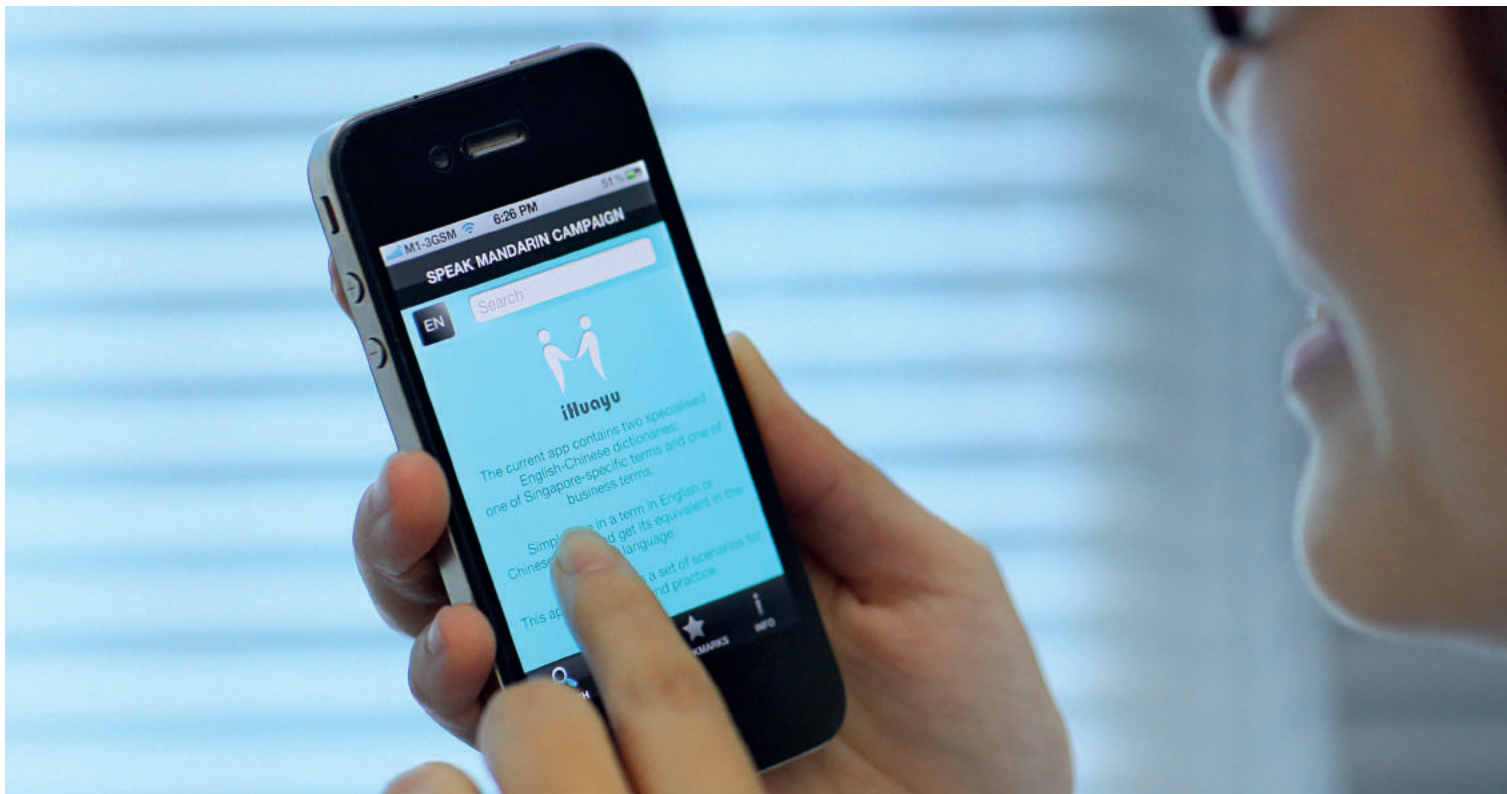


When the campaign was first launched, his daughter was only two and he had just started work with the former Sin Chew Jit Poh as an administration and personnel manager. Sin Chew merged with another Chinese daily, Nanyang Siang Pau, to become Lianhe Zaobao in 1983.

The campaign helped to provide his daughter and two younger sons with a good bilingual environment at home and in school. They were constantly reminded of the importance of Mandarin.

"Though they speak no Hakka, my three children could switch effortlessly from English to Mandarin at home and at work today," he said.

"As long as we use (the language) frequently and use it without fear, not only will we be able to master the language and speak good Mandarin, we will also be able to help create a conducive environment for picking it up."



A mobile application “iHuayu” was introduced during the Speak Mandarin Campaign launch in 2012, as a resource that offers users bilingual business and Singapore-related terms that are frequently used in media.

Mr Seow added that the app “is for people with difficulty finding the right word – in conversations it’s easy, but in business, there are many instances where you can find yourself at a loss for words.”

Users of the app have found it helpful. Finance manager Sharon Lee said: “I like that you would be able to get the Chinese translation of local schemes such as Medisave or Workfare Bonus at just a tap – so you can explain it to the elderly, or even overseas visitors when they ask.”

### **Use it or Lose it**

The present Campaign Chairman Mr Seow hopes that more

Chinese Singaporeans including civil servants will continue using Mandarin in their daily lives, even after the dust has settled on the campaign’s activities.

The theme of the campaign under his leadership has been: “Mandarin. It Gets Better With Use.” The slogan was chosen to bring across the point that there is no shortcut to learning Mandarin well. Said Mr Seow: “One can listen, read, speak and write the language, but the key is still in using it.”

programmes and listening to Chinese radio are ways of learning by osmosis. Reading Chinese books, newspapers and even comics is yet another way.”

To that end, the campaign organised its first Parent-child Talent Competition in July 2013. The objective was for both parents and children to learn, have some fun and hopefully spark a family-wide interest in Mandarin.

One nine-year old participant, Cherelle Phee, was encouraged to take part simply because her parents could accompany her. Her parents, who were English-educated, also benefited. Her mother said: “It’s not just the job of the child to learn. Parents also need to learn alongside their children.”

On a national level, then-Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew set up a fund to promote bilingualism among pre-schoolers in November 2011.

Mr Lee also launched his book, *My Lifelong Challenge: Singapore’s Bilingual Journey*. Sales of signed copies of the book – which he described as the “most important book” he has ever written, as it documented his struggles adopting a bilingual policy in a multiracial society – went towards the fund.

Education Minister Heng Swee Keat pointed to the importance of starting young when he launched the campaign at the Singapore Management University (SMU) in July 2012.

He described meeting a group of Singaporean students in Beijing, who were attending Tsinghua University and working in Chinese companies at the same time.

The Singaporeans had neither taken Higher Chinese nor were fluent Mandarin speakers; some seldom used Mandarin in Singapore. But they were game to be there, working and living in China and being immersed in the language.

Mr Heng said: “Having planted the early seeds of bilingualism in our students, we’ve provided them with the latent potential to speak Mandarin and operate in a Chinese-speaking environment.”

Apart from the interactive activities which carried on from past campaigns, including a campaign theme song contest, a video-clip competition, a television quiz for students and an advertising blitz across the print, broadcast and new media, the organisers focused on new technology.

### **Leveraging Technology**

Given the popularity of smartphones, the campaign launched a free iPhone app in July 2012 called iHuayu. Targeted at PMEBs (professionals, managers, executives and businessmen) who were sometimes at a loss for business-related words or phrases in Mandarin, iHuayu featured the Chinese equivalents of 50,000 frequently used business terms such as “hot money” and “gross domestic product”. It could also translate terms commonly used in Singapore, like “Electronic Road Pricing” and “void deck”, into Chinese.

An Android phone version was later developed.

Referring to the app when launching the campaign, Mr Heng said: “Technology is a great leveller, and can be used to great effect in levelling up linguistic competencies.”



## 2011-present: MOVING INTO THE FUTURE

As the campaign moved beyond its 30th year, it embraced new technology in order to reach out to more young people.

At the same time, the spotlight returned to the critical role played by parents. Increasing numbers of children who turned up in Primary 1 were growing up in homes where only English was spoken.

### Parents Teaching Children

Campaign Chairman Mr Seow Choke Meng, Executive Vice-President of Cultural Industry Promotion at Singapore Press

Holdings (SPH), strongly believes that parents play a critical role in helping their offspring learn and master Mandarin from a young age.

When Minister for Transport and Second Minister for Foreign Affairs Lui Tuck Yew launched the campaign on July 4, 2011, he said: "When your attitude to Chinese language, culture and history is one of fun, discovery and adventure, your children will also see the Chinese language and culture in the same light. For those who want to learn or encourage our children to use Mandarin in their daily lives, exposing them to Chinese television



Minister for Information, Communication and the Arts Lui Tuck Yew and Senior Minister of State, in the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, and the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources Grace Fu at the launch of the Speak Mandarin Campaign in 2011 with Promote Mandarin Council members.

## Ms Lim Sau Hoong

### A Bilingual Advertising Veteran

In the interview for this book, Ms Lim Sau Hoong elected to speak in Mandarin, liberally peppered with idioms and poetic turns of phrase which young working Singaporeans might have already left behind in their school textbooks.

“When people are unable to use language effectively to express the subtleties and complexities of their thoughts, they become culturally shallow,” said Ms Lim.

“Language is a weapon. If Singaporeans do not have this weapon, they cannot, in a manner of speaking, access the world.”

Learning Mandarin from the age of five, Ms Lim spent her primary school years winning inter-school Chinese oratorical and storytelling competitions. She was exposed to a diet of classic Chinese novels like Romance of the Three Kingdoms and English fare from Enid Blyton.

Graduating with a degree in Chinese Studies from the National University of Singapore, she was a Chinese Language teacher at Anglo-Chinese Junior College for a year before diving into the advertising world which proved to be the perfect platform for her talents.

What the Executive Creative Director at advertising agency 10AM Communications brought to the campaign was years of award-winning advertising experience. She was responsible for the Guinness “Word of Wisdom” campaign which ran from 1989 to 1994 (featuring Hong Kong celebrity George Lam), and she received the President’s Design



Award in 2007. Her clients have included McDonald’s, Sony Ericsson, Sony, CapitaLand and China’s national TV station CCTV. Her work for the Bank of China has reaped more than 70 international awards.

She is recognised as a woman who has overcome discrimination in a male-dominated ad world to top the game. Her eloquence in Mandarin and English has undoubtedly helped pave her way into the huge Chinese market.

The mother of two sons tries to imbue the same love for all things Chinese in her children, by exposing them to Mandarin songs, television programmes and even to her work, with varying success. She mused: “I feel that this cannot be forced. The more you force, the more they reject.”

## Campaign Impact

If the programmes seemed to be more impactful, it was partly due to the fact that more funding was available, including \$350,000 from two new sponsors: The Business China Group and the Chinese Language and Culture Fund, which tipped the campaign kitty to over \$1 million.

She also leveraged her social and business networks, calling on familiar faces to appear on television.

In hindsight, Ms Lim still derives tremendous satisfaction from having led the campaign for three years, partly because it was so challenging. She said: “I grew personally. I worked with different people, different departments and understood how others regarded the campaign. In the past, I never thought

about it, I thought it had no relation to me, I didn’t really care. But as a Chairman, I became more concerned about Singapore’s language journey.”

“It is one of the most difficult launch campaigns I have done but after I saw the results, I felt it was rewarding especially in Singapore’s context of learning Mandarin. I contributed one small drop. Not big, but it’s positive.”



Campaign posters for the Speak Mandarin Campaign’s key initiative in 2009 — “The Chinese Challenge”.



A television advertisement, which for the first time featured non-Chinese people speaking Mandarin, made an immediate impact – both good and bad. The ad showed a United Nations of children from Singapore, France, Norway, Congo and Russia, as young as two years old, rattling off Chinese nursery rhymes and describing their hobbies in Beijing-accented Mandarin. The stars included the two young daughters of famed investor Jim Rogers, Happy and Bee.

For the featured children, Mandarin was their second or third language.

“I talked to their parents and they really felt that Chinese would be very important. They wanted their kids to compete with the Chinese,” recalled Ms Lim.

She made special mention of these children in her speech during the 2008 campaign launch: “These kids are all diligently learning Mandarin, yet Singapore parents feel that Mandarin is repulsive. But in 30 years’ time, when these kids and our kids are competing on the same world stage, will your kids be able to win?”

Viewers were suitably impressed: If even foreigners are taking Mandarin seriously and their children can speak it so perfectly, what about us?

Others disapproved: They felt that the ads scoffed at Chinese Singaporeans who were unable to speak Mandarin.

### Chinese Challenge

Ms Lim and her team came up with other ways to engage its target audience.

Chinese Challenge was a 12-week online competition where 12 questions were posted every week, in English and Mandarin, on the campaign website.

The multiple-choice questions covered a wide range of topics from culture and history to geography. The exercise of coming up with the questions proved to be a social event as many people gave feedback to the organisers. “Some old *Nantah* graduates even came up to say, I can do volunteer work for you to come up with questions!” said Ms Lim.

Instead of the expected 5,000 participants, Chinese Challenge drew 15,000 faithful followers. Through Chinese Challenge, they learnt for instance that the Internet phrase “*wai lou*” – a tilted building in Chinese – is often used by forum netizens to describe a chat that has veered off the topic of the original posting. Or that the phrase “*mao shan*”, as in “*mao shan wang*” durians, is derived from the Malay word *musang*, or civet cat.

At the end of 12 weeks, the competitors with the highest scores were invited to attend an audition where six finalists battled it out in a televised final. In 2009, nearly a million viewers tuned in to the final and the programme clinched the Best Variety Special at MediaCorp’s Star Awards 2009.

The televised finals also memorably featured politicians Lim Swee Say and Gan Kim Yong amongst many others, and Teo Ser Luck hamming it up as Bruce Lee. For the two years the show was televised, about ten politicians were featured in each show. Said Ms Lim: “Since the politicians were extremely supportive, it would be great to have them play cameos for the show.”



In 2009, the campaign produced a series of television advertisements featuring non-Chinese children speaking Mandarin.

friends and take exams in English. They will master English. With Mandarin we can connect with the whole of China and its 1.3 billion people.”

Ms Lim recalled that her main challenge was that many Chinese Singaporeans who went through a bilingual education left Mandarin behind once they left school, and were unable to speak the language well.

In order to address this issue, the Promote Mandarin Council targeted their efforts at two core groups: Young adults

aged between 16 and 34, and working adults aged 35 and above.

“Speaking Mandarin is especially relevant to them since Singapore was talking about doing business in China,” said Ms Lim.

### A Memorable Advertisement

An important point to be made was that even foreigners were wising up to the need for Mandarin fluency in order to engage with the Chinese.



Then-Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew (left) and Ms Lim Sau Hoong autographed the campaign poster during the launch of the Speak Mandarin Campaign in 2009.



## 2008-2010: **MAKING AN IMPACT**

If there's one thing people remember from the campaign under Ms Lim Sau Hoong's leadership, it's a striking television advertisement.

Featuring young children who were anything but Chinese speaking impeccable Beijing-accented Mandarin, it was the first time the campaign had showed speakers of Mandarin who were not ethnically Chinese. It drew both praises and disapprovals, but the sight and sound of blonde toddlers reciting Chinese poetry struck a chord.

Up until then, the campaign had always carefully and politely focused only on ethnic Chinese.

The impact of the ad was a reflection of Ms Lim's grasp of the medium: The campaign's only female Chairman to date was lauded a "bi-cultural ad wizard" in a June 1, 2008 Straits Times article introducing the advertising veteran as the new face of the campaign.

### **Recruiting an Advertising Guru**

It was a job she did not want at first. The hunt for a new Chairman started when Mr Kenneth Tan joined the Media Development Authority. He could no longer assume the Chairman's role as there was a conflict of interest.

Ms Lim's name topped the selection list. On her CV was the stand-out fact that the Executive Creative Director at advertising

agency 10AM Communications – a company which she founded – was the only Singaporean roped in to help Chinese film director Zhang Yimou orchestrate the beginning of the Beijing Olympics.

Asked for her initial thoughts when asked to head the campaign, she said: "In my heart, I know that the campaign cannot change the mind-set of Singaporeans. It can only create a ripple. Or perhaps, my small contribution can inspire some people to embrace Mandarin. Singapore's language policy cannot be reversed. But as a true blue Singaporean, I felt that I could do this small thing for Singapore."

The advertising veteran added: "I'm also a media and advertising person. From a creative perspective, I thought it might be good to re-consider the whole campaign and give it a different spin."

### **Campaign Challenges**

Even though the campaign had been humming along for nearly 30 years by the time Ms Lim took the hot seat, there was no letting up.

When then-Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew launched the 2009 campaign on 17 March, he once again appealed to parents who were bilingual to speak to their children in Mandarin. He re-emphasised: "Nobody's brain is 1,000 gigabytes. The most you have is 5 gigabytes. If you want your children to master Mandarin speak to them in Mandarin. Don't worry about them learning English. They will pick it up in schools, they will meet

## Mr Kenneth Tan

### Campaign Veteran who Championed Film and Media

Mr Kenneth Tan was involved in the campaign for 14 years, starting from the time in 1994 when then-Chairman Ho Kwon Ping, tasked to target English-educated Singaporeans, approached him to join the committee by saying: “Kenneth, you are our target audience. Please join me.”

Therefore, when Mr Tan took over as Chairman in 2006, he had already helped to organise more than 10 campaigns.

He strongly believed that sparking a desire to speak Mandarin had to be done via “fun” avenues such as films and songs. This was no doubt due to his background. Mr Tan, who became the Chairman of the Film Society when he was just 19, spent his career in films and media: He was Managing Director for movie chain Golden Village, Chairman of the Singapore Film Society and is currently an Assistant Chief Executive at the Media Development Authority.

The effectively bilingual Nanyang Primary alumnus credits his Chinese school background for his strong Mandarin foundation. In his day, all his subjects were taught in Chinese except the English language subject. To this day, he recites his mathematics multiplication tables in Mandarin.

On a personal level, chairing the campaign gave Mr Tan a valuable glimpse into how Government thinking translated into action on the ground. “In the process, my own Mandarin improved and till this day, I am still very close to many members of the Promote Mandarin Council.”



Said Mr Tan: “We wanted to convert those who thought Chinese was ‘uncool’.”

In 2008, a *Yang Sheng* series of weekly English and Chinese talks, by Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) practitioners who spoke on topics based on the Chinese philosophy of wellness, was launched. The speakers were also featured in a dedicated *Yang Sheng* series on Razor TV and MyPaper to reach out to both English and Mandarin-speaking audiences.

Capitalising on the fact that the Olympics in Beijing was around the corner in 2008, events were organised to put the spotlight on the fact that the biggest sporting event in the world was held in a Mandarin-speaking nation. In the lead-up to the Olympics, campaign organisers teamed up with the

Straits Times and Singapore Sports Council to run a sports-themed video series called “*On Your Marc, Get Set, Go!*”, where Straits Times Sports Correspondent Marc Lim was shown learning how to speak better Mandarin from national athletes whilst learning the sport. The video series was produced and shown on Razor TV. He also penned a weekly column in The Sunday Times on his efforts to learn and use Mandarin in a fun way. By the time he covered the Beijing Olympics, his standard of Mandarin had improved significantly.

The 2008 campaign launch was organised at an indoor football facility, The Cage, involving local sports stars like basketballer Michael Wong, shooter Vanessa Yong, footballer Shi Jia Yi, sailor Roy Tay and bowler Jazreel Tan.



Campaign Chairman Kenneth Tan's “Music, Movies, Metaphors” strategy tapped on the wide appeal of Chinese pop culture. Zhao Wei Films produced a two-and-a-half minute MTV to encourage Chinese Singaporeans to learn Chinese. (Front row, from left) Producers Gary Goh, Tan Fong Cheng, actresses Yeo Yann Yann and Mindee Ong, songwriter Xiaohan and Eric Ng (back row).



### Campaign's 3 Ms

While he was Chairman, Mr Tan explained that his strategy centred on what he called the 3 Ms: Movies, Music and Metaphors.

For instance, the 2006 campaign was launched with much fanfare when the theme song of the movie *881* – a Singaporean musical-comedy-drama about the *Getai* scene – was performed at the Golden Village cinema in VivoCity. The movie was later screened in theatres and became the top grossing locally-produced movie in 2007. “We were working with our partners to engage our audience in their daily lives: For example, tapping into the wide appeal of Mandarin songs and movies, as well as attracting their interest with the beauty of idioms and metaphors.” Some of these partners included Golden Village, the Singapore Media Academy, Eric Khoo's Zhao Wei Films, song sheet producer Music Net, Eduplus Language Centre and MediaCorp Radio.

Karaoke fans could even sing Mandarin songs at karaoke outlet K Box at a discount during the campaign.

Mr Tan also added, “We learn best by osmosis and absorption. Music or singing is more participative. I personally know of people who don't even understand what the lyrics of a song mean, but they can mouth almost phonetically perfectly the entire song. Imagine how potent that would be if you combine it with understanding.”

The former Managing Director of movie chain Golden Village, also championed Chinese movie screenings which were a hit with both young and old. He had organised these movie events

in the 90s, even before he became Chairman, when he was a committee member.

He said: “Movies are great because they use language in context. It's a conducive leisure activity. Although most people don't watch movies to pick up the language, they pick it up anyway. It doesn't take big or high-brow things to get people to be interested in the campaign. Language is fun and it should be campaigned that way.

“All we want is to put across a tone and manner that will make our target audience take a second look and say: ‘Hey, this is something different’.”

He however added a note of caution: “In re-positioning, we did not want to go totally to the other extreme, such that it becomes fun but frivolous. It's fun, it's upbeat, it's relevant, it's enjoyable. But it also has depth, it also has its roots.”

Other programmes included a story-telling competition for parents judged by children, a *Huayu Cool* songbook with *hanyu pinyin* lyrics, a Mandarin advertising slogan contest, a carnival and a Chinese digital film fest.

### Design, Lifestyle and the Olympics

The following year in 2007, Mr Tan expanded his focus beyond movies and music to include design and lifestyle.

For instance, people could harness their artistic flair to design Chinese idioms on T-shirts in a contest. These would then be printed on the shirts by hip retail outlet, 77th Street, and Night and Day, a gallery-cum-bar in Selegie Road.

## 2006-2007: **REFRESHING THE CAMPAIGN**

To Mr Kenneth Tan, Campaign Chairman in 2006 and 2007, his greatest challenge was keeping the campaign fresh for Singaporeans who had already gotten used to the annual event. Programmes were geared toward engaging the young and English-educated.

In 2006, for instance, the campaign launched Chinese Jazz

Night at a Boat Quay jazz club, Jazz@Southbridge. During the event, which was launched by then-Deputy Prime Minister Wong Kan Seng, Jacintha Abisheganaden belted out jazz tunes in Mandarin.

In his speech, Mr Wong urged Singaporeans to use Mandarin not in place of English, but in addition to it.



Then-Deputy Prime Minister Wong Kan Seng singing at the finale during the launch of the Speak Mandarin Campaign at GV VivoCity in 2006.

# Professor Wee Chow Hou

## An English-educated Academic Turned Mandarin Champion

Educated in English at the then Dryburgh English School and Presbyterian Boy's School, Professor Wee Chow Hou struggled to learn Chinese.

The Professor of Strategy and Marketing now teaches at the Nanyang Business School, Nanyang Technological University. He also writes and consults on Asian business practices. Prof Wee brushed up his Mandarin on his own when he was a PhD student at the University of Western Ontario in Canada, and later at the National University of Singapore where he started an MBA programme and various executive development programmes in Chinese.

Following his 10-year stint as campaign chief, he is convinced that when it comes to speaking Mandarin, parents play the most important role. "We must recognise the importance of parents when it comes to learning languages. If we give our children an easy way out, they will never try."

Interestingly, Prof Wee is best known for distilling the wisdom of Sun Tzu's Art of War, a Chinese military classic, into management principles and practices for modern corporate warriors. He is a world-renowned expert on this subject.

His two children, now aged 34 and 32, grew up in Canada



but once back in Singapore, were sent to Chinese-speaking kindergartens. The house was stocked with Chinese books and magazines, so the children could painlessly learn the language.

Both went on to study Higher Chinese at primary and secondary schools and scored distinctions in them. They did so without private tuition but only under the watchful eyes of their mother who was also educated in English.



foreign language in Singapore in 30-50 years' time.

In 2002, the Chinese press submitted a proposal to the Government on how to arrest falling standards of Mandarin. The editors from Lianhe Zaobao, Lianhe Wanbao and Shin Min Daily gave recommendations on how to get young people interested in the language.

The campaign was also set against a larger backdrop of several major educational reviews, as the Government and teachers struggled to find the best way to “teach” Chinese.

From increasing the difficulty and cultural content of textbooks to simplifying the Chinese syllabus so that Chinese words might be taught in English, getting young Chinese Singaporeans to be engaged with their mother tongue continues to be a conundrum tied to a multiplicity of influencing factors, even today.

Looking back, Professor Wee is most proud of how the campaign, during his tenure, adapted to the times. “We successfully gave a ‘futuristic twist’ to our approach. We tried to bring an awareness of the importance of speaking Mandarin and learning Chinese, and I think we succeeded.”



PM Lee Hsien Loong at the launch of the Speak Mandarin Campaign on November 5, 2005. A bilingual feature, *Cool Speak* was introduced in the Straits Times, and a pocket-sized *Cool Speak* Chinese-English guidebook presented to guests at the event.

knowledge of Mandarin has become an economic asset and this has provided the added advantage and urgency for English-speaking PMEs (professionals, managers and executives) to take learning Mandarin more seriously.”

In 2005, the 172-page Mandarin pocket dictionary titled *Cool Speak: Your personal guide to speaking Mandarin*, was published by The Straits Times.

### **Dialect Revival**

Interestingly, it was during this time that dialects quietly re-entered Singapore society. In the late 90s, the authorities started allowing piecemeal dialect programmes on cable television. In local 1998 movie, *Money No Enough*, Hokkien features in its dialogue 80 per cent of the time. Director Jack Neo said at the time that the movie – which revolved around three friends who had no money and who started a business together – was mostly in Hokkien as that was how the lower-income groups spoke. It was a huge hit.

The chairman, Prof Wee, did not see this as a challenge, unlike some he termed “over-enthusiasts”. “They were so concerned about the speak Mandarin theme that they became very worried when dialect started creeping in. I felt that in response, we should show that we had arrived and that we should be confident and magnanimous enough to accept dialects without thinking that it would compromise Mandarin.”

### **Continuing Challenge**

Despite the campaign’s best efforts, however, the bigger persistent challenge was that for the younger generation of

Chinese Singaporeans, English continued to rise in dominance.

Children from Mandarin-speaking homes fell from 70 per cent in 1989 to 54 per cent in 1999. At the same time, children from English-speaking homes rose from 26 per cent in 1990 to 42 per cent in 1999.

During these years, heavy-weight politicians spoke out often and passionately about the subject.

In 1997, at his National Day Rally speech, then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong spoke of the need to reproduce a core group of Chinese Singaporeans steeped in Chinese culture, history, literature and the arts. He emphasised that a Chinese language elite was necessary to keep alive the country’s heritage: “The sense of rootedness and identity, the social instinct to work together and help the less successful, the self-confidence of belonging to an ancient civilisation, have helped Singapore to hold together socially and politically.”

In 1998, then-Minister for Information and the Arts George Yeo, in his speech to launch the campaign, said: “If the majority of Chinese Singaporeans use Chinese, not as the mother tongue but as a second language, not used at home but taught only in school, the nature of our society will change and it will be for the worse. Therefore, the objective of the Speak Mandarin Campaign today is not only to establish Mandarin as the preferred language over dialects, but also as a high language for Chinese Singaporeans.”

In 2000, two Chinese language experts interviewed in The Straits Times even suggested that Chinese may become a





Then-Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts Dr Lee Boon Yang (centre) at the launch of the Speak Mandarin Campaign in 2003 at MOX bar.

Said Prof Wee: “The challenge was not in getting people to speak Mandarin. The greater challenge was in getting them to speak good Mandarin and by that I mean 100 per cent Mandarin in one sentence. Not a mixture of Mandarin, Malay, dialects and English.”

The campaign also went deeper into the cultural angle. Even though this had been touched on in previous years, the campaign embraced it more fully from 2001. The slogan was: “Mandarin. Window to Chinese Culture”. Said Prof Wee at the time: “Culture can bring a deeper appreciation of the language. So if you are able to appreciate Chinese culture, you will be challenged to broaden your vocabulary.”

Launching the campaign that year, then-Information and Arts Minister Lee Yock Suan said: “Our common working language is English but our mother tongue provides us with vital links to our roots and identity. It gives us a world-view that complements the perspective of the English-speaking world. Proficiency in Chinese will also enable us to absorb the richness of the original Chinese stories and literary works which are lost in translation. It will help us appreciate more deeply our cultural heritage and values.”

The economic value of Mandarin became more pronounced as China grew in prominence. In 2003, the Promote Mandarin Council said in a statement: “With the emergence of China, the



Then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong noted in his 1999 National Day Rally address that Singaporeans were speaking a form of bastardised Mandarin. “I notice that a form of Singapore Mandarin is creeping in. I call this *chap chye* Mandarin. This is Singlish’s counterpart. It is a mixture of dialects and Mandarin with English words thrown in.”

In 1998, the campaign’s first Chairman Ow Chin Hock noted that the standard of written Mandarin had fallen over 20 years.

In 1999, there was even talk of getting the young to read Chinese newspapers. Then-Minister for Education Teo Chee

Hean cited sobering figures from Lianhe Zaobao – the proportion of its readers under the age of 30 had plunged from 35 per cent in 1989, to 20 per cent in 1999. He said that creating an environment where Chinese Singaporeans spoke Mandarin was not enough. They had to be encouraged to also read Chinese materials.

With mounting concern over the quality of spoken Mandarin, the 2001 campaign focused not only on the need to speak Mandarin, but also the need to speak good Mandarin. This marked the first time the campaign put the spotlight on the quality of spoken Mandarin.



Then-Minister for Information and the Arts George Yeo, with Chairman of Promote Mandarin Council Prof Wee Chow Hou visiting the “Window to Mandarin” (*Hua Zong Wang*) exhibition held in conjunction with the launch of 1998 Speak Mandarin Campaign at Suntec City.

centres and music. We have to make learning Mandarin a pleasure, not a chore.”

Prof Wee, in a recent interview, said: “Speaking Mandarin was deemed to be archaic and old-fashioned. So we moved out of our comfort zone, changed the logos and programmes, made it more trendy and modern.”

Efforts were also made to reach out to parents. In 2006, they could undergo training in story-telling at national libraries, and then take part in a family storytelling competition.

### **Riding the Internet Wave**

With growing Internet penetration rates, the campaign significantly stepped up its online presence during this time.

While a website for the campaign was first set up in 1995, the Internet was the main theme of the 1997 campaign. Its focus was on getting English-educated Chinese Singaporeans to surf Chinese websites, so they would not only speak Mandarin but read it. The logo that year was designed to resemble a computer icon, with a cursor pointing at it. On television, celebrities James Lye and Wong Li-Lin were shown in advertisements surfing Chinese Internet websites at a cybercafé.

Said Prof Wee in an interview then: “When we think of Chinese, we think of the calligraphy brush. We should move away from that and think of modern, exciting ways of learning Chinese. We are going into a very exciting era of trying to learn Mandarin in an ‘upmarket’ and modern IT environment.”

The website became more interactive and interesting, even

featuring 24 animated Chinese fables and parables. The campaign’s online outreach efforts won it an Outstanding Applications award from the National Computer Board in June 1998.

Several months later, when then-Minister for Information and the Arts George Yeo launched the year’s campaign, he unveiled *Hua Zong Wang*, a one-stop gateway to a world of Chinese Internet resources. Those who wanted to access it would get a free Chinese starter CD kit, which included a Chinese viewer and which allowed for *hanyu pinyin* input. Once plugged in, users could visit a virtual “comic café” for comics lovers, a “media stand” offering hourly updates from international wire agencies and even a “wedding court” which allowed brides to book their wedding gowns online. It was also linked to 12,000 overseas Chinese websites.

In 2002, the campaign, capitalising on the growing gaming culture, even launched an online multi-player strategy game called *Century of Three Kingdoms*.

The website, offering regularly refreshed content and online contests, also helped the campaign to move beyond its traditional one-month, once-a-year timeframe. Speaking to the Straits Times in a 1999 interview, Campaign Chairman Prof Wee said that “the Speak Mandarin Campaign is no longer a one-month event every September. We want to give the public a constant reminder all year round.”

### **Quantity to Quality**

Beyond just speaking basic Mandarin, the spotlight was widened to focus on other aspects.

Pagar Road. The choice of venue was significant as organisers wanted to send the signal that speaking Mandarin was trendy.

In his speech, Dr Lee said: “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.”

Movies continued to feature strongly in the campaign, testament to then-committee member Kenneth Tan’s unwavering belief that it was easier to fall in love with a language via entertainment. Every year, the campaign featured either a movie festival or a headlining family-friendly movie (usually a Disney cartoon) in Mandarin.

A Chinese exhibition was also organised for several years, from 1998. These two-day “Window to Mandarin” exhibitions featured vendors who offered Chinese language classes, sold Chinese books, Chinese educational CD-ROMs, Chinese computer software and other resources, to pique an interest in all things Chinese. The objective was “to shift the direction of the campaign to providing practical support,” as Professor Wee Chow Hou, who was then Campaign Chairman, pointed out in an interview.

Much effort was made to engage English-speaking Chinese Singaporeans.

In 2004, for the first time since the campaign was launched, a bilingual slogan was used: *Hua Yu cool* (华语 Cool; Mandarin is cool), which sought to convey the message that Mandarin was a part of every day life rather than a difficult language to learn. Singapore artist Tan Swie Hian supported the campaign by creating a 华语 *Cool* image which incorporated the campaign slogan against a Chinese painting of red flowers.

To appeal to young English readers, a new bilingual feature called *Cool Speak* was introduced in the Straits Times, the most widely-read English newspaper in Singapore. Appearing once a week, it explained Chinese phrases culled from sports and entertainment events, local and foreign news as well as lyrics of popular songs, and informed readers on how to pronounce and use them.

The feature evolved to a weekly human-interest interview on English-speaking Singaporeans who were motivated by their hobbies, work or interest in Chinese culture to use Mandarin in their lives. *Cool Speak* was well-received by Straits Times readers and continued for several years. A 172-page pocket-sized Chinese-English guidebook was also published.

It was also a first when English news anchor Melissa Hyak surprised audiences by reading the first segment of the Channel NewsAsia 9.30pm news in Mandarin on the day the 2003 campaign was launched.

On the approach to engage its target audience, a spokesman for the Promote Mandarin Council explained in 2000: “Nowadays, people are a lot more outgoing. To reach them, we have to use creative means like movies, webchats, activities at shopping



## 1997-2006: **ENGAGING THE PEOPLE**

As the campaign continued to appeal to the growing numbers of English-educated Chinese Singaporeans to speak Mandarin, it became increasingly accessible and friendly.

The campaign's celebrity ambassadors did not only speak Mandarin. They often admitted to how they once used to speak Mandarin badly, and how they successfully got up to scratch.

Programmes were designed to be interactive and fun, to hopefully spark a self-directed passion for the language. These were also increasingly tailored towards the young, many of whom were now growing up speaking English at home.

### **Engagement Efforts**

During this period, campaign activities included *xinyao* concerts, story-telling competitions, the launching of Mandarin music CDs, a pop concert which featured William Soh and other singers, and a four-part gameshow featuring artistes like Sharon Au and Allan Wu. In 2005, organisers even managed to “sneak” in 15-minute sets of Chinese music into night clubs so party-goers could groove to Chinese music.

In 2003, the campaign was launched by then-Minister for Communications, Information and the Arts Dr Lee Boon Yang at a hip-and-happening night spot, the MOX Bar and Cafe in Tanjong



Local singer, Joi Chua and Chinese rap-rock band Chou Pi Jiang were the ambassadors for the Speak Mandarin Campaign in 2004.

## Mr Ho Kwon Ping

### The Campaign's First English-educated Chairman

Mr Ho Kwon Ping was the first English-educated non-government personality to lead the campaign.

The businessman and industrialist who was then the President of the Wah Chang and Thai Wah group of companies grew up speaking English. Raised in Thailand, he studied at the American School where only English was used.

His parents, prominent businessman Ho Rih Hwa and prolific bilingual writer Li Lien Fung, were effectively bilingual and his mother tried to teach him Chinese at home but he was resistant.

It was only when he was 16 and his father sent him to Tunghai University in Taiwan to study Chinese for a year that his eyes were opened to the world of Chinese culture.

In a September 1994 Straits Times interview, Mr Ho said: "I accepted the chairmanship because I felt the need to change the status quo."

Asked on what he himself personally got out of the campaign, he said, in October 1995: "The most rewarding part has been that it brought me in touch with people from a broader spectrum of Singapore society than I normally would get a chance to meet."



overseas Singaporeans would access the site. Content included a calendar of events and a bulletin board for users to share their views on movies.

### Using Celebrities

Mr Ho's campaign was also notable in that it managed to involve well-known English-educated personalities, who demonstrated to the target audience that they were not shy about speaking Mandarin, even if their Mandarin was not perfectly fluent.

During the 1994 campaign launch, high-flying ambassador Chan Heng Chee and diplomat Tommy Koh performed a crosstalk or *xiangsheng* which was scripted by award-winning playwright Kuo Pao Kun.

A year later, at the 1995 campaign, Brigadier-General (NS) Lee Hsien Yang, who was then Chief Executive Officer of Singapore Telecommunications, took to the stage at the launch event of the campaign at the Television Corporation of Singapore's TV Theatre. He acted and spoke Mandarin in a live recording of popular sitcom *Under One Roof*. The self-confessed reluctant actor said at the time: "I'm not an actor and I do not consider myself a celebrity. I agreed to do it because I think the Speak Mandarin Campaign is an important initiative."

Singaporeans also sat up and started paying attention when they saw Professor Tommy Koh, then-Raffles Hotel General Manager Jennie Chua and swimming star Ang Peng Siong speak Mandarin in light-hearted and witty television advertisements.

For instance, one advertisement showed Mr Ang in a locker room, ostensibly getting ready for a swim, speaking in English

about how "Practice makes perfect". The scene then cuts to a karaoke lounge where the swimming champion belted out the theme song from martial arts film *Huang Fei Hung* in what the Straits Times called "well-practised but less-than-impeccable Mandarin".

Explaining the thinking behind it, Mr Ho said: "We are getting English-educated Chinese Singaporeans who one would normally think would be rather shy about speaking Mandarin in public, and perhaps even making a fool of themselves on TV, to speak Mandarin. That is in fact an important part of our message."

Reflecting on his campaign in October 1995, Mr Ho spoke with some satisfaction: "I think we brought a fresh approach and a certain amount of irreverence to the subject, which was intended. We made it more palatable, less campaign with a capital C. We wanted it to be more fun, more easy-going, which I think we accomplished."



Diplomat Tommy Koh and Ambassador Chan Heng Chee performed a crosstalk during the 1994 Campaign Launch.



counterparts if they fumble while using the language. Help them.

### A Soft-Sell Approach

Well-aware that the target audience had a different mind-set from an earlier generation of Singaporeans, the committee took a different tack with its messaging. It wanted the campaign to be light-hearted, humorous and fun.

Said Mr Ho: “For the modern professional class of English-speaking Singaporeans, we cannot use heavy, exhortative messages which smack of ‘propaganda’ but instead we have to ‘soft-sell’ our message, like sophisticated advertising. There must be an element of ‘fun’ in the campaign.”

“We must not scare off our audience by making the hurdle too high. We should attract them to access Chinese culture – and Mandarin in the process – through easy-to-digest things like Chinese TV shows and movies, and so forth.”

The “new” campaign stamped its identity from the day of the launch when, for the first time, it was held in the form of a charity gala dinner at the Shangri-La Hotel. Previously, the campaign launches had been held at the Singapore Conference Hall.

The head of the 1994 campaign launch committee Ms Pang Cheng Lian said that the “formal atmosphere” of the Singapore Conference Hall was not attractive to the English-educated. The Shangri-La dinner, which was sponsored by the hotel, aimed to raise \$150,000 from the dinner proceeds to fund Chinese cultural activities.

An advertising agency was also roped in to design the

campaign’s messages. After a four-way pitch, Leo Burnett, a top international ad agency, won the account.

The overall theme during Mr Ho’s chairmanship was one of balance. This was conveyed in witty ways. One poster, for instance, showed a floral umbrella and Chinese paper umbrella with the words “Widen your coverage”. Another showed half a Chinese drum spliced against half a Western drum with the tagline, “Drum up opportunities”.

For the first time, the campaign’s message was also printed on 50,000 stored-value MRT farecards.

Well aware that one of the most effective means of language exposure is through entertainment, the organisers brought in many Chinese movies, a practice which continued in later years. In 1994, a Mandarin film week was held at cinema multiplex Yishun 10, featuring films like *Judou* and *Return to a Better Tomorrow*. The Mandarin version of Disney cartoon *The Lion King* was also screened in Singapore before it was shown in China and Taiwan. The next year, the campaign was launched at the Golden Village Marina cineplex, featuring the world premiere of *The Story of Ajin* by acclaimed Hong Kong film director Ann Hui.

Mr Kenneth Tan, who was then a member of the committee but who would later step up to the Chairman post, said: “Cinema-going is a painless way of exposing oneself to a language.”

The campaign went online for the first time in 1995, in response to the soaring Internet penetration rate and to better engage its target audience. Campaign organisers also hoped that

educated Chinese Singaporeans to use more Mandarin.”

He lauded the Chinese-educated Singaporeans who went out of their way to promote Mandarin without offending other Singaporeans.

And then there was the appointment of Mr Ho Kwon Ping, a high-profile businessman who had until then conducted his media interviews in English because he had insisted his Mandarin was not up to par. In his two years of service as the Council’s chairman, he became something of a poster boy for the campaign as his outspoken views and fresh approach

earned him reams of newspaper coverage.

### Shifting the Target

Under Mr Ho’s leadership, the campaign had two objectives: To encourage English-educated Singaporeans to speak more Mandarin, and to convince them that they had to master their own language to understand their culture well.

The message which consequently emerged to the English-educated Chinese was: Don’t be shy to speak Mandarin.

At the same time, the message to those who were already fluent in Mandarin was: Do not laugh at your English-educated



The Speak Mandarin Campaign reached out to English-educated Chinese Singaporeans from 1994 to 1996, during which Mr Ho Kwon Ping (seated) was the Campaign Chairman.

dialects – particularly those then-Campaign Chairman Ho Kwon Ping referred to as “English-educated yuppies” – were choosing to speak English instead of Mandarin.

Many could not straddle both languages.

Deepening the chasm was a perception that Mandarin was a low-class language. Mr Tan Tiang Keh, an academic who was interviewed in the Straits Times in October 1989, stated that high-ranking government officials were not speaking Mandarin: “These people just do not seem to feel proud of being able to speak Mandarin. Some even pretend they do not understand their mother tongue. To them, there is no use speaking Mandarin as it won’t raise their social status.”

It was clearly a concern five years later when Mr Ho launched his campaign in 1994 and raised the same point in an interview: “Many older English-educated persons are not interested in Mandarin and Chinese culture. They feel that it is something which has nothing to do with them. Their prejudice and ignorance have made them unaware of what they have missed out. There are many such people in Singapore. What is deplorable is that they are occupying high positions.”

At the same time, he said there were those English-educated Chinese who were too shy to break into Mandarin when speaking.

### **A Different Organising Mindset**

A new kind of organising committee was brought in to reinvigorate the thinking behind the campaign. Instead of a mostly Chinese-educated committee, English-educated people from all sectors

of society were roped in to join the Committee to Promote the Use of Mandarin. They represented the target audience.

Since 1994, many in the committee have been English-educated Chinese. They included former Nominated MP Robert Chua (then-President of the Singapore Confederation of Industries), Ms Pang Cheng Lian, then-Personal Assistant to the United Overseas Bank Chairman and Mr Kenneth Tan, then-Chairman of the Singapore Film Society.

A Lianhe Zaobao editorial in September 1994 stated that this was a “major breakthrough in the campaign’s history” as it was, for the first time, promoted by the English-educated ... It is appropriate because only they themselves know the difficulties and needs of English-educated Chinese.”

In a Straits Times interview in the same month, Mr Ho said: “We can intuitively gauge the psychology of the English-educated yuppies – their innate defensiveness, dislike of heavy-handed official-sounding campaigns, value of wit and humour in ‘breaking the ice’.”

The committee’s meetings were, for the first time, held in English. Then-Straits Times political correspondent Han Fook Kwang, in a September 24, 1994 article on his experience in the committee, wrote: “Here were 20 members of the committee, the majority of whom spoke Mandarin as the first language, tasked to promote the use of a language they obviously love and had high regard for, deliberating, not in Mandarin, but English, and some rather haltingly too. All this to accommodate the handful of English-speaking members, this columnist included, who were drawn in because part of the campaign this year was to get English-





The slogan for the Speak Mandarin Campaign in 1994 was "Mandarin, Use It Or Lose It."

## 1994-1996: **A TRANSFORMATION**

In 1994, the Speak Mandarin Campaign underwent perhaps its most dramatic transformation in its 35-year history.

The thinking behind the 1994 campaign, its target audience, the demographic of the organisers, the approach and even its programmes were a marked departure from the preceding 15 years.

Why was there a need for change?

Increasingly, the language being used by Chinese Singaporean at home and at work, was English, and not Mandarin.

While the campaign had succeeded brilliantly in persuading Singaporeans to avoid dialects, those who were eschewing their

## Mr Ho Kah Leong

### The Campaign's Longest-running Chairman

Mr Ho Kah Leong, a politician and artist, led the campaign for 11 years. He was the campaign's longest-running Chairman.

Mr Ho started his career as a teacher at Nan Chiau High School in 1965, then became a Member of Parliament for Jurong in 1966.

The accomplished painter has also served as Parliamentary Secretary in various ministries.

In what is perhaps an indication of the mettle of the man, he once said: "A campaign that is done quietly is not a campaign and will never be effective as one."

In a 1989 Straits Times interview which labeled him "Mr Mandarin" for his role in fronting the campaign, Mr Ho, when asked on what impact the campaign has made under his tenure, said: "The campaign has removed the psychological barrier involved in using the language, particularly over the Government service counter."

But his ending note was that there could be no letting up in the campaign's efforts to encourage Chinese Singaporeans to speak Mandarin. "Our ultimate aim is to make Mandarin the common language in the Chinese community," said Mr Ho, who memorably kicked off the campaign's Mandarin Karaoke Championships in 1992 with a slow Mandarin number.



Then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong had to step in to assure Singaporeans that English was still the working language of the nation, and Acting Minister for Information and the Arts George Yeo promised that the next year's campaign would be less "tense" and "more fun and lively".

It was. The theme for 1991 – "Mandarin for Chinese Singaporeans: More than a language" – was supported by a beauty contest, karaoke competition and cross-talk events.

But 1990 was not the only speed bump in the campaign's history. A greater challenge loomed on the horizon.

### **The Rising Challenge**

After the 1980s, a new breed of English-educated Chinese Singaporeans emerged, who, while not speaking the dialects they may have encountered in their childhood, were not speaking Mandarin either. Instead, they were most comfortable with English, the main working language both of the nation and the world.

Indeed, statistics from the Education Ministry showed that the percentage of children entering primary school who spoke Mandarin at home reached a peak in 1989, then started falling to 67.9 per cent (1990), 66.6 per cent (1991) and 64.7 per cent (1992).

Conversely, the percentage of those who spoke English at home was steadily rising: from a low 9 per cent in 1980, it leapt to 26.3 per cent in 1990, 28.6 per cent (1991) and 31.1 per cent (1992). In response, the campaign shifted its focus from the hawker centre communities and public transport workers that were the

target groups of previous years, to white-collar workers after 1988.

When then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew launched the campaign in 1989, he appealed to Chinese professionals, businessmen, industrialists and senior civil servants to use more Mandarin in order to raise the social status of the language.

On a television programme in October 1989, he made his appeal on sentimental grounds. He said the campaign has to get people "emotionally attached" to Mandarin. "So we go back to our roots – more than 4,000 years of history. This is a part of us."

### **A Turning Point**

In 1992, when then-Deputy Prime Minister Ong Teng Cheong launched the campaign, he acknowledged that it was at a turning point. It would henceforth focus on English-speaking rather than dialect-speaking members of the Chinese community.

Referring to the rising rate of English usage in the average Chinese Singaporean household, he said: "If this trend continues, Mandarin may one day lose its influence in society. This means that Chinese children will use English when they grow up. Their understanding of the mother tongue will either be limited or totally absent."

Since then, English-speaking Chinese Singaporeans have remained the key focus of the campaign. It has remained so for the past 23 years.



In response to all these attempts to make Mandarin more accessible, there was some concern that cultural values and roots were being diluted.

But then-Campaign Chairman Mr Ho Kah Leong, addressing Parliament in his capacity as the Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Education, responded that these moves had helped students to learn Mandarin better and faster.

### **Economic Imperative**

Another impetus which underscored the campaign's relevance emerged in the mid-80s. As it became apparent that China would soon shape up to be one of the world's economic superpowers, it became economically attractive to speak Mandarin.

When then-Second Deputy Prime Minister Ong Teng Cheong launched the campaign on September 29, 1985, he spoke not only about the cultural value of Mandarin, but of its economic value. "With further development in China, the economic value of Mandarin will increase," said Mr Ong.

He then cited examples of multi-national companies which were looking to employ people who were bilingual in English and Mandarin, to undertake negotiations in China.

In 1988, then-Minister for Trade and Industry and Second Minister for Defence Lee Hsien Loong reiterated the same point when he launched the campaign. Mandarin, he said, was becoming more useful as a business language.

From then on, China's economic liberalisation would become a source of motivation for Singaporeans to learn Mandarin.

### **A Glowing 10-year Report**

By 1990, it was clear that the campaign had achieved its aim of replacing dialects with Mandarin: The population census showed that between 1980 and 1990, Chinese households using Mandarin as the predominant household language rose from 13 per cent to 30 per cent. Households using dialects fell from 76 per cent to 48 per cent.

In market and hawker centres, those using Mandarin rose from 1.2 per cent in 1979 to 21.9 per cent in 1989, which was the campaign's 10th anniversary.

That year, news reports on the campaign lauded its stunning success in shifting the spoken language of the average Chinese Singaporean from dialects to Mandarin.

An editorial by Deputy Chief Editor of Lianhe Zaobao, Goh Nguen Wah, published on September 30, 1990, stated: "Judging from the results of the campaign, Chinese Singaporeans are realistic and have the spirit of innovation. They do not cling to their old ways but are prepared to adapt to changing times and environments...Most accept that the Speak Mandarin Campaign is a far-sighted and innovative social campaign."

Challenges remained. The campaign's organisers were given a stinging reminder of the emotional connection that people have with language, when its 1990 campaign was met with anger and derision in some quarters. Specifically, its slogan – "If you're Chinese, make a statement in Mandarin" – offended ethnic minorities and the English-educated Chinese, whose protests then drew the ire of the Chinese community.

*Hanyu pinyin* – English phonetic transcriptions of Chinese characters – made it easier for many to start speaking Mandarin.

### **The Rise of *Hanyu Pinyin***

In an October 1982 Straits Times article titled “Campaign was turning point in clerk’s life”, Susan Gwee, a clerk, said *hanyu pinyin* had helped her to read Chinese. Even though she had studied Chinese in Primary One and Two, she came from a non-Chinese speaking background and eventually studied Malay in school.

In the 1980s, *hanyu pinyin*, which had already found its way into schools, was progressively integrated into mainstream society. Chinese businessmen were encouraged to register the names of their businesses in *hanyu pinyin*, even though the Registry of Companies and Businesses made it clear that it would not “compel” them to do so as they might do business with other ethnic communities or with companies in other countries.

In daily life, *hanyu pinyin* names replaced dialect transliterations in many areas, from the description of food items on signboards to the names of new companies, HDB new towns, streets and buildings. For instance, Tekka Market became Zhujiao Market.

In 1982, in conjunction with the campaign, it became compulsory for Chinese Singaporeans to register their children’s names in *hanyu pinyin*: Teo Geok Boey was known as Zhang Yumei in school, for instance.

This continued to cause controversy years down the line as some parents were not comfortable with “changing” their dialect family surnames which linked them to their ancestral roots. But it has inadvertently led to a generation of Chinese Singaporean children growing up with two or three names, and whose identity cards reflect their *hanyu pinyin* names in brackets behind their dialect names. Chinese script was also simplified.



In 1990, the campaign slogan “If you’re Chinese, make a statement in Mandarin” offended some ethnic minorities. Then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, seen here at the launch of the Speak Mandarin Campaign at the Singapore Conference Hall in 1993, reassured Singaporeans that English was still the nation’s working language.



Mandarin was promoted in government departments like the Registry of Companies and Business in the 1980s.

memorable Speak Mandarin Campaign slogans, television commercials and song filmlets. A whole generation of Singaporeans grew up with catchy Speak Mandarin Campaign jingles such as “*Da jia shuo hua yu*”, which continue to ring in their memories even today.

In 1986, pop culture was woven into the campaign for the first time as *xinyao* singers such as Liang Wenfu and Huang Huizhen were roped in to boost the appeal of Mandarin through their folksy tunes. In 1988, local English-educated television stars like Chen Xiuhuan, Zheng Wanling and Li Nanxing revealed in the press that they had initial reservations about using Mandarin during filming, but subsequently overcame it with constant practice.

Mass media proved to be an effective avenue to reach out to Singaporeans. Mandarin lessons were broadcast on television and radio. In 1982, the then-Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) came up with five-minute blocks of simple

conversational Mandarin lessons interspersed with programmes called Everyday Mandarin.

In 1989, on the 10th anniversary of the campaign, the SBC roped in children from 10 top schools to film a 10-episode television series *Fun with Mandarin*, screened on Saturdays at 3pm. The objective was for the young to teach the young: the children sang songs, performed sketches and recited poetry.

Dr Gwee Yee Hean, a management consultant and leading Chinese intellectual, gave his opinion on how the campaign had evolved in a August 29, 1992 Straits Times article: “It was a less confrontational, more coaxing approach. The message was ‘look at what you stand to gain instead of what you stand to lose’. That made the campaign more appealing to a new generation of Singaporeans.”

But the results achieved in the campaign’s first decade were not only due to canny messaging and creative outreach.



## 1982-1993: **GROWING SUCCESS**

As the campaign gathered momentum in the early 1980s, it focused on different segments of the Singapore population each year.

This included hawkers and customers of markets and food centres, public transport workers, and later patrons and service staff in restaurants and shopping centres.

Civic groups and other organisations joined hands with the campaign organisers to reinforce the message. The campaign's theme for 1982 was "Speak Mandarin at your Workplace", and it was jointly organised by the committee and the National Trades Union Congress.

Government ministries and some private sector organisations also ran their own in-house Speak Mandarin drives in conjunction with the campaign. These included the Housing and Development Board and Public Utilities Board – in 1988, both agencies provided 90-minute Mandarin classes during office hours for their staff, who had to pass an examination at the end of the year. Those who failed had to reimburse the cost of the course.

During the campaign months, volunteers, Members of Parliament and grassroots workers distributed publicity materials by hand all over the island to homes, markets, food centres and shops.

Mr Ho Kah Leong, who was Campaign Chairman from 1982 to 1993, said in an interview that the success of the campaign

during his tenure was due to grassroots support, which had helped to spread the campaign beyond the civil service to the rest of the community.

### **Creative Messaging**

Beyond pamphlets, the campaign began to explore more creative channels of communication during this decade.

Promotional initiatives became more interactive. Instead of a one-way top-down approach where the Government was perceived to be doling out propaganda, members of the community were involved in story-telling, singing, and oratorical contests, as well as debates and talent shows.

The technology of the day was used to help Singaporeans learn Mandarin. Conversational Mandarin lessons were developed by the campaign secretariat and the Ministry of Education in 1979, accessible by telephone or through cassette tapes available for purchase. Between 1980 and 1989, over 83,000 sets of Mandarin lessons on cassette tapes were sold.

The response to a 24-hour Dial-for-Mandarin service, launched on May 24, 1983, was overwhelming: many people who dialled 3395577, the hotline number, could not get through on the first day. Six years later in 1989, the hotline reached a record 50,000 calls a day.

These years also saw the beginnings of some of the most

## Dr Ow Chin Hock

### The Campaign's First Chairman

Academic and politician Dr Ow Chin Hock, now 70, was the first person to lead the Speak Mandarin Campaign. Like all those following him, he is effectively bilingual.

Educated at Catholic High School and then at the University of Singapore where he graduated with an honours degree in Economics, he went on to Vanderbilt University in the United States where he obtained a master's degree and then a PhD in Economics.

At the time of his appointment as the Chairman of the Committee to Promote the Use of Mandarin from 1979 to 1981, he was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Culture.

Even after he stepped down, he continued to take an interest in the promotion of Mandarin. In 1988, he suggested that the campaign be expanded into a Chinese Language and Culture month.

In an interview he gave in 1999, Dr Ow said that most Chinese Singaporeans were supportive of the Speak Mandarin Campaign and even those who were initially against the idea were converted in the end. He retired from politics in 2001.





The campaign faced opposition from some, but there were others, like these members of the Parent-Teacher Association of St Michael's School, who voluntarily met twice weekly to learn basic Mandarin.

108 people signed off on a petition letter dated October 26, 1979, which argued: "Many of the witty exchanges in Cantonese cannot be well-expressed in Mandarin. In the end, the whole show will not be as spicy."

The last dialect drama to be shown on Singapore television was the Cantonese drama serial, *The Brothers*. It attracted over a million viewers over the age of 15 according to research data, and it ended its run in January 1982.

On the overall tone of the letters, Dr Ow recalled: "People rebuked the Government, saying that the entertainment value of the serials would decline after dubbing. Some even said that it amounted to robbing the older generation of their entertainment." Along with television programmes, there was a ban on dialect programmes and commercials on the radio and in the cinema. Local radio stations and Rediffusion – which featured master

Cantonese storyteller Lee Dai Sor's programme – ceased all dialect programmes by the end of 1982.

However, phasing out dialects in the mass media was a key enabler of the campaign, for it allowed Mandarin to penetrate the homes. At the time, according to the 1980 census, there was a television set in 90 per cent of Singapore homes and 65 per cent watched television every day.

"Television was a very influential medium with which to create a Mandarin-speaking environment and we could not let dialect programmes get in the way," said Mr Lee Kuan Yew. "Our decision was criticised as cruel and lacking in compassion for elderly viewers, but it was the correct thing to do, as otherwise the Speak Mandarin Campaign could not penetrate homes. I am therefore grateful to the many older Singaporeans for their sacrifice."



Said another Singaporean: “Since the campaign was started, I have more courage now to use Mandarin in these places.”

### Targeting Civil Servants

In order to help conversations begin in Mandarin, the Government asked civil servants to be role models.

Two weeks after the campaign was launched, Head of Civil Service Mr Sim Kee Boon sent out a circular instructing Chinese staff to refrain from using dialects during office hours, and to use Mandarin instead when speaking with Chinese members of the public. Even if the response was in dialect, they were to persist in speaking Mandarin.

These civil servants wore badges saying “I can speak Mandarin”. In 1981, 50,000 such badges were given out.

Internally, all the government ministries formed their own committees to promote Mandarin. Classes in conversational Mandarin were started for ethnic Chinese civil servants who were not proficient and wanted to learn the language. By 1989, over 4,000 civil servants had taken these classes. Passing Mandarin proficiency tests became a condition for promotion.

Civil servants were also asked to speak Mandarin in a social setting, in order to seed a Mandarin-speaking environment in the wider community.

The Government, however, was mindful to avoid too heavy-handed an approach. Mr Sim, in a Straits Times article on September 25, 1979, said: “When dealing with the public, our objective must be to encourage, not compel, the use of

Mandarin. Courtesy and common sense must prevail.”

### Teething Pains

Initially, as with anything new, some found the campaign a bitter pill to swallow.

According to Dr Ow Chin Hock, who led the campaign from 1979 to 1981, three main groups were opposed to the campaign:

- Older Chinese Singaporeans who were emotionally attached to the dialects which they used in their daily lives, and who believed it would be difficult to learn a new language.
- English-educated Chinese Singaporeans who thought English was superior and considered Mandarin a lower-class language.
- Non-Chinese who were worried that the campaign would push them to the sidelines.

Mr Lee Kuan Yew, in his book *My Lifelong Challenge: Singapore's Bilingual Journey*, also noted that the Chinese clan associations were initially resistant as their organisations were dialect-based.

On the ground, the change which probably raised the greatest outcry in the initial months was the dubbing of Hong Kong drama serials from Cantonese into Mandarin.

Specifically at the point of the campaign launch, the hugely popular TV series *Heaven Sword and Dragon Sabre* was being screened weekly. Passionate letters arguing for a repeal of the dubbing policy were sent in to both the English and Chinese newspapers.



Campaign posters were displayed in hawker centres and food centres during the first few years of the Speak Mandarin Campaign to promote the use of the language.

## 1979-1981: THE EARLY YEARS

Once the gong was sounded, the national machinery was swiftly activated to welcome the Speak Mandarin Campaign.

The annual campaign would take the form of an intensive month-long publicity blitz, supported by materials such as posters, banners and pamphlets.

### First-year Mission

The mission in the first and early years of the campaign was clear: Get Chinese Singaporeans who could already speak

Mandarin, but who were more comfortable with speaking the other Chinese dialects, to switch to Mandarin instead.

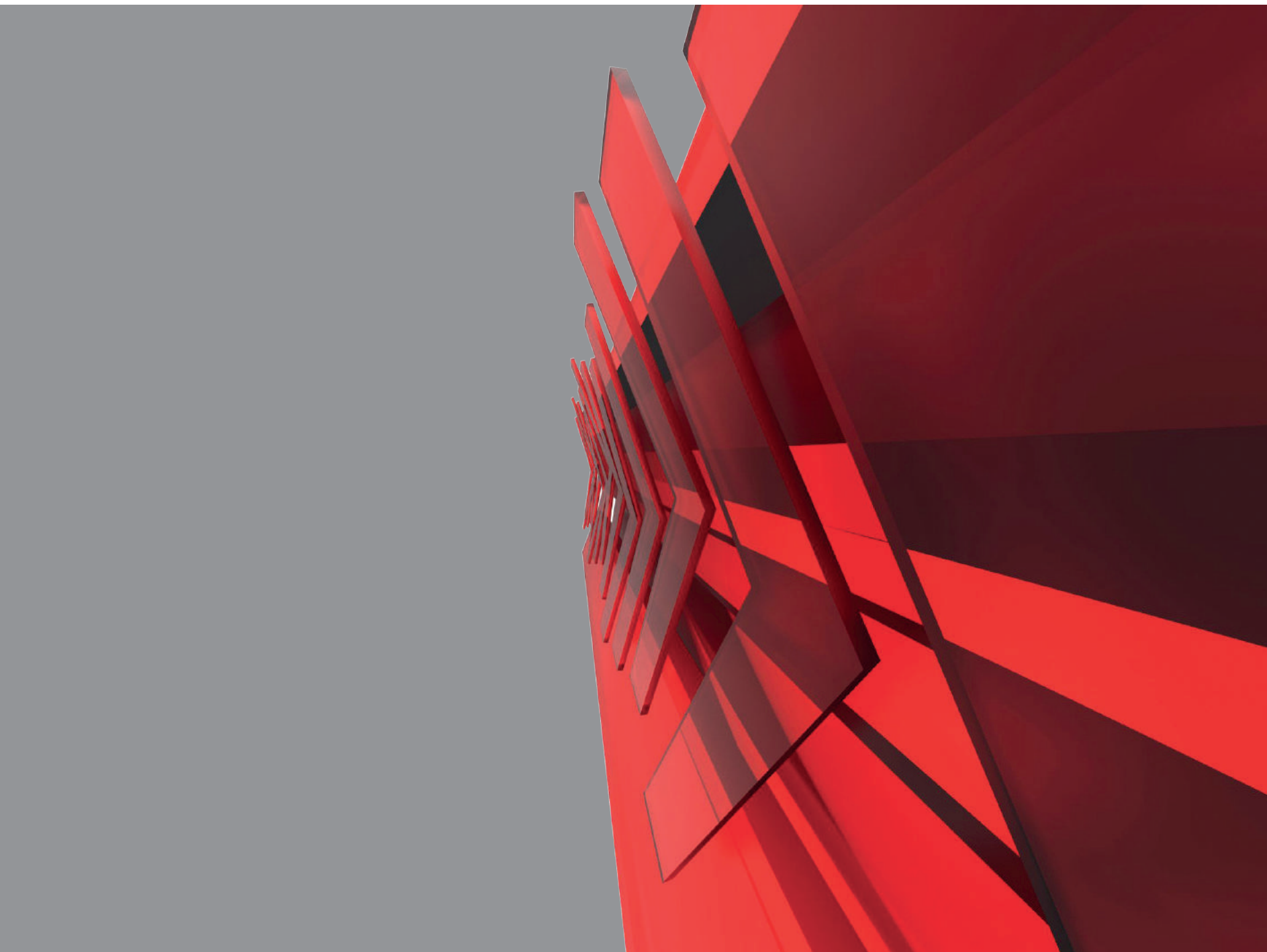
Interestingly, news articles at the time suggested that many could in fact speak Mandarin but were actually too shy to initiate a Mandarin conversation. Said one bilingual Singaporean, interviewed in October 1979, who went to a Chinese stream school: "I feel very uncomfortable to be the first to use Mandarin when I don't know whether I can be understood or not."



2

## Speak Mandarin Campaign **Milestones**





is very important. We must be able to use Mandarin in formal occasions, and at work, for instance, when holding discussions with Chinese businessmen in China or Singapore. But we must also be able to read articles and *Weibo* or sing pop songs in Chinese.

We must keep up with the times and adapt to new environments. When teaching Chinese, we should use new technologies and tools. Today, you can find all sorts of things on the Internet. You click on a word, you can hear its pronunciation or check its translation, all in an instant. If you need any information, you can find the articles. You can even find Chinese classics such as *The Twenty-Four Histories*. You only need to look it up; if you are interested in reading it, you can access it immediately. You do not even need to go a bookshop to buy or order the book. We should make use of technology and we can certainly use technology when learning languages.

In addition, we must grasp new breakthroughs in linguistics, understand how students learn languages and how they start learning. Do they learn to listen and speak first, then learn reading and writing? If that is the case, how should they learn to listen and speak? Do they need to practise their spelling? Do they need to write from memory? Do they need spelling and dictation tests? These are all our traditional methods. That was how Chinese was taught for the past few thousand years. But today, we should have better methods, and we should try them. We should not resist them. We must continue to seek new ways because technology is advancing every day. Those who want to learn Mandarin face the same problem: they have to start from scratch. Some people say that you only need to find a certain secret method for you to learn 10 Chinese characters in 10

minutes, but it is not that simple.

**23 I sense that you are quite optimistic about the ability of Singaporeans to master Mandarin. But there are still some people who express worry from time to time about the trend of falling standards in Mandarin and mother tongues, and there are also people who worry that we are becoming a monolingual society that speaks only English. How do you see such a concern and worry?**

I can understand the concerns of these people. Many of them are leaders of the Chinese community who are Chinese educated. They see the Chinese standard today as being very different from that of the early years. This is undeniable. But will we be facing the end of the world because our Mandarin standards are falling? I don't think so. Within the limits of what we can do, we can achieve roughly 95 per cent of the desired outcome. Of course, there is room for improvement, but we have to concede that we have already put in tremendous effort (to obtain this outcome).

From the standpoint of a person steeped in Chinese culture, he may hope that (by mastering Mandarin) we can write articles, compose poems, write lyrics, speak eloquently and express everything in Mandarin, as well as transmit many things in society through Mandarin, but such an aspiration is difficult to achieve. We want to do more but we must also know our limitations. Ours is a multi-racial society. We cannot become a society in which Mandarin is the main language. We have to maintain the social environment in which English is the working language. In such an environment, whatever we can do (for mother tongues), we will do our best to achieve it.



Those learning Chinese must be able to speak, read, listen to and enjoy the language after learning it.

that children should learn Mandarin. Nobody is saying that it is a waste of time. People know that if you do not learn Mandarin, you will definitely regret it later in life.

**21** You mentioned at the Zaobao Forum that many Westerners are also starting to learn Mandarin and have learned it well too. If such a trend were to continue, would it pose competition to our bilingual edge?

There would definitely be competition, but we are different from other countries in that we have maintained our bilingual ability as a society. In the West, not everybody learns Mandarin. Only a small group of people are interested in learning Mandarin. It is a

small group, but they have learned it really well. But as a whole, the proportion of people who are able to speak Mandarin in these societies will never be big.

**22** What are your expectations and hopes for Singaporeans learning the Chinese language? How should we continue to encourage Singaporeans to speak Mandarin in the future?

I hope we can continue to adjust the pedagogy and our way of using Mandarin, as technology and society change, so that Mandarin continues to be a living language, and not a dead language. We want to apply it. After learning Mandarin, we must be able to read, speak, listen to and enjoy the language. This





PM Lee Hsien Loong at the Zaobao Forum in 2013. He opined that Singapore has a competitive edge over Western societies in that we have bilingual ability as a society.

is helpful to getting a job in China later in life and become motivated to learn the language, then let us go with the flow and utilise this motivation. After a student has mastered Mandarin, he will naturally absorb the many values, as well as cultural and general knowledge, pertaining to the Chinese culture. This is what we hope to see, and we will, as a matter of course, reap the results. Take Sanskrit as an example. It is a very important form of cultural heritage in India. However, the country may have Sanskrit experts but the numbers are very small. Very few people learn the language as not everybody has the time to learn.

**20** The rise of China has provided us with an opportune time to learn Mandarin. From your observations, how effective has this been?

The effect is already quite apparent. Without the rise of China and if China were not what it is today, it would definitely be more difficult for schools to get students and parents to accept the bilingual policy. Basically, parents today have accepted that there is value in learning Mandarin. They may have issue with the pedagogy or the curriculum, but they have basically accepted

### **are your views on those who feel that we should relook our dialect policy?**

I can understand how they feel. But to be honest, it is not possible to go back to how things were, nor should we do so. Today, Singaporeans are able to speak Mandarin because we put a lot of effort into the Speak Mandarin Campaign. If we were to preserve all sorts of different dialects, not only would Singaporeans today not be able to speak Mandarin, I think it would be very difficult to maintain the standard of dialects as well.

Actually, the dialect situation here is more complex than with Mandarin. People can generally speak Mandarin. But there are so many dialects here. How is it possible to preserve all these dialects – and what's more, to be able to interact in these dialects? It is impossible. Now, some people are saying that we should preserve the dialects, bring them back. I feel that if people want to sing dialect songs or operas, this is possible. They can learn dialect as a third language. But if we were to use dialects in a prevalent manner, say at a hawker centre, which dialect should we use to speak to the stallholders? Do we speak Hainanese when buying Hainanese chicken rice, or speak Teochew when buying Teochew porridge, or Hokkien when buying Hokkien mee? This is a rather romantic view of things. It is not quite possible to do that in real life. We should not mistakenly underestimate the importance and achievements of the Speak Mandarin Campaign. Speaking more Mandarin and less dialect is the right thing to do.

**18** You just said that only about 5 per cent of young people nowadays speak dialects. Considering

### **the fact that this group has grown smaller, what are the Government's considerations in responding to the call to relook or relax the broadcast policy pertaining to dialects?**

I think we should not send out the wrong signal. Our main direction must be to maintain and strengthen the environment for speaking Mandarin. This is the most important thing. I do not think that in maintaining an environment for speaking Mandarin, we can also create another environment for speaking Hokkien, Teochew, Hainanese and Hakka. This is not workable. In fact, the Hokkien, Teochew or even Hainanese spoken by Singaporeans is already not quite the same as those spoken in the provinces of Fujian, Guangdong and Hainan in China. The dialects here also have absorbed Malay and English influences, as well as all sorts of Singaporean lingo. Our phrases, sentences and grammar are also not of the original dialect. Dialects in China are still very pure. You would know if you listen to the songs of Teresa Teng. Her Hokkien and our Hokkien are different.

**19** You are of the view that the rise of China is helpful to our learning Mandarin. Some Singaporeans nowadays are also looking at Mandarin with the same pragmatic perspective, and believe that learning Mandarin is important. But besides pragmatic considerations, do you think Mandarin also has its other attractions?

Pragmatic considerations have their value too. If China were a backward country today, we can talk about the cultural value of Mandarin, we can talk about its long history and philosophy, but it would definitely be more difficult to encourage students to learn Mandarin. If students today think that learning Mandarin

### **13** Do you feel that a bilingual education and an understanding of Chinese culture is an edge at work?

There is definitely an edge. Chinese culture still has strong roots in our society. If you want to understand the mindset of Singaporeans, you must be able to understand their language and views - this is a precious asset. This is because if you want people to identify with you, to accept you, then they must feel that you are just like them.

Additionally, during international meetings, being able to interact directly in Mandarin with leaders from China or other countries and regions is not only more convenient, but also makes for a warmer atmosphere. We can also talk about issues that might be difficult to discuss through interpretation. In official meetings, we will of course still use English, as it is a working meeting. We are Singapore, not China or Taiwan. We want to avoid any misunderstanding that we are part of China. We are not Chinese citizens. We are Singaporeans and there are non-Chinese in our team.

During meetings, other leaders may use Mandarin; I will sometimes listen and reply directly in English. Interpretation is one way – from English to Chinese. This is a more practical approach. But when interacting over a meal, we are able to discuss world affairs with our counterparts directly in Mandarin. The other side will feel comfortable, relaxed and willing to share their real thoughts. Interpretation would not only slow down the process, but will also make the interaction stiff. The feeling would be very different.

### **14** Should we have the same expectations of political leaders' linguistic abilities in this

### current term or even the next term?

I think we need to have some people in the political leadership who are good in Mandarin. But to expect every leader to be fluently bilingual, this expectation is too high and may not be attainable.

### **15** You said the expectation is too high, is it because of the environment nowadays?

Not every student from the previous generation is proficient in two languages. Some spoke mostly English while some spoke mainly Mandarin. Those who spoke Mandarin then are likely to be quite well-versed in English now, but those who spoke English may not be fluent in Mandarin today. Of course, if they have entered politics, their Mandarin will have improved because they now use it more. So when it comes to the next slate of political leaders, I think it would already be quite good if we can maintain the current situation.

### **16** You mentioned just now that when talking to leaders of other countries, it is an edge to be able to converse in Mandarin. Are you worried that we might perhaps lose such an edge?

Everyone has their strengths and weaknesses. We cannot expect people to have it all. We must accept this reality.

### **17** Some Singaporeans, including young people, are calling on the Government to preserve dialects and they are worried that dialects might die out. Do you think that such a worry is understandable? What



get a sense of the expressions and terminology, as well as the tone of these articles, so as to understand the thinking behind them more accurately. Of course, I also read the newspapers. I read Zaobao every day. It is a must.

## **11 Mr Lee Kuan Yew often encourages Singaporean parents to start exposing their children to Mandarin from pre-school, and even encourages them to send their children to bilingual kindergartens. What is your view on this? As a parent, do you also nudge your children in the hope that they can improve their proficiency in Chinese?**

This approach is in line with scientific principles. Scientists researching languages found that a child's ability to learn languages is strongest when he is very young, that is, during the few years before he goes to primary school. So it is best to let your child start young if you want him to master Mandarin. And it is not just the pronunciation, but also the grammar and structure. If they start learning at the age of 2 or 3, or are accustomed to hearing and speaking Mandarin from an early age, it will benefit them for life. They will remember the language and not forget it. When it comes to learning Mandarin – or for that matter, any language – if you do not use it as an adult, you will lose it very quickly. When a child learns a language, it stays with him for life. So I think this is in line with the scientific approach.

Still, every child is different. Some children are strong in their linguistic abilities, and others are less so. Even among siblings, not every one is the same. We can encourage the child, support him, help him, but we cannot force him. If we apply too much pressure, the child will rebel, and this will be counter-productive.

## **12 Do you converse with your children in Mandarin at home?**

I have four children. My eldest daughter Xiuqi has no problem with learning languages. When she was in school, she did not need Chinese tuition, and took up Higher Chinese. She continued to take Chinese as a subject in pre-university. It was her choice. She has strong linguistic ability.

My eldest son Yipeng has Asperger's Syndrome. His linguistic ability was affected by autism. English is not a problem for him, but Chinese is a different matter. My other sons are also not strong in their language abilities. One (Hongyi) studied Chinese B. He tried his best but I think his dyslexia has affected his ability to learn languages. My youngest son (Haoyi) is able to manage Chinese. I asked him if he wanted tuition, he said no, so I let him learn on his own. As he is younger, there were more online tools at his disposal when he was learning Mandarin. He was able to use online dictionaries, as well as translation and pronunciation tools when reading articles. He did not need to check physical dictionaries, so that saved him a lot of effort. Hence he was willing to continue to take up Chinese. I forgot what his Chinese results were but he passed. And he has kept up his interest in Chinese. After serving National Service, there was a period of time in which he was waiting to enter university. He made use of that time to attend Chinese tuition. He got a friend from China to tutor him. During that time, we did our best to use Mandarin in our conversations. He later went to university and read computer science. We then talked a lot about computers. As we had to use a lot of computer terms, we switched back to English. One day, when he has children, perhaps he will find another opportunity to use Mandarin.

Four, I could still manage, but when I was in pre-university, I had tuition for a period of time. At that time, the Chinese subject was called Comprehension and Writing, equivalent to the General Paper nowadays. I did not do well in spite of my efforts, and almost failed the subject. Nonetheless, I managed to pass.

In learning languages, it is not always a question of willingness - talent counts too. We can all try our best and still attain differing levels of proficiency. We must accept this reality. This is my view. I feel that my ability to learn languages is decent, but it is definitely not the strongest. But if I work hard at it, I can attain a good standard, definitely good enough to use.

After leaving school, I had fewer opportunities to use Mandarin. I used to speak Mandarin a lot in the army, because many officers and soldiers in those days were Chinese-educated and I would use Mandarin when interacting with them or instructing them. After I joined politics, I would also speak Mandarin very often when conducting meet-the-people sessions or engaging the residents. But in the official or professional context, I mainly use English. Hence, if I do not practise or use Mandarin for a period of time, I can feel my Mandarin getting rusty. This is how language works: If you do not use it, you will slowly lose your ability to express yourself in it. Reading and listening are less of a problem, but speaking is more difficult, and of course, writing is even more difficult.

## 10 Do you try to keep in touch with Mandarin frequently? Do you read Chinese books?

I have too few opportunities to read Chinese books. Now that you ask this question, I recall the last time I read a Chinese book was

some years back. Lung Ying-tai wrote a book called Big River, Big Sea. I read the book from cover to cover. It was very riveting and left a deep impression on me. Later on, Singaporean writer Choo Lian Liang wrote a book called Chasing The Rainbow. I read that too and could relate to her experiences. In her book, she wrote about her forefathers who left China to settle in this region during the early years. They grew up in the Johor state of Malaya, and later went through the war. After the war, her parents were sent back to China and she went with them. But she came back to Singapore subsequently and grew up here.

This is her life experience. She wrote about it in Chinese. Her daughter Sim Ann (People's Action Party member and Minister of State, Ministry of Education & Ministry of Communications and Information) translated the book into English. I am aware of Ann's linguistic ability and believe she has done a good job, but still, I would like to read Lian Liang's works in her own words. I am able to read Chinese books, and this is one big benefit of mastering a language.

Actually, I have fewer opportunities now for reading books generally, which is a bit of a pity for me. One problem is time, but it is mostly because I am always spending time thinking about work. You must be able to put work aside if you want to read, so that you can focus on the content of the book, from the first chapter to the last. You can do this during vacation, but if you are not on vacation, your mind will not be oriented towards this, and it will be more difficult to do so. But I do read a lot of materials in Chinese. I often read articles in their original form, especially those that have to do with China or Singapore. One reason is so that I can practise the language. Another reason is so that I can

kindergarten to primary and secondary school, I had always felt very comfortable. When I was little, about four or five right up to primary school, we had a Chinese tutor for my brother, my sister and me. But the Mandarin that I learned was mostly from school. I did not feel there was any difference between me and the other students. Of course, I came from an English-speaking family. My parents primarily spoke English, and at the time, most of the students at Nanyang Primary School were from Chinese-

speaking families. This was the difference between us, but it was not a problem at all.

Later, when I reached Secondary Four and pre-university, I began to feel that although I had no problem with comprehension, I was less able to express myself in Chinese compared to my classmates, particularly when writing compositions. My ability to speak, however, was not an issue. When I was in Secondary



PM Lee Hsien Loong, with his mother Kwa Geok Choo and brother Lee Hsien Yang, when he graduated from Nanyang Girls' High School's primary school (the primary section subsequently became Nanyang Primary School) in 1963. Although he came from an English-speaking home environment, he did not feel he had problems learning Mandarin in school.



content into another language, perhaps Chinese. And while Google Translate is not perfectly accurate and even contains grammatical errors, about 80 or 90 per cent of the translation is passable. I think we can use Google Translate. We cannot possibly look for a professional translator every time we see a new webpage, and I would not have the expertise to translate it myself. Hence, Google does have its use. Technology advances all the time, and while Google Translate cannot compare to a real-life translator with professional training, it can be used anytime. Translators, however, are not always accessible.

## **7 But the Government has decided to set up the National Translation Committee?**

We must still raise our translation standard. We can tap the experience and expertise of those members of the Chinese community who have strong translation capabilities. They can help us do better.

## **8 You mentioned the challenges brought about by our multi-racial and multi-lingual environment. English is a common language for all the races here and the Government has frequently talked about expanding the common space. Do you think expanding the common space and encouraging people to speak more Mandarin are two contradictory goals? How should we obtain balance?**

I do not see a contradiction, but rather there is a tension between the goals. We want to maintain a common space where everybody uses English and feels comfortable. At the same time, every race wants to preserve its own tradition, culture and use of

its own language. And it is not just the Chinese – it is even more so for the Indians and the Malays. The thing is, we have to find suitable platforms to use our mother tongues appropriately. Only then can we maintain a balance between the two goals.

Of course, we must accept certain trade-offs. I think in learning languages, the language capability of a person learning only one language will be stronger than someone who has to learn multiple languages. China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as Britain and America, are monolingual societies. The Chinese and Taiwanese speak Mandarin, and the Hong Kongers speak Cantonese, and we can never speak as fluently and as fast as them. This cannot be helped. Similarly, we cannot be as fast as the British and the Americans when speaking English. They have only one set of software in their brains, and are therefore quick with their words. Unlike them, we have two sets of software, and have to toggle between modes all the time, so we will always be a tad slower. If you look at it this way, there is indeed a trade-off. We must be bilingual and our standard in the two languages cannot be 100 per cent. On the other hand, we could say that because we are bilingual, we have a richer view and understanding of the world than theirs. There are definitely benefits to bilingualism.

## **9 Your father, founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, once talked about the reasons for sending you and your siblings to Chinese schools. Can you share with us your experience learning Mandarin as a young person?**

We did not talk about whether I should go to an English school or a Chinese school. My parents made the decision. They sent me to Nanyang Primary School and I readily accepted their decision. I did not face any problems at that time. In school, from

**that there is still a possibility of the campaign shifting paradigms next? How should it press on with its mission?**

I think the objective of the campaign will not change in the short term. But we do have to seek new modes of expression and new narratives for the campaign every year. We need fresh approaches to attract the public's interest, and to encourage people to support this campaign. This is something we must do continually.

**4 Would you be concerned that with time, the implementation of the bilingual language policy might slowly weaken the effects of the campaign?**

There is still value in the campaign. We must press on with it. We must not give up. There are not many societies like ours, where there is one main language (English), while another (mother tongues) is still widely used as a daily language, and as a language that transmits culture. Not in China, Hong Kong or Taiwan. In the West, an example of a bilingual country is Canada. In Canada, the working language is English, but some Canadians speak French and identify strongly with the language. If you listen to the speeches of their leaders, they will often break into a few sentences of French before resuming in English again. This is very natural to the Canadians, but we would find it strange – what are they talking about, all of a sudden? Then again, English and French are not starkly different languages, unlike English and Mandarin. In Singapore, we are able to maintain a certain standard in both languages. Our English is good. Our Mandarin is not bad either. I would consider this quite a feat already. This is what we must continue to work towards.

**5 If a young bilingual professional were to express hopes of seeing a more multi-lingual environment taking root here in the future, how would you respond?**

I would say that in Singapore, all the mother tongues will always exist. But to hope that all will attain the same level of mastery in their mother tongues, and that there will be equally abundant platforms for the use of all the mother tongues – now that would be very difficult. For example, the 28-member European Union has 24 official and working languages. They have to translate every document into 24 languages. Their translators are really busy. This way of doing things is not very practical, but they have to do it because of political considerations. If we were to do the same thing here and translate every document, every circular and every piece of official literature into four languages, I think our efficiency would plummet. This is not doable.

**6 But is this concern a form of motivation, or a hindrance for the Speak Mandarin Campaign?**

If the attitude is positive, then it should be a motivation. But if the attitude is negative, pessimistic or resistant, then of course it would become a hindrance. I worry sometimes that in seeking a perfect language solution or environment, we resist solutions that may be imperfect but are feasible and deal specifically with the problem. For example, I know many in the Chinese community think that Google Translate is not a tool that can be used, that it gives word-for-word, mechanical translations and therefore does not provide any value. But I think Google Translate does have its value. If you want to understand what a particular webpage is saying, or need to very quickly grasp the main thrust of a passage, you will need to translate the

campaign was to unify the language: Speak less dialect, speak more Mandarin.

As I see it, this objective has largely been achieved. Very few young people today speak dialect. We did a survey – there are only about five per cent of them. The majority of young people nowadays can speak Mandarin. As for older Singaporeans, we have seen good results too. Nowadays, many of the elderly understand Mandarin, although they may not speak it fluently and find it easier to express themselves in dialect. I often meet such people when I conduct meet-the-people sessions or talk to residents. They understand what I am saying when I speak to them in Mandarin, but prefer to speak in dialect, such as Hokkien, Teochew or Hainanese, when explaining their problems. So we have seen results. Of course, we cannot expect the elderly to completely change their way of life and their language habits, and switch to using Mandarin exclusively.

But the environment has indeed changed over the past 35 years. Many of today's parents graduated from schools with English as the sole medium of instruction. Their working language is English. The main language that they use at home is also English. Our objective today is no longer just to "speak less dialect, speak more Mandarin". The aim now is to encourage people to practise Mandarin as much as possible in an English-speaking environment, so as to keep Mandarin a living language as well as a thriving language; a language through which we can express our spirit, our ideas and our desires. We still need to do more in this respect.

**2** Founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew gave his assessment of the campaign in an interview on

**the 20th anniversary of the Speak Mandarin Campaign. He said the work to promote Mandarin then was only "half-way through". You had mentioned earlier that in an English-speaking environment, it remains challenging to encourage more Chinese Singaporeans to speak Mandarin. Do you think there has been progress since the 20th anniversary of the campaign?**

Fifteen years have passed since the campaign's 20th anniversary. The way I see it, our society has changed since then, and more people now speak Mandarin. Today, most of the children entering Primary One come from English-speaking families – or at least, they say they come from English-speaking families – but I believe many of them are quite familiar with Mandarin and converse frequently in Mandarin. The language environment is constantly changing.

Another important factor is the rise of China. China's international status today is different than it was 15 years ago. How Singapore engages with China then and now is also different. Today, many Singaporeans go to China for business or work, and some even study there. This is a very big incentive for Chinese Singaporeans to use Mandarin.

**3** You spoke earlier about the development of the Speak Mandarin Campaign. The campaign has adopted different aims at different stages of its development, and has also targeted different audiences. In 1979, its main target was the dialect-speaking groups. By 1991, it was about getting people to speak Mandarin in an English-speaking environment. Now, the campaign is reminding people to use more Mandarin. Do you think





Photo: Thong Kah Hoong (Lianhe Zaobao)

## PRACTISING MANDARIN IN AN ENGLISH-SPEAKING ENVIRONMENT

– An interview with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong

Interview: Ng Wai Mun (Lianhe Zaobao)

### **1 It has been 35 years since the launch of the Speak Mandarin Campaign. How do you see its progress?**

The original objective of the campaign was to encourage Chinese Singaporeans to speak more Mandarin and less dialect. This objective was clear. Back then, many young people spoke

dialect as a first language. For some it had to do with education levels, while for others it was a matter of their family environments. (Founding Prime Minister) Lee Kuan Yew felt this situation could not continue. For people to learn English, Mandarin and dialects – and not one but a range of dialects at the same time – it would be quite impossible. Hence, the priority at the beginning of the



Then-Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister, Dr Goh Keng Swee (right), presented the “Report on the Ministry of Education 1978”, also known as the “Goh Keng Swee Report”, in 1979. It is popularly regarded as a milestone in Singapore’s bilingual policy.

attributes. These values will provide cultural ballast to our people as we adjust to a fast-changing world.”

Mandarin would thus serve as the “emotionally acceptable” language, in Mr Lee’s words, for Chinese Singaporeans.

### **The Campaign Launch**

And so, on September 7, 1979, the Speak Mandarin Campaign was launched with great fanfare.

First known as the “Promote the Use of Mandarin” campaign, it was then-organised by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

At this launch, Mr Lee took the stage at the Singapore Conference Hall, and addressed an audience of Government officials and community leaders in English, Mandarin and Hokkien. He made repeated pleas to Chinese parents to drop the use of dialects at

home and speak Mandarin instead.

“Logically, the decision is obvious. Emotionally, I know it is painful,” he said, “but as rational parents, I have little doubt that given some time, the right choice will be made.”

Outside the venue, Singaporeans all over the island diligently tuned in to the 8.30pm live telecast of Mr Lee’s speech.

A certain Mr Cheong Ah Keong even took a bus from his Chin Swee Road home to a community centre at Hong Lim to watch the live telecast, even though he already had a TV set at home. “My home is too noisy for me to concentrate on such a serious programme,” he told a Straits Times reporter.

Clearly, the gravitas of this campaign was not lost on Singaporeans. The music of this young nation was about to change forever.

well as their mother tongue. Speaking to an audience of 10,000 educators at the Gay World Stadium, he said: “If we do nothing about (this), we shall produce citizens who can only communicate with those in their own language stream.”

However, it was what happened downstream, as a result of this switch to a bilingual system, that made the Speak Mandarin Campaign necessary.

As bilingual education took root in the 1960s and 70s, fewer and fewer Chinese Singaporeans sent their children to Chinese schools. In 1975, Nanyang University switched to English as its medium of teaching. In 1978, 30 formerly all-Chinese schools started English-language streams to meet growing demand. By 1979, 90 per cent of Chinese students were enrolled in English schools.

This shift towards teaching in English was indicative of a larger problem: Bilingual education was failing because of the prevalence of dialects.

Dr Goh Keng Swee, the then-Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, highlighted the sweeping changes needed for Singapore’s education system in the landmark “Report on the Ministry of Education 1978”: “It has not occurred to many Singaporeans how unnatural the present school system is. Most schoolchildren are taught in two languages – English and Mandarin. 85 per cent of them do not speak either of these languages at home.”

Mr Lee, who also realised that the brain tends towards one dominant language, said in his speech at the launch of the

Speak Mandarin Campaign in 1979: “After 20 years of bilingual schooling, we know that very few children can cope with two languages plus one dialect.”

Evidence seemed to reflect this theory: A 1980 survey by the Ministry of Education found that children from English and Mandarin-speaking homes fared much better academically, compared to those who came from dialect-speaking households.

The survey, conducted on 34,155 Primary Three pupils from 309 schools, found that the average marks for English and Chinese for those raised in a dialect-speaking environment were 40.4 per cent and 43.5 per cent respectively. Students raised in English and Mandarin-speaking families, on the other hand, scored 64.4 per cent and 60.1 per cent respectively for their English and Chinese tests.

### **Cultural Imperative**

At the time, China had not yet become an economic powerhouse. One easy option for Singapore’s education system might have been to do away with Mandarin altogether, and let people stick to English and dialects.

But Mr Lee believed that language was not just about words – it also transmitted values.

In his book, *My Lifelong Challenge: Singapore’s Bilingual Journey* (2011), he wrote: “Learning the Chinese language means imbibing the core items of Chinese history, tradition and culture. The Confucianist values of loyalty, honour, discipline, filial piety, emphasis on family, respect for authority – all vital for nation-building and for cultivating citizens with honourable personal



But how and why did this campaign first come about?

### **Singing the Same Tune**

In the 1970s, the ethnic Chinese community in Singapore spoke many different Chinese dialects. There were more than 12 Chinese dialects spoken here, reflecting the different regions of China from which Singapore's original Chinese immigrants hailed.

Although more than a century has elapsed since the first wave of Chinese immigration, each dialect group in Singapore still largely communicated in the regional languages of their forefathers. There were also distinct geographical clusters for different dialect groups: Amoy Street for the Hokkiens, Tew Chew Street for the Teochews, Kreta Ayer for the Cantonese and Hylam Street for the Hainanese.

In 1979, this is what a visitor to Singapore's Chinese community would have heard:

- On buses, three out of four conversations were conducted in Hokkien.
- In hawker centres, eight out of nine conversations were conducted in Chinese dialects.

Even in the hallowed chambers of Parliament, some politicians spoke in Chinese dialects.

The prevalence of Chinese dialects in everyday life, even for non-Chinese Singaporeans, is reflected in a 1979 Straits Times report which stated that 1.5 per cent of Malay passengers on the bus spoke in Hokkien to their Indian bus conductors.

The need for a common language within the Chinese community

was necessary not only for economic fluency. A rapidly developing nation could not afford to ignore the potential problems that might arise if citizens stuck only to their own dialect communities.

Singaporeans were then moving into their new homes in communal Housing and Development Board (HDB) estates. If a Cantonese family was tucked between a Hokkien family on one side and a Teochew family on the other, they all had to be able to talk to one another.

Significantly, then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's last dialect speech – in Hokkien – was made in 1979. Thereafter, he addressed the Chinese community in Mandarin.

### **Supporting Bilingual Education**

Another pressing concern at the time was the need to groom Singaporean Chinese who were effectively bilingual in English and Mandarin.

The People's Action Party (PAP) became Singapore's ruling party in 1959, inheriting an education system that favoured the English-speaking. Students in other language streams were very much left to their own devices.

At the time, 51 per cent of Singapore's 320,000 school-goers were enrolled in English schools, 43.5 per cent in Chinese schools, 5 per cent in Malay schools and 0.5 per cent in Tamil schools. Essentially, these students would learn just one language.

On December 8, 1959, Mr Lee unveiled the bilingual education policy that would become a cornerstone of the PAP's nation-building efforts: Students would now have to learn English as



Then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew speaking at the launch of the inaugural Speak Mandarin Campaign in 1979.

The music of a nation is composed of the voices of its people.

Its melodies can be heard in millions of conversations taking place every day – on the streets, in schools, shops, offices, and homes. Its harmonies consist of the sounds of people chatting with colleagues and classmates, bonding with friends and family, and expressing their most intimate feelings.

In multi-racial Singapore – particularly within the ethnic Chinese community – this music has changed dramatically over the last few decades.

In just two generations, the resident Chinese population has gone from only speaking their native dialects, to embracing

English and Mandarin under a bilingual education system, to relinquishing dialects in order to speak better Mandarin.

Many of these changes were Government-led, nation-building necessities. The Speak Mandarin Campaign – one of the longest running and most influential campaigns in Singapore's history – is an important case in point. Launched in 1979, it has fundamentally changed how the nation's ethnic Chinese citizens communicate with one another.

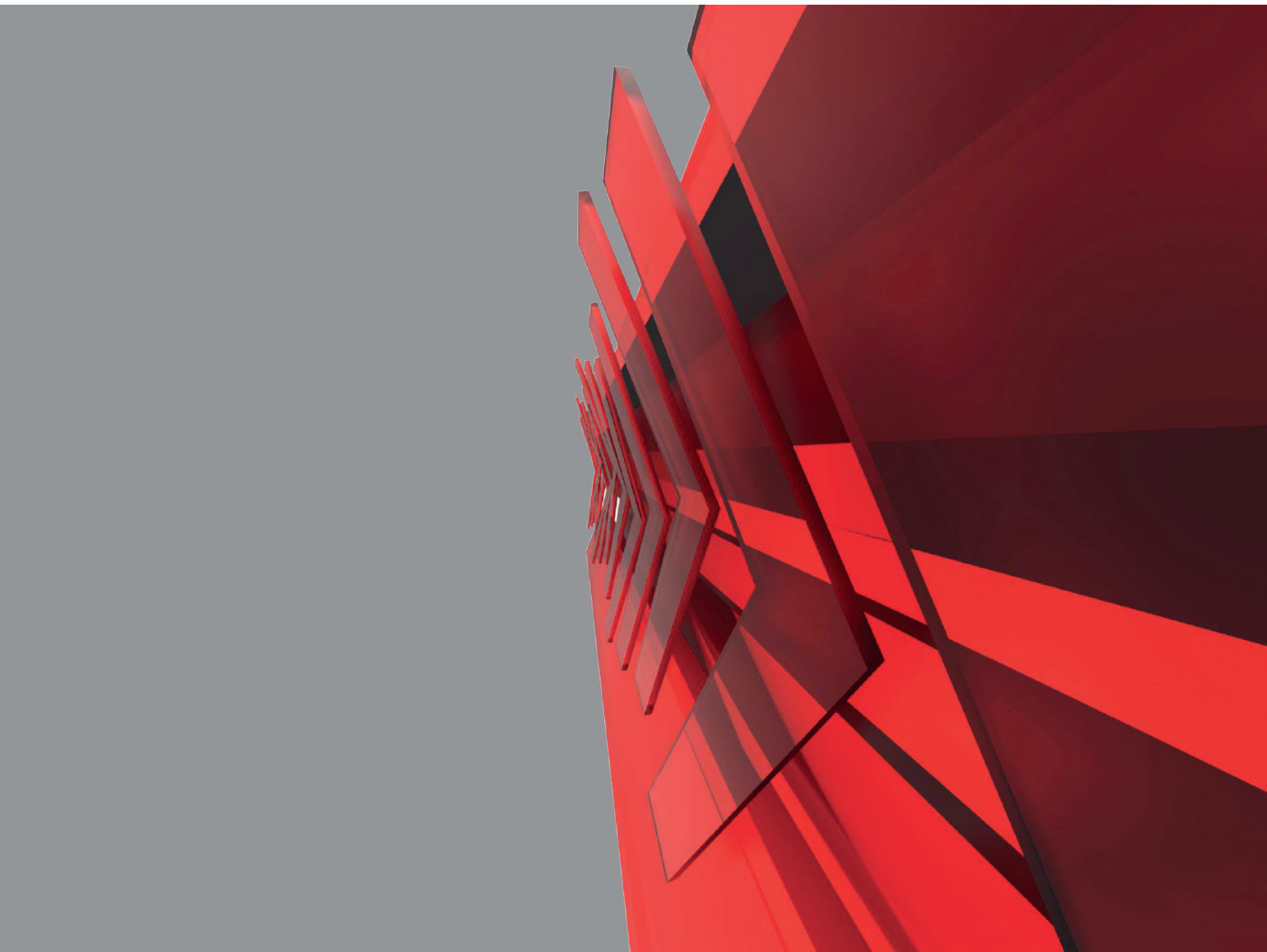
This annual campaign has been running for 34 years, and is still going strong. Many Singaporeans grew up with it. Many of its annual theme songs still reverberate in the collective memory.



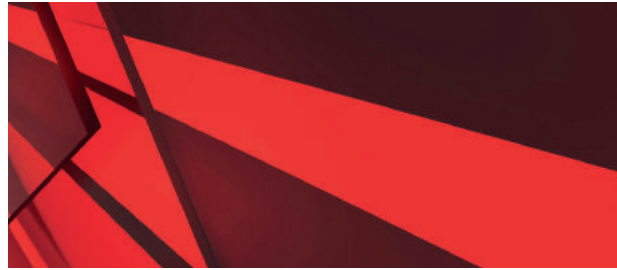
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Speak Mandarin Campaign  
**Let's Speak Mandarin**





# Message



## MR LAWRENCE WONG

Minister for Culture, Community and Youth

Language is more than just a tool for daily communication and business exchanges. It helps to transmit knowledge and values from generation to generation. It is also a dynamic and evolving part of our culture.

Our language reflects our belief systems, our thoughts and the spirit of our community. Understanding its nuances and cultural connotations allows us to express ourselves, identify with one another, and build emotional connections with one another.

Most Singaporeans today are bilingual. Chinese Singaporeans have learned English as their first language and Mandarin as their mother tongue. Our ability to speak Mandarin allows us to access the rich philosophies, perspectives and traditions of the Chinese. It also provides a bridge to the heritage and roots of our ancestors. At the same time, we are part of a modern and multi-racial culture, open to changes and diverse influences.

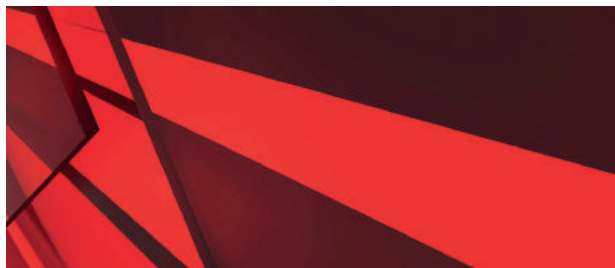
Indeed, being bilingual has enriched us as individuals, as we are better able to appreciate the different cultures from the East

and the West, and have the mobility in interacting and moving between them. It is a unique, cosmopolitan quality that not many around the world may have. This is an asset for our country, and we must work hard to preserve it.

The Speak Mandarin Campaign has come a long way since its inception. This is only possible with the support and hard work of the Promote Mandarin Council and their partners in the Chinese community.

I congratulate the campaign on its 35th anniversary, and wish them every success in encouraging the use of Mandarin as a living language in Singapore.

# Preface



## MR SEOW CHOKE MENG

Chairman, Promote Mandarin Council

The Speak Mandarin Campaign, launched 35 years ago, is Singapore's longest-running social campaign. Over the years, it has steadily encouraged many Chinese Singaporeans to speak Mandarin instead of dialects.

The challenge is ongoing. Today, an increasing number of Chinese Singaporeans are speaking English rather than Mandarin at home.

But it is a challenge which we have met head-on. The Council has constantly re-invented itself, delivering new and interesting programmes to better engage the community and to fulfil its mission of promoting the use of Mandarin.

Given the campaign's long history, it is timely that we publish a 35th anniversary commemorative book to trace how it has changed over the years and the impact it has made. This book gives a comprehensive update on the campaign, and provides an independent analysis on the relevance of the campaign in Singapore. It comprises interviews with stakeholders, key

players of the campaign, and personal stories of Singaporeans — including the post-1980s generation — on how the Campaign has impacted them.

It is presented in English and Chinese, with each language offering unique insights into the campaign.

Moving forward, we will continue to work with as many partners as possible in order to extend the reach of the campaign beyond its key activity period. These partners include teachers, leaders in the community and parents. It is crucial that language acquisition takes place at a young age and in this regard, parents are the best people to speak to as they encourage their children to speak Mandarin on a daily basis.

Our aim is to seed a passion for Mandarin and cultivate an appreciation of Chinese culture. Beyond the economic imperatives, Mandarin is what defines our past and therefore, our present and future. It is our anchor in a changing world.



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# A Mandarin Anchor



in a  
**Changing  
World**





# A Mandarin Anchor

in a  
Changing  
World

PROMOTE  
MANDARIN  
COUNCIL  
推广华语  
理事会

