ABSTRACT

The Speak Mandarin Campaign is a campaign heavily endorsed by the Singapore Government since its launch in September 1979. Although often seen as an attempt in persuading the Singaporean Chinese to use Mandarin as their lingua franca in place of Chinese dialects, Speak Mandarin Campaign has implications for the content of Chinese consciousness in Singapore.

The arguments put forth by the government during the promotion of the campaign is examined in this paper. Focusing on the cultural themes and other related themes, this paper seeks to establish the role of the government in the construction of the cultural identity of Singaporean Chinese, as it is not in coherence as a result of different dialect or educational backgrounds. The impact of the campaign on the divided Singaporean Chinese is also reviewed.

Cultural identity is a constant process of (re)invention and (re)negotiation. This paper argues that the Speak Mandarin Campaign promoting Mandarin use is a (re)invention of the cultural identity by the Singapore Government, while its effects requires the Singaporean Chinese to (re)negotiate their cultural identity. Ultimately it is the position where you speak from that is most crucial to whether to “Speak Mandarin or Not”.

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