The Bilingual Policy and Mandarin as a Commercial Asset: summary

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Singapore made a second language compulsory in all schools in 1966 and, after the Goh Report of 1979, turned English into the first language of a single school system from 1987, with Mandarin, Malay or Tamil taught as the mother tongue assigned to each community. The Speak Mandarin Campaign, launched by Lee Kuan Yew on 7 September 1979 and supported by the withdrawal of dialects from television and radio, replaced a dozen Chinese dialects with Mandarin within a generation, at a real cost to the culture and family life of the older Chinese community. The success was overtaken by a second shift, since by 2020 English had become the most frequent home language of Chinese Singaporeans, at 47.6 % against 40.2 % for Mandarin, although most English-speaking homes still use Mandarin as their second language. Mandarin became a commercial asset once China opened and diplomatic relations were established in 1990, serving the government-to-government projects, the private banks and family offices that serve Chinese clients and the verification of Chinese documents. Its value is limited by uneven proficiency, by competition from Hong Kong and mainland graduates and by the

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fact that English remains the language of Singapore law, which is why Malay, Tamil and English continue to carry their own weight in the state's balanced multilingualism.

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