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## China or Chingland?

Niu Chiang and Martin Wolff

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*Abstract* This article does not pretend to provide a solution to any pressing social, economic or political issue, nor does it rely upon any prior academic research for its suppositions. Instead, it is an attempt to spark public interest, analysis and debate on what may be the defining moment in the shaping and development of the new China as “Chingland,” with “Chinglish” as its national language. “Modernization” was one of the buzzwords of the recent 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. However, use of this term appeared to consistently imply “Westernization”; there appeared to be a lack of clear differentiation (and appreciation of the difference) between the two terms. It is the perception of this lack that sparked the authors’ interest in the subject matter of this article.

### ‘Modernization’ or ‘Westernization?’

In the West, business leaders calculate the cost/benefit of every decision. This includes consideration of *hard*, *soft* and *psychic* costs and benefits (both tangible and intangible): that is, *hard* (currency, raw materials, labor, logistics, etc.), *soft* (loans, grants, charitable contributions, sponsorships, good will, etc.), and *psychic* (reputation, brand identification, celebrity association or endorsement, etc.). On the other hand, Western political leaders tend to calculate public opinion (as measured or determined by surveys conducted by professional pollsters) and make popular decisions that are more likely to translate into extended political life.

Western business leaders keep their attention focused on business longevity and profit, while western political leaders keep their attention focused on political longevity. As a result, both groups of leaders, more often than not, develop “tunnel vision”, which can – and often does – produce unexpected, unanticipated and unwanted results, which could have been avoided through a more expansive or comprehensive world-view.

Sometimes, very good people with good intentions make very bad decisions which unintentionally produce bad consequences and worse ramifications. For example, to what extent, if any, has China adopted or embraced western tunnel vision in its decision to embrace the wholesale teaching of English as a Second Language throughout China – purely for anticipated future economic gain? Have all the probable or foreseeable consequences and ramifications been carefully studied, examined and debated?

China has made a deliberate and calculated decision to open its door to the world, to join the “new world order” (in effect, an English-based world government emanating out

of Washington and London), and reap the economic benefits of participation in the new global economy through WTO (World Trade Organization) membership, hosting the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, and hosting the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai. A great deal has been written about China's preparation to take its rightful place as a major participant in the new world order and a great deal has also been written about the basic changes that must take place within China in order to comply with the requirements of that membership.

However, have all of the consequences and ramifications been adequately contemplated, or, has the tunnel vision of Western influence already crept stealthily into the highest level of decision-making in China? Has the promise of economic prosperity and parity blinded China to certain inescapable realities?

In the past ten years, there has been an alarming increase in the emphasis on English as a Second Language (ESL) in China. Public middle schools, high schools and universities throughout China have developed and implemented English-language programs. Private ESL schools (kindergartens, primary, middle, high and college) have proliferated to such an extent that there are now an estimated 3,000 private ESL schools in the city of Shanghai alone (source: *Shanghai Star*, 10-17-02). At first blush, it may appear admirable that China has so wholeheartedly made such a concerted effort to adopt English, the international language of commerce, as its second language. On October 24, 2002, Zang Xinsheng, Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Education reportedly said: "With China's accession to the World Trade Organization and the approaching Olympics in 2008 more than ever is it a priority for young Chinese to learn and improve their language skills" (source: "Government encourages public to learn English," *China Daily*, 10-25-02). The same article states that "Beijing is striving to reach its goal of teaching citizens to speak English to improve its image as an international metropolis."

Chinese students studying ESL believe that they will eventually reap increased economic benefits as a direct result of ESL study. An informal survey of approximately 1,000 Chinese ESL students, conducted by the authors in Shanghai, Wuhan and Xinyang, revealed that their motivation was predicated upon either their parents' desire or their own desire for an improved economic future.

If we apply Western cost/benefit analysis to ESL in China, it could hardly be disputed that this national educational and linguistic revolution will provide substantial economic benefits to both China and the Chinese people. But an alarm bell has been sounded by such eminent scholars as Professor To Cho-ye of Hong Kong, who argues that the widespread study of English is a waste of valuable resources to the detriment of the study of Mandarin (cf. *Shanghai Star* 10-24-02, "English Dominance").

Linguistic scholars apparently all agree that language and culture are inseparable. Therefore, as Chinese students learn English, they also learn Western culture. As Chinese students study Western business, they necessarily learn all about "democracy" (simple majority rule by means of voluntary elections), which is the foundation for Western corporate ownership and management control. It follows that the nationwide Chinese

ESL campaign brings with it an immersion in Western concepts, including social, cultural, business and political thought. It is inevitable that a certain amount of traditional Chinese thought will give way to a certain amount of Western thought, which translates into a society developing with confusing input.

The final result may be a country that is neither purely Chinese nor purely Western, but rather a Westernized China which might more aptly, if ruefully, be referred to as “Chingland.” The people, their culture, and their language will either be Mandarin sprinkled with English words (*Shanghai Star* 10-24-02 “Guangzhou ... public servants should possess an English vocabulary of at least 1,000 words.”), or a Westernized Chinese people who speak broken English, or “Chinglish” comparable to the “Singlish” of Singapore, the “pidgin English” of Hawaii, or the Creole of Louisiana.

Moreover, the current political structure of China will not be immune to the forces of change wrought by the intense study of “Democracy” in Business English or MBA courses. Once the “simple majority rule by voluntary election” genie has been let out of the bottle and grasped by the simple majority, it can not be forced back into the bottle. The infusion of foreign businesses into China with their Western model of “Democratic” management will further indoctrinate Chinese business leaders in the Western principles of “Democracy.” It will no longer be a question of “*if*” Democracy will ever have a serious impact on China’s politics, but *when*. Is the “Democracy” being taught through ESL compatible with the long-term goals and objectives of the Chinese Communist Party? Again, applying the idea of Western business cost/benefit analysis, we may ask: What is the real cost of China’s quest to garner its slice of the global economic pie? And is the price to be paid too high?

China is recognized as a developing nation in economic terms. But has adequate consideration been given to the fact that it is also a developing nation in social and cultural terms and that its nationwide ESL program provides a defining moment in that development? Have the anticipated economic benefits unintentionally predestined such basic and fundamental changes in China’s social, cultural and political fabrics that a grassroots backlash may occur? Why has China apparently forsaken Mandarin for English when 25% of the world’s population already speaks Mandarin, and Mandarin is one of the six working languages of the United Nations? Why does China so meekly submit to the English-based new world order emanating out of Washington, D.C., when 25% of the world’s population looks to Beijing for its leadership? Does China not yet realize the reality that the emerging China has the immediate clout to demand that those desiring to do business in China or with China should learn Mandarin, rather than expect 1.3 billion Chinese to learn English?

If China is to maintain its national sovereignty, must it not also maintain the use of Mandarin as its vehicle of international communication with the rest of the world? There are those who suggest that it is a matter of practical expediency for China to use English in the short term and that when China reaches economic maturity, it can always return to the use of Mandarin. The obvious danger with this argument is that the world is investing in a global business communication system based upon English and it will not willingly

spend the time or resources necessary to later change to Mandarin just to accommodate China. It is also doubtful that China itself would ever attempt to press the subsequent international use of Mandarin once it has settled into the use of English and finds it suitable for its international business purposes.

The European Union has a very firm understanding of the relationship between maintaining a national language and maintaining a national identity. Enko Landeburn, chief of the EU enlargement office, reportedly said, “It is the democratic right of every member state to use its own language. This rule must be kept” (*China Daily* 11-5-02: “European union turning into Tower of Babel with enlargement”). Following this EU model on a world scale, all WTO rules and regulations, proceedings and decisions, should be translated into Mandarin, as should all international business transactions involving China or its business entities. This of course gives credence to Professor To’s support (above) for ESL as a means of meeting the need of specific professionals only (*Shanghai Star* 10-24-02, “English Dominance”). Translators would certainly fall within this category, as would lawyers, accountants, scientists and other professionals who have an identifiable need to learn proper or precise English.

The capital cash outflow through the ESL program could be stemmed and redirected to the multitude of translators that would be required. This would provide an additional economic benefit to China created by the enhanced study of Mandarin rather than the current ESL emphasis. Capital flight through foreign expert ESL teachers would be restrained and the money redirected to pay local Chinese translation teachers.



Could or should China learn something from the EU’s prioritizing the preservation and continued use of native languages? Is the risk posed by ESL to China’s social, cultural and even political structures and systems outweighed by the potential economic benefits such that China’s Chineseness is for sale? ESL at any cost? Should the love of money replace traditional Chinese wisdom as the most valuable asset of the new Chingland? Should economic gain be at the expense of what makes China different from all other nations? National identity is tied directly to the preservation of the native language.

## **Conclusion**

It would appear that linguistic and other scholars throughout China have a fundamental obligation to seek enlightened answers to the questions posed herein and to provide the appropriate guidance to China’s leadership so that the future course for China may be properly charted in the best interests of the people of China and thus avoid decisions resulting from tunnel vision. Is it incongruous that while China’s relics and antiques are not for sale, the underlying heart and culture of China is now apparently on the auction block?

## POST PUBLICATION EVENTS

As a result of the publication of the above article, the authors were invited to write a commentary for a forthcoming book.

<b>Date:</b>	Sat, 14 Feb 2004 04:49:48 -0800 (PST)
<b>From:</b>	 "Qiang Niu" <donna_niu@yahoo.com>   <a href="#">This is Spam</a>    <a href="#">Add to Address Book</a>
<b>Subject:</b>	Fwd: An invitation to publish
<b>To:</b>	teachbesl@yahoo.co.uk

**Rajagopalan <rajagopalan@uol.com.br>** wrote:

From: "Rajagopalan"

To:

Subject: An invitation to publish

Date: Sat, 14 Feb 2004 10:10:51 -0300

Dear Prof. Niu Qiang,

I am writing to you after browsing through your paper "English or Chinglish?". Let me briefly introduce myself. I am a Full Professor in Linguistics at the State University at Campinas (Brazil). I understand that we have common interests, especially regarding the advance of English as a world language and its consequences (I have a paper on this topic scheduled to appear in the ELT Journal, this coming april).

Now, the reason I am writing to you is that I am currently involved in editing a book on this subject (in Portuguese, Brazil's national language). The volume is being edited by a colleague of mine and myself. The design of the book is as follows. There is an opening chapter, which is a translation of a controversial paper of mine that originally appeared in English in the Journal of Language and Linguistics. The paper generated so much interest in Brazil that a local publisher has shown interest in publishing it in Portuguese, along with reactions from fellow linguists from around the world. The paper discusses the impact of English on Brazil. We have already invited a number of scholars from different countries: USA, UK, Australia, Honk Kong, India, Lebanon, Argentina, Denamark, Peru, Greece, israel, Spain. Portugal and so on (along with a number of Brazilian linguists). Some of the names you may readily recognise: Robert Phillipson, Alastair Pennycook, Bernard Spolsky, etc. (They have already agreed to contribute).

If you are interested in contributing a piece (it will be translated and published in Portuguese), please let me know and I will be happy to forward an electronic version of the original paper in English. All I ask you to do is to to read the paper and react to it in a maximum of 1500 words. It would be especially interesting if you could compare the Brazilian situation with what you have in China (this is what many of our colleagues from other countries have done).

I look forward to receiving an early response from you,

Yours sincerely,

Rajan (this is what my friends call me)

Prof. Kanavillil Rajagopalan

The following article was submitted to and accepted by Prof. Kanavillil Rajagopalan.

## **Linguistic Failures**

By: Niu Qiang, PhD and Martin Wolff, J.D.

It is undeniable that England has given the modern global community - English as the international language of commerce<sup>i</sup>, British common law<sup>ii</sup>, contract law<sup>iii</sup> and maritime (Admiralty) law<sup>iv</sup>. Whether by accident or design, the effect of these contributions on the world is a fundamental destruction of individual ethnic customs, social structure and culture. There appears little or no dissent amongst linguists for the proposition that language and culture are inseparable.

Language functions as a symbolic marker of a nation due to the inseparable relationship between language and culture, which is sociolinguistic in nature; while the inseparable relationship between language and culture is to be traced further to the interdependent relationship between language and thought, which is psycholinguistic in origin. And yet, armed with this knowledge, linguists world-wide sit idly by and watch as their local culture is stealthily supplanted by English culture riding piggyback on the English language, embraced officially or unofficially as the second language.

Occasionally, a scholar like Prof. Kanavillil Rajagopalan writes a controversial piece such as “National languages as flags of allegiance; or the linguistics that failed us: A close look at emergent linguistic chauvinism in Brazil”, which reminds us that not only is the English language the greatest all time export of Great Britain, but this gift is like a Trojan Horse that brings with it a potentially destructive force.

The situation in Brazil, as described by Prof. Kanavillil Rajagopalan, is not so dissimilar to that in China.

The teaching of English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) in China has become a nationwide endeavor pursued at all academic levels, from the kindergarten to the University. In the past ten years there has been an explosion in the development of public school English programs and private English language schools throughout China. EFL/ESL has become very big business in China (China Daily, HK Edition, October 9, 2002.) Reports show that ESL has become a 10-billion yuan business in China. Of the 37 billion yuan annual book sales, ESL takes up as much as 25% of the market share. And a few ESL teachers in Shanghai command an hourly rate of 1,000 yuan (US\$120). Even on average, a student pays 10-20 yuan (US\$1.2-2.4) for one hour of ESL training.

In 1862, under the Great Qing Dynasty, the first English Language School was officially opened by the Chinese Government to train ten men for the newly created diplomatic corps. (Deyi, 1992 Panda Books) In the past ten years, there has been an alarming increase in the emphasis on English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) in China.

Now, China annually recruits 100,000 “Foreign Experts” (FE) to teach English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) ([www.Chinatefl.com](http://www.Chinatefl.com)) with an accompanying 10 billion Yuan price tag. (China Daily, Hong Kong Edition, October 9, 2002.) According to one Internet recruiting web site there are 150,000 foreign ESL teachers working in China ([www.AbroadChina.com](http://www.AbroadChina.com)). The People’s Daily reports that in 2001 the industry made a 700 million yuan (US\$8,700,000) profit in Beijing alone. (People’s Daily, 1/23/02) Public middle schools, high schools and universities throughout China have developed and implemented English-language programs. Private EFL/ESL schools (kindergartens, primary, middle, high and college) have proliferated to such an extent that according to statistics from the Education, Science, Culture and Health Committee of the NPC, about 54,000 private schools had been set up in China by the end of 2000, with 6.93 million registered students. (People’s Daily, 5/23/01).

At first blush, it may appear admirable that China has so wholeheartedly made such a concerted effort to adopt English, the international language of commerce, as its second language. On October 24, 2002, Zang Xinsheng, Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Education reportedly said: “With China’s accession to the World Trade Organization and the approaching Olympics in 2008 more than ever is it a priority for young Chinese to learn and improve their language skills” (China Daily, 10/25/02). The same article states “Beijing is striving to reach its goal of teaching citizens to speak English to improve its image as an international metropolis.”

Beijing wants its 13 million residents to speak English to enhance its image as a cosmopolitan metropolis (China Daily, 10-05-02). China’s Ministry of Education wants all young people of China to learn English due to China’s WTO membership and China’s hosting the 2008 Olympics (China Daily, 10-05-02). Certain municipal governments in China require all of their civil servants to learn some English (China Daily, 10/05/02)

These goals or objectives beg the question, WHY?

Market studies, market analysis and affirmative recommendations from experts in the fields of business, math and linguistics should support each of the forgoing propositions, but do not appear to have been conducted.

What is the mathematical probability that each of Beijing’s 15 million or so residents will need to be able to speak English for an intended or even accidental encounter with a single English speaking foreigner during the 2008 Olympics? Probably not very high.

Does a market study support the proposition that Beijing’s image will be enhanced in the eyes of foreigners if all the residents of Beijing can speak English? Further, would such image enhancement translate into increased economic benefit for Beijing? If so, how much economic benefit will accrue to Beijing and does it offset the social, cultural and political costs that must be paid along the way by the people of Beijing? These questions do not appear to have been addressed by any formal study.

How many bilingual (Chinese-English) jobs will actually be created in China due to China’s World Trade Organization (WTO) membership and hosting the 2008 Olympics? Does the number of new jobs requiring English support the need for all of China’s young people to learn English? Answers to these questions are not readily available. And about the bilingual jobs created by the 2008 Olympics: How long will they last? A few months? Why should someone spend three or four years studying English in College for a job in 2008 that will only last a few months? Post Olympics what becomes of these Chinese English speakers?

What is the mathematical probability that all municipal government civil servants, in any particular Chinese municipality, will need to use English in their daily work? Very slim.

Is there any empirical study or evidence to support the current EFL/ESL revolution in China, which revolution may in fact have significant adverse social, cultural and political effects? (Qiang/Wolff, 4/03) It does not appear that the Chinese Central Government has issued any formal Resolution or Position Paper authorizing, condoning or supporting the current ESL revolution in China. Rather, it has been allowed and even encouraged to just evolve. Other than standardized testing for College entrance, the Central Government seems to have no set educational policy or curriculum for EFL/ESL. There is no single Ministry of Education document stating the Government policy on EFL/ESL in China. (He Qixin, 8/01)

This rush to educate has spawned an industry run amuck, without appreciable government control or regulation. (Qiang/Wolff, 9/03)

Why the concerted effort to require 1.3 billion Mandarin speakers, 25% of the world's population, to learn English as a foreign/second language? Since Mandarin is one of the six working languages of the United Nations, does the world at large have a greater appreciation for the importance of Mandarin than China itself?

Is the current EFL/ESL revolution in China a misguided, self-inflicted English colonialization, brought about tacitly, if not officially, by adopting EFL/ESL teaching as a national program? Will the West conquer China from within, without a single shot ever being fired? Will English enculturation supplant traditional Chinese culture and values? Will "Beijing duck" and "dim sum" be replaced with McDonalds and Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC)?

Why has China apparently forsaken Mandarin for English when 25% of the world's population already speaks Mandarin, and Mandarin is one of the six working languages of the United Nations? Why does China so meekly submit to the English-based new world order emanating out of Washington, D.C., when 25% of the world's population looks to Beijing for its leadership? Does China not yet realize the reality that the emerging China has the immediate clout to demand that those desiring to do business in China or with China should learn Mandarin, rather than expect 1.3 billion Chinese to learn English?

Why should 1.3 billion Chinese learn English when "95% of Chinese college graduates will not use oral English in their whole lifetime nor will they read any English materials."? (China Daily, 11/03/03)

Could or should China learn something from the EU's prioritizing the preservation and continued use of native languages? (Qiang/Wolff 4/03) Is the risk posed by EFL/ESL to China's social, cultural and even political structures and systems outweighed by the potential economic benefits such that China's Chineseness is for sale? EFL/ESL at any cost? Should the love of money replace traditional Chinese wisdom as the most valuable asset of the new Chingland? Should economic gain be at the expense of what makes China different from all other nations? National identity is tied directly to the preservation of the native language.

It is safe to say that the language issue should not be treated merely as purely linguistic, but rather as a potential dynamic force which may operate on various social and political factors and thus lead to drastic social transformations. Language planning has to be taken into serious consideration by policy makers where independence is newly declared, or where sovereign cohesiveness is challenged, so that national unity and harmony can be maintained.

A national language is more than just the language of government or of education; it is the symbol of a people's identity as citizens of that nation.

This language issue should not be treated as merely linguistic, but rather it is a socio-psychological issue in nature and is of political significance due to the intrinsic relationship among language, thought and culture. A national language shared by all in-group members is the potential unifying force that brings people closer in time of social change, but it can also be a divisive power, which may break a nation into parts or groups.

Yes Prof. Kanavillil Rajagopalan, linguists must engage the issue on all fronts, including active public discussion of political and ethical issues! If not linguists, then whom?

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<sup>i</sup> “The English language is the UK’s biggest export success story.” **British Council**, The United Kingdom’s international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations.

[www.britishcouncil.org/belgium/english/](http://www.britishcouncil.org/belgium/english/)

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.hildesheim.co.uk/quickreference/politics/britlaw.html>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.duhaime.org/contract/ca-con1.htm>

<sup>iv</sup> Maritime Law as a Mixed Legal System, (1999) 23 Tul. Mar. L.J. 317

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