



## Weatherhead East Asian Institute

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
EXPANDING EAST ASIAN STUDIES  
2004-2005 TEACHING COLLABORATIVE

The Expanding East Asian Studies (ExEAS) program at Columbia University seeks up to fifteen faculty participants from two- and four-year institutions in the Northeast to participate with Columbia faculty and postdoctoral fellows in the 2004-2005 ExEAS Teaching Collaborative.

ExEAS, funded by the Freeman Foundation, is a multi-year initiative designed to build on achievements in undergraduate education about East Asia to reach a larger number of students at all types of undergraduate institutions. The ExEAS Collaborative brings together a diverse group of Asianists and non-Asianists from a range of institutions to share ideas and resources, network, and develop new teaching materials.

Participating faculty will take part in three weekend workshops on the Columbia University campus during the 2004-2005 academic year and will be asked to develop curricular materials for dissemination in print and over the internet. Faculty participants will receive lodging, travel reimbursement, and a \$250 honorarium per workshop.

Faculty who teach full-time at a two- or four-year college or university within approximately 300 miles of New York City are welcome to apply. To apply, please submit a cover letter describing your teaching interests; the kinds of units, materials, or courses you would like to see developed; and a current C.V., including a list of courses taught within the past three years. Send application materials to ExEAS, Columbia University, MC 3333, 420 W. 118<sup>th</sup> St., 9<sup>th</sup> Floor, New York, NY 10027. The postmark deadline for applications is April 26, 2004.

For more information, please write to  
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## Choosing a Foreign Language for the Future Or, the Need for American Students to Study an Asian Language in College

By John F. Copper

**T**hirty years of employment as a college professor have led me to anticipate weekly that one or two students will ask me what language is best to study in college and why.

The essence of this question is: What language will be most important in my future? Since studying a foreign language requires a considerable commitment in terms of time and energy and may even become a lifetime endeavor, this matter deserves careful consideration.

Learning a language spoken by a large and/or an increasing number of people is preferable in most ways. As August Comte once said: "Demographics is destiny." Thus I suggest studying a "big language."

One must also consider the languages of nations growing economically and those advanced in science and technology to be more important. Why is English such an important language when it is smaller in number of speakers than two or three other languages (Chinese, Hindi, and perhaps Spanish) and the number of first-language English speakers is declining (from 9.8 percent of the world's population after World War II to a bit over 7 percent now)? The answer is obvious: English is the language of science and business.

Finally, the supply and demand of people fluent in various foreign languages is a variable; after all, language is a marketable skill. There is a plethora of speakers of some foreign languages and too few of others.

### **FOLLOWING IS MY LIST OF THE TOP TEN LANGUAGES IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE THAT I RECOMMEND STUDENTS STUDY AND A BRIEF EXPLANATION FOR THEIR RANKING:**

**1. Chinese. Mandarin** or *putonghua* (the common language) is first. It is the national language in China and most Chinese, over 90 percent, now speak it, and an even higher percentage will in the future. Mandarin Chinese is spoken by more people in the world than any other language, by a sizeable margin.

In addition, China is booming economically—more than any other important nation, and this will probably continue to be true for some years. China is also, many believe, about to become a technology powerhouse.

In the 1990s, when the US economy is said to have done well, China grew four times the US pace. China was the world's fastest growing economy in 2002 and 2003. Most forecasters expect this boom to continue. "Greater China" (which includes China and Taiwan plus the Overseas Chinese) will overtake the United States in

economic output, if purchasing power parity is used as a measure, in a matter of months. The People's Republic of China alone will overtake the United States in a decade or so and will surpass the US, Europe, and Japan combined in fifty years, according to some projections.

China is not an advanced country in science and technology; but this is changing quickly in a number of respects. China is about to become the global manufacturing house for electronics and computers; accompanying that is a technology boom in those fields. Research generally is a fast-growing business in China. Reflecting this, in just three years there will be more e-mail messages in Chinese than in English.

One also need ponder the fact that more than half of history's most significant inventions came from China. A number of trends such as research funding, the number of Chinese getting foreign higher degrees, China's space program, and more, indicate China may currently be on the way to restoring its global intellectual role. Chinese, incidentally, comprise one percent of the American population, but are fifteen percent of the researchers in the US.

Finally, Chinese is a very useful second language: many people in East and Southeast Asia learn Chinese. And there are 60 million or so Chinese, generally well educated and/or wealthy, living outside China. After English, Chinese is the world's most important second language. Second languages make it possible for many more people to communicate. (Esperanto, the so-called artificial international language, has not succeeded.)

**2. Japanese.** By number of speakers, Japanese is one of the top ten languages. Japan is the second largest nation in the world in economic size and is the first in foreign investment and economic assistance. Japan is the leader, along with China, of the most economically dynamic part of the world—East Asia. Japan is innovative, accounting for a greater share of the world's patents than any other nation except the United States. It has many cutting edge industries, including computers (recently, Japanese built the fastest one in the world), artificial intelligence, optics, electronics, new materials, robotics, and more.

Japanese also is a useful second language. Many people in Korea and Taiwan (both with booming economies) and some in Southeast Asia speak Japanese. Not enough Americans are studying it.

**3. Arabic.** Modern Arabic is the formal language spoken in most countries in the Middle East (though not Iran), making it one of the top languages in the world by number of speakers. It is the language of many countries with high birth rates. It is the language of Islam—the fastest growing religion in the world (and the United States)—which will have more followers than any other religion by 2023 if current trends continue. It is also the language of oil. Not surprisingly there is a dire need for Arabic speakers among the US intelligence agencies.

**4. Bahasa, or Malay.** It is the language spoken in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. Indonesia is the fourth largest nation in the world by population after China, India and the United States. Indonesia is the largest Islamic country; there are more adherents to Islam in Indonesia than in all Arab countries combined.

Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei are all oil-exporting countries. Indonesia and Malaysia also control the world's supply of tin and



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The Japan Studies Association, with a generous grant from the Freeman Foundation, will conduct a 3-week intensive workshop on Japan for faculty and administrators from two- and four-year colleges and universities who have little or no prior academic background on Japan and who demonstrate the willingness to incorporate Japan Studies into humanities, social science, or business courses.

The Freeman grant covers up to \$600 airfare, accommodations, most meals, and a stipend.

Applications may be filed electronically on the JSA web site: [www.japanstudies.org](http://www.japanstudies.org). All applications must be received by February 1, 2004.

If you have questions, contact Dr. Joseph L. Overton, JSA President, 4303 Diamond Head Road, Honolulu, Hawaii 96816, [overton@hawaii.edu](mailto:overton@hawaii.edu), or Fax: 808-734-9151.

## ESSAYS

natural rubber. All three countries have been booming economically (though Indonesia is currently in a recession), and this will no doubt continue in the future. Finally, very few American students study or speak Bahasa.

**5. Russian.** By land size, Russia is the largest country in the world and is sixth in population. Blessed with natural resources, some say its oil production may soon make it the world's leading energy exporter, passing Saudi Arabia. Russia is advanced in science. Russian is a second language spoken by many people in border nations. There is, however, a caveat: Russia must reverse its rapidly declining population.

**6. Spanish.** The third or fourth largest language in the world, Spanish is spoken in most countries south of the United States, in addition, of course, to Spain. Countries where Spanish is spoken have growing populations. Spanish is the most frequently heard foreign language spoken in the United States. There is one drawback to learning Spanish though: it is the most popular language to study in America and the supply-demand equation is not favorable.

**7. Korean.** It is one of the top ten in number of speakers. South Korea is one of the economic miracle countries of the past forty years and will no doubt continue to be a fast growing country commercially. North and South Korea will eventually unify, producing a "combined" Korea that is more important politically, economically, and in other ways. Last but not least, Korean is not a language studied by many American students or students anywhere; the market favors any American who knows Korean.

**8. Portuguese.** One of the world's top ten languages, it is spoken in the largest Latin American country: Brazil. Brazil is the fifth largest nation in the world in size and population and is also growing economically. It may be the dominant nation in South America in the future. Fewer Americans study Portuguese than Spanish and several other European languages.

**9. Hindi.** After Mandarin Chinese, it is the second largest language in the world in terms of number of speakers. It is the dominant language in India, the world's second largest nation by population and a country doing well economically. However, it is not a universal language in India and most Hindi speakers speak English.

**10. Bengali.** A top ten in number of speakers, Bengali is an important language in South Asia. If I were to suggest alternatives for number ten it would be two dialects of Chinese: Cantonese and Sichuanese, and Thai and Vietnamese. Cantonese is a business language in China and is spoken by many Overseas Chinese. More than twice as many people speak Sichuan dialect as there are people in France or England. Both Thailand and Vietnam are mid-sized countries doing well economically.

Astonishing to some, I suppose, I do not put French or German in my top ten list. These two countries' populations are too small and are declining. Neither country is growing very fast economically. And many people in both speak English, especially in Germany. Lastly, too many American students study these languages; the supply of speakers exceeds the demand.

Clearly, the most important foreign languages for Americans to study are Asian, reflecting Asia's successful economic growth, its rapid modernization, and the region's rise in political and strategic stature. Pragmatic matters aside, Asian cultures are rich and worth learning about when choosing a language to learn ■

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## NORTH KOREA: BEYOND THE DMZ

This new documentary from Third World Newsreel by J. T. Takagi and Hye-Jung Park follows a young Korean American woman to North Korea, with a unique look at life in the D.P.R.K. (2003, 56 minutes)

*"A thought-provoking introduction to the origins of the current conflict between the D.P.R.K. and the U.S. —and a very human look at the people of North Korea, which is sure to trigger lively discussion and further study."*

J. J. Suh, Assistant Professor of Government, Cornell University

### OTHER NEW TITLES ON ASIA AND ASIAN AMERICAN TOPICS FROM THIRD WORLD NEWSREEL

**Sky Blue Hometown**—Soh Young Kim's film on Korean Russians—their internment by Stalin and their lives today.

**Mask**—In Liu Xiaojin's film, the villagers of Xiaotun restage a masked folk opera for the first time after China's Cultural Revolution, unveiling antagonisms among villagers, officials, scholars—and the filmmakers.

**The Army Forced Them To Be Violent**—Tino Saruengallo's film describes the Indonesian student movement in the wake of President Suharto's fall in 1998, and the subsequent military and police repression.

**Double Exposure**—Kir Yin Snyder explores the conflicts and contradictions experienced by a Chinese American immigrant—from youth to middle age—in a provocative and humorous personal essay.

**Last We Forget**—Jason DaSilva examines the impact that 9/11 has had on civil liberties in the U.S. and the lives of immigrants in a historical context.

Third World Newsreel carries over 400 titles on Asian, African, Latino/a, Native American and the diasporic experience. You may reach Third World Newsreel at 845 Eighth Ave., 10th Floor, NY, NY 10018; Phone: 212-847-9277 (ext. 308); Fax: 212-594-6417; website: www.twn.org