

# Lingua Francas in Higher Education in Northeast Asia and ASEAN Countries: Implications for Regional Cooperation on Languages

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## *Abstract*

*This research aims to analyze the issues and challenges of language as a medium of instruction in institutions of higher education in East Asian countries in the context of student mobility and internationalization of higher education. It also explores the possibility of forging regional cooperation among Northeast Asian and ASEAN countries. In the age of globalization, we are facing the challenge of coexistence between national languages and with English as the medium of instruction in institutions of higher education. Language as a medium of instruction is a driving force for student mobility within this region, students' motivation for learning and upward social mobility. Instructional language is also tied to the raising of cultural awareness and may also influence the creation of regional identity. That is, language is not just a tool for education but it also may have a huge impact on the people of East Asia in terms of facilitating cross-cultural experiences and creating a future regional identity through regional cooperation and integration.*

*This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of globalization on language issues, such as the dominant role of English in each country's approach to the internationalization of higher education. The article also looks at the experience of the European Union and ASEAN as regional collaboration models, with a main focus on the two organizations' positions on English and multilingualism in regional dialogue and policy harmonization, i.e., the relationship between English and other languages, in their respective regions. Thirdly, the focus of the discussion shifts to the issue of language in Northeast Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea and China. The comparison with the EU and ASEAN cases allows us to offer some observations about the specific situation of language as a medium of instruction in higher education and the trends in student mobility and language policy in Northeast Asia. It is hypothesized that language as a medium of instruction impacts students' motivation to learn, seek mutual understanding and secure social mobility and future careers, as well as their views of the countries in which they choose to study.*

*Finally, this research is an attempt to highlight the implications for dialogue and regional cooperation toward the development of a regional language framework as an element of East Asian regional integration.*

## **1. Introduction**

This paper focuses on the current issues of language as a medium of instruction in the context of internationalization in higher education in Japan, South Korea, China and ASEAN, as they are key actors in East Asia. Against the backdrop of deepening globalization, the three Northeast Asian countries and ASEAN countries held an East Asian Summit in 2005 with the aim, among others, to establish a practical framework for cooperation, alongside the process of internation-

alization, in higher education for future East Asian integration.<sup>1</sup> In the dialogue at the East Asian Summit from 2005 to 2010, the importance of cooperation and the establishment of a regional framework in higher education between ASEAN+3 countries has been well emphasized.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in this paper, “East Asia” refers to 13 countries: 10 ASEAN member countries, excluding East Timor, plus Japan, South Korea and China. In the East Asian region, the political, economic and cultural diversity that exists is a treasure but also an obstacle to regional cooperation. Unlike the European Union, East Asia does not yet have an institutional framework for regional integration, nor does it have a shared regional identity and norms to support the integration. However, people are witnessing increasing student mobility within East Asia.<sup>3</sup> This so-called “de-facto” integration can be seen especially in the educational field.

Internationalization in higher education has many dimensions. As Knight defined it, internationalization of higher education can be an aim in itself wherein an international, intercultural, or global dimension is incorporated into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education.<sup>4</sup> For example, leading universities around the world are now introducing international/transnational education programs and are expanding agreements for exchanging students among higher education institutions. Moreover, in the discussion of WTO and GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services), higher education has become an export commodity.<sup>5</sup> Today, flows of international students represent important economic benefits and countries are eager to develop programs to attract more international students to their institutions.

The ASEAN countries established an ASEAN University Network (AUN) in 1995.<sup>6</sup> AUN aims to strengthen the existing network of cooperation and promote collaborative programs. AUN now consists of 26 leading universities from all of the member nations of ASEAN. In Japan, China and Korea, “Campus Asia” was launched to promote exchange and cooperation among universities, representing the first trilateral cooperative venture in higher education between them.<sup>7</sup> These regional frameworks of cooperation have been developed to enhance regional student mobility and also to respond to the current growing flow of students in East Asian countries. Traditionally, the flow of international students from Asia was vertical, toward more advanced Western countries in what Altbach has described as the “Core-Periphery” structure in higher education.<sup>8</sup> The vertical flow of international students has yet to become a lateral and horizontal pattern of mobility within East Asia. According to Trow’s model, higher education is moving from an elite-type model towards a massification and universal type of higher education.<sup>9</sup> East Asia is not an exception. Gross enrollment rates in higher education in East Asia have reached 98% in South Korea, 58% in Japan, 23% in China, 45% in Thailand and 35% in Malaysia.<sup>10</sup> With these high enrollment rates, studying abroad is now more accessible to the general public.

In the age of mass and universal types of higher education in East Asia, the role of higher education for attracting and accommodating globalized human resources has become more and more important as a source of national benefits and for gaining international competitiveness. Internationalization of higher education has become a crucial strategy for each country with political, economic, academic and sociocultural rationales.<sup>11</sup> According to Knight, English, as a medium of education, has become an important tool in increasing the number of incoming students and in promoting the internationalization of education in any country, and East Asia is no exception. Every international student confronts the issue of language as a medium of instruction in deciding where to go for a study-abroad experience. Students tend to choose their destination country based on the language in which they will study, taking into consideration how they can enhance their language proficiency, which they think is important for their future careers. Competency in the English language is an important qualification for university students in many countries since it is a tool of empowerment that can improve their socioeconomic status in many cases. Therefore, it is important to look at how the countries of the region deal with the issue of language as a medium of instruction, how they balance the international language and national

language, and how they manage the strategy of internationalization in higher education in terms of languages.

## **2. Triangulation: A Feature of East Asia, Languages and Higher Education**

The purpose of this section is to identify the distinct features of languages and language issues in the region and examine why some issues, which have been debated elsewhere in the world, have not been discussed in East Asia.

In East Asia, when we discuss language issues, we are always confronted by the historical and political background of the region. However, the language issues are inevitable and are something we must face on a daily basis since language is the core element of people's communication and solidarity in a society. In comparison with the European Union, which has established a regional policy for languages such as "plurilinguism,"<sup>12</sup> East Asia has two distinguishing aspects we need to consider in discussing language issues in the regional context.

The first aspect relates to the diversity of the region. East Asia is characterized by diversity in many aspects: culture (including religion and language), politics, economy, geography, and the environment. These aspects of diversity are an important asset of this region. Its languages are especially important, as they are the primary means of communication and constitute an important part of each culture and its people's pride. In terms of linguistic diversity, there are almost 7,000 languages in the world, and 25% of them are found in the thirteen countries of East Asia.<sup>13</sup> In addition, nine of the regional countries are home to more than 50 languages each: 726 languages in Indonesia, 293 in China and 175 in the Philippines. In contrast, there is not a single country in Europe that has more than 50 languages within it. Therefore, we can say that East Asia has more linguistic diversity than Europe. For the countries that contain various small languages, language policy is a somewhat sensitive issue and is closely related to the unity of the people. In the context of East Asia, we can say that language policy is a matter of importance for national sovereignty and is also associated with national educational policy, which should be free of interference by other nations. Therefore, even when East Asian countries have discussed and developed various kinds of regional cooperative frameworks in education, especially in higher education, in recent years, there has been little discussion on regional cooperation in language issues.

Secondly, a language is not just a tool for learning. Many East Asian countries experienced educational imperialism and cultural, social and linguistic assimilation in the colonial period during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Then, a language was not just a means of communication; it was also an instrument of command and control over the country under imperialism, used to influence the occupied people into complying with the dominant power and to embed the colonial power's knowledge and academic system in the colonized country. After gaining independence from the colonial powers such as England, France and Japan, many East Asian countries struggled to establish governance and self-determination and to achieve national unification. Language policy is one of the fundamental requirements for a new government to unify its citizens, establish nation-states and develop a stronger national identity. So, these countries consider language issues to be a matter of national sovereignty with which outsiders should not interfere. Given this background, East Asia is lagging behind other regions, such as Europe, in the development of a policy of harmonization to achieve common objectives and deal with common language issues, including the role of languages.

Meanwhile, the regional language policy suggested by this study concerns itself with a more feasible field for future regional cooperation compared to other language-related areas, such as language rights and preservation of minority languages in East Asia. A student's linguistic proficiency in higher education can be an additional asset that complements, not replaces, his/her

proficiency in his/her mother tongue or other languages related to his/her identity. In this author's view, therefore, it is possible and proper to consider how the East Asian community might discuss and deal with language issues, especially the role of language as a medium of instruction in higher education in this region in the context of regional cooperation.

The languages that can be acquired through education, work and increasing mobility are the ones people would choose. Students in higher education in East Asia are now moving around the world through international collaborative frameworks and international programs that are proliferating in East Asian higher education. Students start to acquire and improve their new languages through the instruction they receive in higher education and through social communication in destination countries. In addition, the middle class in Asian countries will grow in the future<sup>14</sup> and, as we noted earlier, gross enrollment rates in higher education are already getting higher. Now, in the age of globalization, we witness increasing use of English in the international arena including higher education and communication among international students. English and its expanding power is also an important issue we need to discuss in the context of East Asian higher education.

### **3. Language as a Medium of Instruction in Higher Education: Theoretical Frameworks**

Traditionally, international students from East Asia studied abroad in Western countries. P.G. Altbach characterized Asian universities as imported models of Western universities and pointed to their post-colonial structure.<sup>15</sup> In the age of globalization, however, we are witnessing greater international student mobility within East Asia. Jane Knight has pointed out that an unexpected result of globalization is the growing importance of regions.<sup>16</sup> In East Asia, we are witnessing burgeoning student mobility, international cooperation and institutional networks in higher education. In this phenomenon of "regionalization" many countries are attempting to establish themselves as a regional educational hub "to capitalize on the growing demand for higher education from Asian countries and the desire to increase their competitiveness in research and technology."<sup>17</sup> In addition, many elite universities in East Asia have recently appeared in world rankings and seem to be gaining international competitiveness. At the same time, most higher education institutions in the region seek to attract more international students through so-called "international programs," which enable international students to study in English without knowing the local language or languages of the destination country. English has acted as a driving force for students in East Asia.

According to David Crystal, English has already become the lingua franca in East Asia in political dialogue, civil society and university life, and for university students it is now a key incentive to study abroad.<sup>18</sup> Crystal is a positive promoter of "New Englishes"<sup>19</sup> and favors the further expansion of the role of English in global communication. He acknowledges that the history of a global language can be traced through the successful expansion of military, political and economic power, such as British imperial power and the current dominance of U.S. power, but he argues that English is no longer associated with the political authority it once held. According to him, English is a "neutral" tool for communication that can facilitate regional cooperation and social integration. He also maintains, "[I]t is inevitable that a global language will eventually come to be used by more people than any other language. English has already reached this stage."<sup>20</sup> Crystal sums up, "English is playing a central role in empowering the subjugated and marginalized, and eroding the division between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'."<sup>21</sup>

In contrast, Robert Phillipson points to the possible linguistic divide among East Asian citizens. According to him, learning to use English as an international language has served the interests of English speaking countries and countries which host international students, and, as a

consequence, the process has perpetuated the North-South gap and exploitation. English has also brought a linguistic disparity between elite and non-elite inside each country.<sup>22</sup> He observes that access to the dominant language (English) is very unequally distributed and, consequently, a linguistic divide within a country can be a major concern and challenge for the government and this calls for intense discussion.<sup>23</sup>

Phillipson agrees with Crystal on the point that English is now entrenched worldwide, as a result of British colonialism, international interdependence and ‘revolutions’ in technology, transport, communications and commerce. However, the difference between these two scholars is that Phillipson sees the dominant role of English in the context of power relations, as English is the language of the United States, the major economic, political and military force in the contemporary world. His working definition of English Imperialism is that “the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages.”<sup>24</sup> He also asserts that “in the early colonial phase of imperialism, the elites in the Periphery consisted of the colonizers themselves, whether as settlers or administrators. In present day neo-colonialism, the elites are to a large extent indigenous, but most of them have strong links with Centre. Many of them have been educated in Centre countries and/or through the medium of the Centre language and old colonial language.”<sup>25</sup> According to Phillipson, English is used widely to maintain and further expand supranational and international links; English linguistic imperialism operates globally as a key medium of Center-Periphery relations.<sup>26</sup>

Phillipson’s argument is based on the Core-Periphery theory, according to which dominant nation-states reign over the countries in the Periphery. The unequal power relationship exists because the Core countries possess much greater structural resources, including higher education institutions – specifically universities and academic publishers – than countries in the Periphery.

Gramsci’s theory can also explain the language issue in higher education in East Asia. His writings have influenced many scholars and there are many interpretations and applications of his theory of hegemony and language. According to Peter Ives, for example, English is a requisite for upward social mobility and attainment of privileged positions in society. Therefore, not only elites but also the general public who understand that the language provides the access and opportunity to power, capital and resources “spontaneously” choose English as their medium of learning in higher education. Cultural invasion is directly tied to individuals’ “spontaneous” desire and takes place through mass media, the Internet, international mobility and flow of human resources and student exchange.<sup>27</sup> This “spontaneity” is a very important analytical concept to understand student gravitation toward English in East Asia. The expansion of English is surely influenced by the internationalization of higher education and reflects the strategy used by governments and educational institutions that expect to gain economic benefits from increasing their student population. However, the growing population of students studying in English is actually driven by the individual students’ desire to gain competence in the global language in the process Gramsci called “spontaneity.”

Therefore, we must try to understand what role lingua franca plays in higher education in East Asia from individual students’ perspectives and how the language they choose promotes regional integration.

#### **4. Lessons from the EU Experience**

Economic and political integration in the East Asian region is years behind EU integration. In terms of regionalization in higher education and student mobility in East Asia, this author believes there is much to be learned from the experience and the philosophical background of the

EU policy.

In Europe, despite the successful integration process in the fields of trade, economy, finance and law, there seems to be resistance to cultural integration.<sup>28</sup> European countries have maintained the belief that the cultural and linguistic pluralism that exists among them is a part of their historical heritage and is an important asset to be preserved. Confronted with language issues, such as the triangular structure of global language (English), national language (official language in each nation), and regional or local language, in the process of regional integration, the EU has developed three important norms and frameworks for regional coordination and cooperation.

The first element is the LINGUA plan and SOCRATES program. The original purpose of the LINGUA plan was to facilitate regional mobility of the labor force through the enhancement of workers' foreign language competency while preserving the existing linguistic diversity in the region. Along with the regional higher education policy known as the Erasmus program, the LINGUA plan was integrated into the SOCRATES program in 1995.<sup>29</sup> The SOCRATES program is designed to facilitate intercultural interaction and cross-border mobility of students in Europe. Europe, as one region, has set clear objectives in its educational policy to support study abroad and student mobility. The SOCRATES program also contributes to the enhancement of mutual understanding by giving students the opportunity to learn foreign languages and experience foreign cultures. The EU's program locates the regional language policy (i.e., the LINGUA plan) within the higher education policy (the SOCRATES program), both committed to the deepening of mutual understanding.

The second element is the original norms of "plurilingual" education for European residents. "Plurilingualism" was advanced by the language policy division of the Council of Europe. The core idea is that every EU citizen is expected to command two foreign languages besides her/his own mother tongue.<sup>30</sup> Since language proficiency is considered an important basis for knowledge-based societies, emphasis on foreign language acquisition has grown.<sup>31</sup> To supplement the plurilingual education policy, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages has been introduced as a guideline for assessing and monitoring foreign language acquisition with the aim of facilitating intercultural interaction and the cross-border mobility of students and workers in Europe.<sup>32</sup> Within this framework an implementing scheme called "European Language Portfolio" (ELP) has been developed, according to which students can evaluate their language proficiency and progress in their foreign language learning. These collaborative frameworks on the practical and ideational levels help EU countries share plurilingual education as a common experience.

Lastly, the establishment of the "European Year of Languages" is a symbolic expression of the commitment of the EU members to the promotion of language learning as an important element of regional integration. To encourage language learning by all persons residing in Europe, enhance the recognition of multilingualism and raise awareness of the linguistic and cultural diversity in the European Union, many policy measures have been established, including some designed to preserve the languages of minority and immigrant communities.<sup>33</sup> Regarding the EU's emphasis on multilingualism, questions are often raised about the definition of multilingualism and the scope of activities to be undertaken to preserve the region's linguistic diversity. Multilingualism in EU operations stands for its cultural wealth but it also entails a huge burden in terms of financial and human resource commitment.

Implementation of multilingual or plurilingual education policy might be beneficial to East Asian countries in preserving the region's linguistic diversity and respect of the differences, but it would also impose a huge financial burden. East Asian countries would need to allocate huge budgets to carry out such a policy, and it would not be realistic. However, the European experience suggests that we need to promote discussions about regional cooperation in language policy among East Asian countries both at the government and institutional levels, and in both practical

and philosophical terms. As we will discuss in detail in the following pages, the laissez-faire liberalism in language expansion would lead to the dominance of English in East Asia.

## **5. English as the Lingua Franca in ASEAN Countries**

### **(1) The Limitation of Multilingualism**

In the EU case, the more official EU languages exist, the more challenges arise. Multilingual situations require more human resources and financial burdens than monolingual situations. ASEAN, whose economic size is smaller than EU, has difficulty setting up every national language of the ASEAN countries as an official language and employing translators and interpreters in international conferences. Moreover, in the 27 countries in the EU, more than 95% of EU citizens are speaking in their official languages that the EU has established. On the other hand, ASEAN has more linguistic diversity so that even if they chose the dominant languages in each nation, they would not be the first languages for the majority of ASEAN citizens. So, it is not realistic to implement multilingual dialogue at a regional level as in the EU.

ASEAN member countries have held dialogues about regional cooperation in the context of ASEAN integration. The first statement on the language issue appeared in the “Vientiane Action Program” issued at the 10<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in Vientiane, Laos in 2004.<sup>34</sup> Article 3.4 of the Action Program, “Promoting an ASEAN Identity,” refers to the agreement to “mainstream the promotion of ASEAN awareness and regional identity in national communications plans and educational curricula, people-to-people contact including through arts, tourism and sports, especially among the youth, and the promotion of ASEAN languages [*sic*] learning through scholarships and exchanges of linguists.”<sup>35</sup> This Action Program emphasized the significance of regional identity for the ASEAN citizens and recognized ASEAN languages as an essential element of boosting common identity.<sup>36</sup> Agreement among the ASEAN countries on pursuing common objectives is a recent development and they still face difficulties in carrying out the regional policy in this area at a practical level. ASEAN is a region with many ethnic communities and languages, and how to define “ASEAN languages” (whether to include only official/national languages or minority languages as well), and how to balance English as the de-facto common language in dialogues at government, market and civic levels still remain important questions.

English has become the dominant language in ASEAN. Already in 2007, Article 34 of the ASEAN Charter stated, “the working language of ASEAN shall be English.”<sup>37</sup> As Kirkpatrick observes, English is functioning as the lingua franca in ASEAN in various forms for communicative strategies.<sup>38</sup> In higher education, the ASEAN University Network (AUN) was founded in 1995 by ASEAN member states and is currently composed of 26 leading universities and colleges from all ASEAN states. The purpose of AUN is to promote human resource development in higher education in ASEAN, and it cooperates with ASEAN dialogue partners including Japan, Korea and China; additionally, most of the programs that facilitate student mobility and enhance academic exchanges are conducted in English.<sup>39</sup>

In the next section, we will look at the cases of Malaysia and Thailand. Both countries are now trying to become educational hubs in the ASEAN region and are actively internationalizing their higher education systems. They have different historical backgrounds, including that of the establishment of higher education and language as a medium of instruction in universities, but these cases illustrate how the language issue in higher education is handled.

### **(2) Malaysia: Transnational Programs and Issues**

Until the 1980s, the Malaysian government focused on the role of education for national unification and the formation of national identity.<sup>40</sup> With globalization gathering momentum, the

strengthening of international competitiveness and fostering of global human resources became international trends; hence Malaysia was faced with the need for policy reform. Malaysia has been well known as a country with a large number of its students studying abroad, and its brain drain issue has become quite serious since the 1990s. In response, the country has actively promoted English as a medium of instruction, instead of Malay.

According to Sugimura, Malaysia has taken this strategy for two reasons. First, education with Malay as a medium of instruction has caused a decline in students' linguistic performance of English, in the country. Secondly, education in Malay has proven inadequate to follow international academic trends. To enhance its international competitiveness, Malaysia has recognized the necessity of educating its students in English.<sup>41</sup> The reintroduction of English in the Malaysian education system after the British imperial period shows the recognition of English as an international language. Even though Malay is used by the majority of Malaysian citizens, it cannot replace English, which enables them to access the international academic world.

The Malaysian higher education system is also well known for its "transnational programs." These programs are conducted in cooperation with overseas higher education institutions with English as the medium of instruction. Transnational programs have been developed in response to the increasing demand for higher education and liberalization of education as a service. Malaysia is now eager to expand its higher education system into the global market in order to attract more international students from the neighboring countries and to become an "educational hub" in the region. Malaysia has been sending many of its students to English speaking countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, and has also been receiving an increasing number of international students from the neighboring ASEAN countries, as well as Northeast countries such as China and South Korea.<sup>42</sup> Malaysia is proud to have various types of transnational programs enabling students to study in English with lower academic fees than their counterparts in English speaking countries.

These types of transnational programs represent a new type of study abroad experience. Some higher education institutions in Malaysia provide various types of international programs and transcend national borders. English as a medium of instruction in these transnational programs provides a broader opportunity for those who are willing to study abroad and enables Malaysia to receive international students instead of just sending their students.

### **(3) Thailand: Strategies toward Becoming an "Educational Hub"**

Thailand has kicked "internationalization of higher education" into high gear with a long-term higher education policy that started in 1990 and has provided "international programs" taught in English. The beneficiaries of these programs are mainly local Thai students. Thai institutions of higher education also actively accept students from overseas and cooperate with their counterparts abroad. As in the Malaysian case, the Thai government also aims to be an "educational hub" through a campaign to accept 50,000 international students by 2011.<sup>43</sup>

An example of a Thai international program can be seen at Chulalongkorn University, the leading national university in the country. It started offering a BALAC (Bachelor of Arts Program in Language and Culture) in 2008.<sup>44</sup> This program requires both students and administrators to use English as a common language and students are able to choose from a wide range of languages offered through the Faculty of Arts, including such Eastern languages as Chinese, Japanese and Korean, and Western languages such as French, German, Spanish, Italian and Russian. However, no ASEAN languages, such as Malay or Filipino, are included in this program. The director of the BALAC program states that the reason this program does not offer any regional language is that there is no demand from the students' side to learn any ASEAN languages since English is already commonly used in interactions among ASEAN countries and people.<sup>45</sup> He adds that languages such as French, Japanese and Korean are popular among their students due to their



attraction to the cultures associated with those languages.

This kind of international program in Thailand has targeted both local Thai students and international students from the surrounding countries whose families are temporarily living in Thailand. Programs in English enable the students to study in a common language that is widely used internationally, and also offer them more access financially and geographically.

#### **(4) English as the Lingua Franca in ASEAN**

As Sugimura points out, study abroad has different aspects: one is the aspect of international cultural exchange and mutual understanding among international students and local people in the host countries. Another aspect is the political and economic role of national strategies to compete for human capital and greater international presence.<sup>46</sup> In the cases of Malaysia and Thailand, the latter aspect can be seen through the use of English as a medium of instruction. However, it is difficult to assess the former dimension, which is the facilitation of mutual understanding and cultural exchange. International programs with English as the medium of instruction have obviously opened the door for international students to study in non-English speaking countries. However, the sociocultural impact is still not clearly conceptualized by stakeholders in those programs.

### **6. English as an International Language and National Languages as Alternatives**

#### **(1) China**

China is promoting the study of the Chinese language to increase the number of international students coming to China. In the process of promoting internationalization in higher education, China has strategically established Confucius Institutes at overseas higher education institutions in conjunction with the promotion of international economic and trade relations.<sup>47</sup> Confucius Institutes represent efforts to project Chinese soft power. They are sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Education for the purpose of teaching and expanding the Chinese language and culture, as well as for enhancing intercultural understanding. The first Confucius Institute was established in Seoul in 2004, and the number of Confucius Institutes has increased very rapidly in higher education institutions all over the world. There were almost 300 institutes in 88 countries as of the end of 2009.<sup>48</sup> Chinese soft power has been applied to the “nationalization” of higher education at foreign universities.

This project is a new model of language policy by one country that is tied to higher education institutions. Confucius Institutes are flexible and can adapt to overseas higher education institutions with different organizational structures and financial support systems. However, China’s very active export of its national language and culture and the rapid increase in the number of Confucius Institutes around the world have brought about negative reactions and criticisms. Yang has insisted that Confucius Institutes are “the most systematically planned soft power policy so far.”<sup>49</sup> Since Confucius Institutes are tightly connected with overseas higher education, the Chinese strategy to promote their national language can be interpreted as a nationalist campaign and as a political strategy rather than a cultural and academic strategy.<sup>50</sup>

#### **(2) South Korea**

The English education boom that has been seen in South Korea in the last decade reflects the Koreans’ special interest in English as a global language. It is worthwhile to note that South Korea depends on trade for 92% of its GDP. The international emphasis of Korean corporations explains why many internationally well known companies in South Korea require their new employees to have TOEIC (English proficiency test) scores higher than 900. English is now not only

a requirement for new employees but also a condition for graduation from universities.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, South Korea incorporated English language education into the primary school curriculum in 1997. The boom in learning English among the Korean people is called “English fever.” Many parents are willing to have their children study English at an early educational stage and private English teaching institutes have proliferated rapidly, especially in the urban areas of the country. Studying abroad in English speaking countries, including the Philippines as a cheap destination, has also become popular among the relatively high economic status families, even for primary school children.<sup>52</sup>

Some high schools in South Korea have also started using English as a medium of instruction. The Korean Minjok Leadership Academy was established in 1996 “to provide academic tools necessary to achieve the highest levels of excellence and leadership,” “to contribute positively to the welfare of Korea” and “to contribute a major share to the progress of the world community.”<sup>53</sup> Most of the teachers in the Academy received PhDs from universities in English speaking countries and the Academy’s graduates tend to pursue studies in leading universities in the United States and top universities in South Korea.

“English fever” can be seen not only among the elite students but also among those studying in Japanese universities and colleges. According to this author’s interviews with Korean students in Tokyo, some plan to take advantage of their universities’ student exchange programs and go to the United States, for example, to pursue further studies in English. This desire illustrates that Korean students are keen to have high levels of English proficiency even though they are studying in Japan and have attained advanced levels of Japanese language proficiency.<sup>54</sup> To them, English is indispensable both in education and in career pursuits.

Similar to the Confucius Institutes which aim to promote a national language, Korean Cultural Institutes incorporated Korean language institutes as “King Sejong Institutes,” and they plan to expand up to 150 locations around the world by 2015.<sup>55</sup> The King Sejong Institutes have also been established in cooperation with overseas higher education institutions so that people find them similar to the Confucius Institutes set up by the Chinese government. The number of King Sejong Institutes has started to expand as recently as 2009 and their impacts have not yet been reported, but it is worthwhile to follow how they will expand.

As seen above, in contrast to the English fever that grew voluntarily and spontaneously in Korean society, the King Sejong Institutes represent a national policy designed to promote Korea’s national language to the world. This can be related to the development of nationalism in Korea. Nationalism in Korea expressed itself in the promotion of the Korean language during the period of Japanese imperialism before World War II. Korean nationalism was also evident in the official language promotion for national unification by the newly independent government in postwar Korea. In the age of globalization, however, strong promotion of languages is seen both in the spread of English as an international language and in the promotion of the Korean language as a national language.

### **(3) Japan**

In 2007, The Japanese government published the “Asian Gateway Initiative,”<sup>56</sup> emphasizing the importance of attracting and fostering international human resources in the country and for Japan to become a hub for human networks. Japan also recognized the need to internationalize higher education in the country as part of a national strategy to define Japan as an integral part of Asia. In 2008, the former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda pledged to pursue an Asian version of the Erasmus Plan. In 2010, the leaders of Japan, South Korea, and China agreed to hold a symposium on “Campus Asia” to facilitate academic exchange and student mobility among the three countries at the higher education level.<sup>57</sup> Japan seems to be supportive of regional cooperation among the ASEAN+3 countries.

While South Korea and China have adopted language policies promoting their national languages to the world especially in the context of overseas higher education, Japan seems to be reticent about adopting a national language policy. One reason for this may very well be that the nation has the negative historical legacy of educational imperialism in Asia during its imperialist period. If the Japanese government establishes active language and cultural institutes similar to the Confucius Institutes or the King Sejong Institutes, reaction from former colonial countries will be very negative and damaging to Japan's image.

The Japan Foundation is a government-affiliated organization that supports Japanese language and cultural education overseas, but it does not seek close institutional collaboration with higher education institutions abroad; in this sense, it differs from the Confucius Institutes or the King Sejong Institutes. While the number of people studying the Japanese language has increased, especially in Asian countries (80% of them in East Asia and Southeast Asia), students in higher education institutions studying Japanese represent around 25% of all Japanese language learners.<sup>58</sup> A review of Japanese language education published by the Japan Foundation contains various kinds of research around Japanese language education, but the focus of most research is limited to micro perspectives such as classroom practices, curriculum and evaluation systems and so on.<sup>59</sup> Macro perspectives on Japanese language policy cannot be found in the projects sponsored by the Japan Foundation.

## 7. Conclusion: Implications

Globalization has brought English to East Asia as the dominant language in international discourse. English has become an indispensable language, the lingua franca in academic, economic and political lives in the region.<sup>60</sup> English is also the linguistic promoter of the "regionalization" of higher education in East Asia.<sup>61</sup> We are witnessing different reactions to this phenomenon among the East Asian countries. We see in the Korean, Japanese and Chinese cases that each government is showing its own vision for fostering the competence of its students who are proficient in English to compete in the global market; at the same time, their visions for arresting the decline of their own national languages differ as well. The perceived imbalance between national languages and the global/international language is a common challenge in East Asia, as it is elsewhere in the world.

The cooperative process of language policy formulation for the region as a whole is not only an issue for ASEAN; it is also a key question for Japan, South Korea and China. Due to the growing interdependence in the East Asian region, dialogue between the ASEAN countries and their Northeast Asian partners about regional cooperation in general has continued during the last decade,<sup>62</sup> and now, they need to decide how to ensure policy harmonization in many areas, including educational cooperation and regional language policy. In order to facilitate student mobility and academic exchanges and to foster regional citizens' ability to contribute to the future development of an East Asian community, it is necessary to establish a regional cooperative scheme in higher education and languages as a medium of instruction.

Looking at the internationalization of higher education in East Asia, it is very clear that English has become the lingua franca in higher education within the region. We have also seen that there are different interpretations regarding English as a global language. It is not sufficient simply to criticize the current dominance of English as a lingua franca; we also need to ask ourselves whether the dominance of English as a global language is beneficial for deepening mutual understanding and promoting regional integration in East Asia. The presupposition which defines English as the *de facto* lingua franca may neglect the reality of multilingual coexistence in East Asia, overlook the rights and interests of the people who do not have access to English, and ob-

scure the reasons and methods by which this inequality was created. The disparity between the elite who have an advanced command of English and the non-elite who do not benefit from the internationalization of higher education is growing wider and wider. Since English is seen as the principal language of instruction in higher education, programs that had been conducted in national languages are being replaced by English, as can be seen in many cases mentioned in this article. This division is a negative aspect of the global expansion of English.

The recognition of the dominant role of English as the lingua franca and the internationalization of higher education based on that acknowledgement neglect the fact that one of the treasures of the East Asian region is cultural diversity. Since culture and language are intertwined, language learning and practice will definitely contribute to mutual understanding between peoples and countries with different cultures. In the process of regional integration, the European Union decided to have a clear vision for language policy in the region as a whole, and the policy is known as “plurilingualism.” In contrast, East Asian countries have scarcely had any discussion about a framework for language policy in the context of regional cooperation in higher education. On the contrary, in this region, especially in Northeast Asian countries, language policy takes on a strictly nationalistic hue, and language issues tend to be framed in nationalistic terms, as we have seen through the examples of the Confucius Institutes and the King Sejong Institutes.

The issues of language as a medium of instruction in higher education and as a catalyst for student mobility are obviously interrelated. Because of the globalization process and the associated focus on one dominant language, many minority languages are in danger of disappearing,<sup>63</sup> and even national languages appear to be losing their power in each regional country’s effort to facilitate international student mobility. Language issues as they relate to the internationalization of higher education have been taken up only at the national level; they have escaped attention at the regional level. Language policy issues are raised only in the context of national sovereignty and sensitive political issues in East Asian countries. As a result, international cooperation in education within the East Asian region, especially regarding language issues, is rarely a topic even in the context of higher education. To remedy the situation, we need to bring up language issues in our discussion of regional integration, with particular attention to advancing regional cooperation in higher education and regional language policy at both the practical and the ideational level.

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