

5th Nitobe Symposium, Tokyo, August 2-3, 2007

**“European Languages and Asian Nations:
History, Politics, Possibilities”**

Concluding Document

***Democracy, development, identity: Challenges to language policy
in Asia***

Experts in language policy and pedagogy from Asia, Oceania, Europe, and North America met in Tokyo on August 2-3, 2007, to debate the role and impact of European languages in the history and contemporary society of Asian countries.

Since the first symposium in 1996, the on-going Nitobe process has been encouraging public discussion of language policy at an international level and in many different contexts. As a further contribution to this process, the 5th Nitobe symposium offers the following observations and recommendations to researchers, public intellectuals, opinion makers and decision makers interested in the implications of language issues for Asia's present and future development. These conclusions are also relevant to understanding the language problems of a globalized world.

One common ingredient of the diverse Asian experiences is the fact that languages of European origin, English in particular in recent times, have become part of the multilingual mosaic of Asian countries. Some of these languages have developed unique local varieties that now form a part of the Asian cultural heritage, yet the standard European forms of these languages continue to be taught and used widely. A common challenge is therefore to reconcile the tussle between the acknowledged contribution of these standard European languages to Asia's modernization and the feared marginalization of Asian languages, major and minor. The ascendancy of European languages, and the concomitant attention and resources committed to them, has taken place without democratic oversight and protection of the interests of the Asian languages and their speakers.

It is also clear that European languages are often implicated in widening divisions between the haves and the have nots, on the level of individuals, of cultural groups, and of states. A second challenge is therefore to manage the acquisition and use of European languages in ways that strengthen social solidarity, intercultural understanding, economic wellbeing and sustainability, and other broadly held social values and goals.

To deal with these serious problems, the Symposium recommends the following themes and programs be considered for action by various bodies at various levels in the Asian states.

1. **Dialogue.** Many shared concerns and challenges relating to the management of multilingualism exist among Asian countries. It is necessary to continue the dialogue through symposia and other means, perhaps eventually to arrive at a global language policy that dovetails with national language policies.
2. **Multiple identities.** There is a political and cultural need to develop a political framework for global and local identities that are not in conflict and give space for diversities of ethnic and cultural identities. This implies a conception of Asia as essentially multilingual and multicultural, both within and between states.
3. **Economic and cultural values.** It is imperative to reduce the (false) dichotomy between economic mobility and cultural rootedness through balancing the economic and cultural values of languages in schools and in the market. This implies measures to bolster the economic and social status of local languages.
4. **Resources.** It is essential to make access of languages to monetary, technological and human resources equitable and just. Concentrating resources only on English and some other major languages would have negative consequences for Asia's development as a political and cultural region.
5. **Learning Asian languages.** There are rewards in communicating in each other's language rather than in a third language. From this point of view, structures must be created for learning Asian languages by Asians within the formal educational system and outside it.
6. **Effective language teaching.** Systematic research in teaching of Asian and European languages is desired with a view to increase their pedagogical efficiency and public appeal. This research should focus on the return the learners get for their investment of time and energy in learning languages.
7. **Existing multilingual models.** Research on the existing patterns of multilingualism and multiculturalism in Asian countries, regarding their vitality, viability, fairness, and management of conflict, will be a valuable input for language policy and planning in the region.
8. **Language development.** It is essential to develop models of language development and education in minority languages that contribute to shared national goals, in the same way that the development of national languages and language policies foster participation in the global economy and global culture.
9. **Esperanto.** The communities of Asian languages can benefit from the experience of the Esperanto movement in building a language for international and inter-communal communication that promotes cooperation and harmony rather than competitiveness and conflict. Esperanto itself may have a significant role to play in the Asian multilingual mosaic.
10. **Capacity-building.** To initiate and encourage action regarding the above themes and programs, it is recommended that Asian countries and institutions encourage the exchange of language specialists and policy makers, of language policy and education information, and of research findings on language issues.