

# Confucian Tradition and Global Education

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*with contributions by*

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# The Overdominance of English in Global Education

## A Glocal Response\*

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In the course of human history, language has played a remarkably important role. Intellectually speaking, language constitutes the core of the mental activities of humankind. It is the formative force of human consciousness and culture, and the means of individual expression and interpersonal communication. As a social institution, language unites as well as divides, integrates as well as segregates. Language has much to do with the identity and solidarity of a people; it is at once the subject matter and the carrier of cultural traditions. On the other hand, languages compete with each other and can be a source of conflict. In the age of globalization, these aspects of

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language have become more complex than ever with the rise of English as a truly global language.

Historically speaking, mankind has witnessed the coming and going of many lingua francas that flourished in different times and in different geographical areas. In the West, there was Greek in antiquity, Latin in the Middle Ages, and French and to some extent German in modern times. In the East, there was Chinese, especially in its written form. In Africa, there was Swahili and in South America Quechua and Spanish, to mention just the most prominent examples. However, in terms of scope and impact, it seems that it is English that has become the truly first global lingua franca,<sup>1</sup> “global” not merely in a geographical sense but in the sense that the spread of English has become an inseparable part of what we now call globalization. It is for this reason that Philipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, two prominent scholars in research on linguistic human rights, have coined the term “englishization,” which they define as “one dimension of globalization.”<sup>2</sup>

From a pragmatic point of view, the world has always been in need of a lingua franca. In fact the term *lingua franca*, originally referring to the language of the Franks (Europeans), was invented in the European Middle Ages, when there was a need for different peoples in the Mediterranean region and throughout the Middle East to have a common language that could be used “freely” to facilitate multilateral trade, diplomacy, and to some extent scholarly exchange. In our globalized world today, the urgency of the need for international communication has reached an unprecedented level. Think of the various world/regional economic summits, of organizations such as the United Nations or UNESCO, of the multitudes of international academic conferences held from day to day around the globe. Nowadays, peoples of the world can hardly afford to disregard the importance of English, in whatever walk of life, if they do not want to be marginalized by the global community.

### **Dominance versus Overdominance**

Language is power. This much-expressed dictum takes on a new meaning with the upsurge of English as a global language. Like many lingua francas in history, including Greek and Latin, the power of English was first backed up by military and economic force. In

addition, the power of English has a significant bearing on the social level as well. Whether we like it or not, proficiency in English has become in many societies not only a matter of practical competence but also a yardstick of social prestige, or “cultural capital,” as depicted by Bourdieu.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the power of English expanded greatly when English became the most important carrier of new knowledge.<sup>4</sup> It is also through this means that the dominance of English poses a challenge to global education. Whoever wants to be well informed, whoever wants to be globally heard or read, finds reading or publishing in English a necessity.

Yet, while this dominance of English is today unavoidable, the world is now facing an additional challenge—the *overdominance* of English. By overdominance of English, I mean the danger of individual languages being self-estranged through an overemphasis on English at the cost of the mother tongue. While dominance is an externally imposed challenge, overdominance is largely a self-inflicted endangerment of the mother tongue through a kind of self-neglect and self-degradation by people of various linguistic communities. In education, one serious consequence of the overdominance of English is the “crowding out”<sup>5</sup> of the native tongue from school curricula and from higher education, a scenario that is not uncommon around the globe today.

One reason we need to draw a distinction between the dominance and overdominance of English is that the two issues allow for different sorts of reactions. As a result of globalization, the dominance of English is a brute fact that some nations are benefiting from and others have to tolerate. It is a global issue that is now under the direct control of no nation. As a danger to native languages, however, the overdominance of English is a matter of domestic language policies or attitudes, which are but under the control of members of the respective linguistic communities, whether government policy makers, university administrators, or the general public. The present paper seeks to stimulate reflection on, and constructive responses to, this problem.

## **The Experience of Germany through Four Centuries**

To exemplify how far-reaching the problem of overdominance can become, let us examine the experience of the Germans. In terms of

influence, the German language was at its prime probably for the whole of the nineteenth century, reaching its pinnacle just before the outbreak of World War I. During that period, German was the most important scholarly language for academic disciplines ranging from astrophysics to art history, from mathematics to sociology, and from economics to philosophy. But before and after this heyday, the situation was quite different.

Although a language with a traceable history, German was in the time of Leibniz and Bach very much neglected, not merely internationally, but by Germans themselves. One remarkable story is that of Frederick the Great, who, when introduced to J. S. Bach, tried to speak to him in French. Another story relates that Voltaire felt so at home in the Prussian court that he wrote to his countrymen, saying, “It is just like in France, people here just speak our language, German is used only when they are talking to soldiers and horses.” And this *schwärmerei* for French was not confined to the royals or nobles alone. Peter von Polenz, a famous historian of German, tells us that, at the turn of the eighteenth century, it was common for middle class German families to require their children to speak French to their parents and to their friends, while German was spoken only to the helpers or maids.<sup>6</sup> In academia, German had at that time a very low status. We only need to recall that most of Leibniz’s own writings were either in Latin or in French, the two leading *lingua francas* at that time.

But the most interesting thing about Leibniz was that he did write a few short essays in German, two of which dealt precisely with the future prospect of German as an academic language. The titles of the two essays are as follows:<sup>7</sup>

1. “Unvorgreifliche Gedanken, betreffend die Ausübung und Verbesserung der deutschen Sprache” [Some unanticipated thoughts concerning the practice and improvement of the German language] (1697/1704/1709)
2. “Ermahnung an die Deutschen, ihren Verstand und ihre Sprache besser zu üben, samt beigefügtem Vorschlag einer deutschgesinnten Gesellschaft” [Warning to the Germans, to better exercise their understanding and their language, together with a proposal for a German-minded society] (1682/1683)

In these two essays, and in some related correspondence, Leibniz brought forth two important notions related to the use of the German language, namely *Sprachpflege* (language care) and *deutschgesinnte Gesellschaft* (German-minded society). The concept of language care is quite akin to the concept of language planning (*Sprachplanung*), for both concepts suggest that we should take measures regarding our native language so that it may develop in a favorable direction. The difference is that language planning is more or less a matter of governmental policy, whereas language care has to do mainly with the duty of members of the linguistic community. And Leibniz's idea of a German-minded society<sup>8</sup> refers precisely to this need of "caring" for the German language<sup>9</sup> through its active use by the German people so that the strength and vitality of the language may develop and prosper.

According to Leibniz, German exhibited its strength in having a rich vocabulary for sensible and technical objects (metallurgy, mining, etc.), but suffered from a shortfall in terminology in two specific areas—that of "the expression of the emotions" and that of "abstract and subtle cognitive expressions, including those used in logic and metaphysics." In other words, Leibniz thought German was weak in the areas of literature and philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

For today's admirers of German culture, this "diagnosis" of Leibniz is hardly comprehensible. In fact, by taking a closer look at the history of the German language, it is not hard for us to discover that it was precisely in the two specified areas that the track record of the German language up to Leibniz's time was indeed not a bad one. There was a long tradition of medieval and baroque German poetry on the one hand and an equally remarkable tradition of German schoolmen and mystics on the other.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, Leibniz's assessment of the German language was arguably the result of his underestimation of his own linguistic heritage. And the fact that an academic as serious as Leibniz could also make such a mistake seems to indicate clearly that the German people of his time, with few exceptions, must have lost confidence and esteem in their own language and must have given up on its "care" to the extent that they could even have become unaware of its previous glamour. In any case, with the proposal of the concepts of "language care" and of a "German-minded society," Leibniz did point to the direction along which the German language might experience a resurrection.

Within a hundred years after Leibniz's "warning," the German language eventually did make enormous progress in both literature and philosophy. In the hands of such literati as Goethe and Schiller and such philosophers as Kant and Hegel, the German language experienced a kind of rebirth. Through the work of these intellectual giants, the German language reclaimed all its lost territory, becoming one of the most powerful and expressive academic languages of modern Europe.

After another century of development, the power of German reached its climax just before World War I. With the rapid rise of English during the interwar period, however, the influence of German was significantly checked, and during and after World War II, German suffered further due to the negative image and inhumane deeds of the Nazis.<sup>12</sup> Culturally and politically, the situation in present-day Germany is very similar to the Germany of Leibniz's lifetime: First, the Holy Roman Empire's significant weakness for some fifty years following the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) finds a parallel in the overhang felt in present-day Germany of the country's defeat in World War II some fifty years ago. Second, while Leibniz's Germany came under the Western influence of the language of France, the final winner of the Thirty Years' War, the same sort of "West influence" is felt by today's Germany, the difference being that this time the West wind comes not from France but from the further shores of the United States. With the upsurge of English (or better, American English), the future of the German language, which once burdened Leibniz, seems to have become a matter for alarm again.

Out of their great concern for this issue, a group of German university professors (thirty-seven in number) wrote an open letter on June 24, 2001, addressed to the Ministers of Culture, of Science, and of Education of all sixteen German states.<sup>13</sup> This open letter bears the caption "Protection and Development of German as National Academic Language." In this letter, the authors brought the world's attention to two noticeable trends regarding the usage of German on German soil: First, an increasing number of international conferences in Germany are using English as the only official language, even when the main target audience is German laypeople. Second, an increasing number of publications in Germany accept only English contributions, and many basic university courses are now offered in English rather than in German.

Seeing the gravity of the issue, the authors made the alarming statement that “the three undersigned together with the thirty-four countersigned, coming from the most disparate disciplines, observe with great concern how the German language is being expelled from our country’s academic enterprise by English. We most politely ask you to take issue with this problem. We also recognize the danger that the primordial language basis for our scientific thinking and for our social exchange of knowledge will be lost within the next five to ten years. This applies also to the significance of Germany as an independent country for academic research.” In the face of such a danger, the open letter suggested a number of measures to be taken, which include: (a) political initiatives (following the example of France) toward designating German, in conjunction with English, the official language of international conferences held in Germany; (b) using public money to translate specially compiled research materials into German to facilitate public access; and (c) ensuring that course offerings in German in university undergraduate programs are not heedlessly suppressed in favor of English.

Looking back at the heyday of Goethe and Kant, when the German language was so alive, it is hard to imagine that the same language now faces such a decline. Putting the whole case in Leibniz’s words, what the open letter was complaining about was nothing but the Germans’ own abandonment of “language care,” which is precisely what should again be strengthened. What if the suggested measures are not followed? Of course, with so many speakers the German language will not easily die out. But it would be bad enough, as depicted in the open letter, if German higher education were to produce a class of isolated elite cut off from the rest of society and incapable of using German in academic writing, discussion, or even thinking!<sup>14</sup>

### **How Should the Overdominance of English Be Dealt With?**

The above trajectory of the German language shows us clearly what challenges the globalization of English might entail for all other national languages. With the experience gained from this account, I will proceed to reflect on a number of topics in the hope that some key issues can be identified and clarified so that peoples in the world

may deal with the same problem in a more deliberate manner. In presenting an argument that is of practical relevance, I will unavoidably have to occasionally proceed from a “Chinese” perspective. This is necessary, as there are indications showing that major universities in China and in Hong Kong have considered or are considering major revisions of their language policy in favor of English. But I hope this “Chinese” perspective will not prevent us from seeing that what we are facing here is a challenge that the whole world is also facing. Given the global nature of this challenge, which inevitably will intensify in the time to come, some generic reflections might already be timely.

1. *English as the indispensable key to the global community:* After decades of self-seclusion, the opening up of China has become an issue of paramount importance both for the Chinese as well as for would-be partners. Propelled by the enormous opportunities that lie ahead for those who can communicate with people from outside China, it is perfectly understandable that a great interest has arisen among the Chinese population in learning the English language, which is regarded, not unjustifiably, as the key to the outside world, and obviously this interest will continue to grow. Besides economic interest, the acquisition of English is also educationally important for contemporary China, because English is now the most important carrier of new knowledge. For Chinese learners of most disciplines, the mastery of English is in this regard educationally much more cost-effective than the mastery of any other foreign language. On the intellectual level, the influx of English in China will in the long run greatly benefit the Chinese population, because learning a foreign language enables the learners to realize that things can be described, formulated, or perceived from different angles. With the correct approaches, obtaining a decent grasp of a foreign language can help us develop a more flexible and liberal mind-set, which in turn will even help us to better appreciate our own culture, or be critical about it if necessary. Goethe once said, “Whoever knows no foreign language, knows not even his own.”<sup>15</sup> With the increased need for cross-cultural communication, China’s further emphasis on English should in the first place be considered in a positive light, as it will indeed bring about positive “capital” for her. Therefore, for any country in the world, including China, tapping into a globalized language like English is clearly a matter of national interest.

2. *The need of the world to have an international language:* Taking a more cosmopolitan point of view, for a globalized world, which is the world we now have, there is unquestionably a high practical value in having a language that is globally understood. It is for this reason that I find expressions like “hegemony” or “imperialism” too emotional, as they very easily prompt us to indulge in historical animosities and distract us from the many positive roles a global language might play. These include, for instance, in areas such as international law and human rights, international rescues and amnesties, academic and scholarly exchanges, urgent medical consultancies, cross-cultural understanding, interreligious dialogues, and so forth. The fact that English rather than French, German, or Esperanto has succeeded in assuming this dominant role should not prevent us from accepting this truth. Even less should it encourage us to take a “boycotting” attitude toward English, which would be against the interests of individual nation-states as well as those of the international community. All in all, despite the critical stance I am going to take, I do not believe that any country, including China, should undermine the importance of a global language like English. The question is only, given the inevitable need to strengthen the use of English, how should individual countries cope with its dominance while preventing its overdominance?

3. *Treating English as an OFL and not as an ENL:* In dealing with language matters, one major rule of thumb is to take linguistic realities seriously. In any human society, the most important linguistic reality is the acquisition of the mother tongue, which is an undeniable fact that should be the starting point of all sensible language policies. While the learning and assimilation of English is culturally and politically inevitable, it remains debatable what attitude or strategy a nation-state should adopt in dealing with English education. A major concern here is that a nation’s strategy of English education can only be part of a more generic language strategy, which has to do mainly with policies regarding the native language, so that measures concerning the former must always be discussed with reference to those concerning the latter. It is in this light that we can conceptually differentiate between two strategies of treating English: “optimized foreign language” (OFL) on the one hand, and “emulated native language” (ENL) on the other. These two English education strategies require some explanation.

By “optimized foreign language,” I mean fostering English education as a foreign language with all possible resources and measures while paying full attention to Mother Tongue Literacy (MTL), or the nurturing of the native tongue. Of course, the adoption of an OFL policy is not an easy matter, especially for nations (like China) whose language is typologically dissimilar to English. How under such circumstances can the learning of English be optimized is the task of research on teaching English as a second (foreign) language (TESL/TEFL), which cannot be dealt with in this paper. What we need to emphasize is that, regardless of the extent of the resources a nation might inject into the promotion of English, all this has to be done in parallel with a solid education in the native tongue. If this condition is not met, the whole language strategy will cease to be one of an OFL and degenerate into one of an ENL.

By “emulated native language” (an oxymoron), I mean the strategy of treating English *as if* it were a native language, to the extent that the true native language is severely jeopardized. An ENL is so depicted (“emulated”) because it looks away from the linguistic reality of the native tongue and presumptively assumes that, with enough resources, English can be taught and learned as well as if it were a “native language.” Of course, given unlimited resources, an ENL is always theoretically possible. But taking into consideration the actual linguistic environment involved and the actual exposure of learners to English, the outcome of an ENL is always limited while its price can be enormously high.<sup>16</sup> And the highest price involved here is not just a matter of money but the alienation of learners from their authentic native tongue, which could have adverse consequences for their intellectual development. Bearing our earlier reference to Leibniz in mind, it is clear that one difference between an OFL and an ENL lies precisely in the different attitudes they embody toward “language care.”

The distinction between an OFL and an ENL is meant to single out the former as the more viable and the latter as a self-delusive approach to English education. For a successful implementation of an OFL, various issues have to be carefully considered: besides TESL research as mentioned above, we might need to consider other issues, including the integration of an optimized English curriculum into a basic scheme of mother tongue literacy, the full exploitation of

educational technologies, and strategies for the implementation of an OFL in different phases of the educational system.

4. *The medium of instruction of the university curriculum:* For university education in non-English-speaking countries, the holding of conferences, symposia, lectures, and so forth in English as much as possible and the delivery of some courses in English are no doubt beneficial in increasing students' exposure to English. But introducing more English is one thing; changing the language of instruction to English completely or to any extent that might jeopardize the future prospects of the native tongue as an academic language is quite another. We must understand that the university lecture hall is the main platform of the "language care" of any nation-state. It is often the place where the intellectual endeavors of the teacher reach their highest degree of consolidation and creativity. And, most importantly, university teaching is the device through which the culture, scholarship, knowledge, and values of a nation are transmitted from one generation to the other. In a word, as far as "language care" is concerned, university teaching in the mother tongue is a bulwark that no nation can afford to give up without serious cultural and educational consequences.

Besides Germany, one might argue, there are many countries in Europe, such as the Netherlands and the Nordic states, that have started much earlier and gone much further in switching their language of instruction at the university level to English. But we must bear in mind that these countries have much smaller populations than Germany or China, which might have left them with little real choice in the matter.<sup>17</sup> It is well known that the people of these countries tend to speak English extremely well as a second language. Some even argue that for these peoples, English can be considered to be a "second first language" rather than a "first second language." But the general success of these countries in English comes at a high price, for it is obvious that Dutch, Norwegian, or Danish belong to those national languages that have long been overdominated by English, at least in academia.<sup>18</sup> In recent years, there has been a strong tendency for universities in China to adopt more English in their teaching and learning activities, which is largely reasonable. But the crucial question is: how far should we go?

5. *Language care as an unshirkable duty of the entire linguistic community, and of academics in particular:* The German philosopher

Herder was of the opinion that, if a language is to develop healthfully, it has to be supported by a group of linguistic users (*Publikum*) who are well educated.<sup>19</sup> For any nation-state, university teachers and students are, so to speak, the cream of society. As intellectuals and academics, they all have a duty to learn new knowledge in their respective disciplines as much as possible. But whether the knowledge thus acquired can be successfully retained and transmitted to the school (secondary and primary) and public sectors depends to a large extent on whether these university people can use their native language to recapitulate, reflect on, criticize, apply, and debate the new knowledge gained. It is only through this channel that new knowledge from the outside world can be assimilated and internalized into the mother tongue of the nation, and eventually become a common intellectual asset of the nation and the basis for further conceptual innovation. For academia worldwide, it would probably be a great setback if progress in thought and scholarship could be made only in English!

Therefore, university academics, especially those who have acquired training abroad, should require themselves to publish at least occasionally in their mother tongue (i.e., in addition to English or other languages), despite a possibly smaller and localized readership. Here, I am referring to both the publication of advanced level research papers and to more basic level educational materials such as textbooks. This is the most important way the abstract notion of “language care” can be realized.

6. *The role of language in the natural sciences and in the humanities:* The question regarding how much English and how much native language should be used in academic research has always been a matter of dispute. With regard to this problem, there has been much discussion on the need to treat natural science subjects and humanistic or social scientific subjects differently. One general observation is that the natural sciences deal with universal phenomena that are quite independent of the cultural identity of the researcher, and for that reason, English alone would best serve the purpose of providing a universal medium of communication. On the other hand, it has often been emphasized that for research on humanistic and social scientific subjects, the objects and concepts of study are in fact not “objective” and “universal” in a natural scientific sense but are significantly motivated by the cultural heritage from

which they are derived. Thus, in handling humanistic issues, approaches from different linguistic formulations often provide important contrasts and nuances that lead to a deeper understanding of the issues.<sup>20</sup> It is for this reason that research in the humanities and social sciences should not be confined to or rely on one global language alone. It was along this line of thought that Wolfgang Frühwald, president of the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung of Germany, once remarked that “all cultural and human sciences (in a broader sense all theoretical sciences) have to do with language. Whereas the concept of science in modern natural sciences is a result-oriented one, the concept of science in the human sciences is always process-related. This means that the results of the human sciences are not lying there prior to the process of their description. They are bound to language and style and are therefore not readily [*ohne weiteres*] transferable to one lingua franca.”<sup>21</sup> By the same token, Maurice Godé, a famous French Germanist, once opined that “knowledge of the respective national languages is a basic prerequisite for meaningful study in the humanities.”<sup>22</sup>

In short, humanities studies rely on linguistic diversity and on cultural traditions to a much greater extent than do the natural sciences. For the humanities in general and for philosophy in particular, proficiency in one single lingua franca is very often a sign of inadequacy, if not of impoverishment. While this might not apply to Kongzi or Plato, it is certainly true of today’s humanities scholar, for whom intercultural understanding and a global outlook have become necessary. As for researchers in the natural sciences, although they do not need a multiplicity of languages to operate, their countries and peoples do need them to fulfill the duty of “language care,” which should apply to all disciplines, although to various degrees.

7. *The bargaining power of various native languages in the face of English dominance.* Being *the* language of globalization, it is quite certain that the influence of English will keep growing in the foreseeable future. It seems also inevitable that many languages of the world will succumb to this dominance. The question of how far and how long individual languages can retain their identity and idiosyncrasies is a matter of cultural dynamics. Generally speaking, a host of factors are involved, of which two are the most crucial: (1) the size of the linguistic community, which proportionally accounts for

the multitude of linguistically active authors, and (2) the bulk of the cultural legacy of a language in history, which accounts for the overall attraction for the recurrent use of the language.<sup>23</sup> Taking these factors into consideration, we can give a rough approximation of the future of some languages. Take German as an example: In terms of the size of the linguistic community, there are about 95 million German speakers in Europe, which is considerable compared to other EU languages such as Dutch, Danish, Norwegian, or Swedish. In terms of cultural legacy, contemporary German differs greatly from the German of Leibniz's time because of the richness in literary, philosophical, and other disciplinary classics accumulated over the past two centuries, and this strength, or "capital," might remain significant for many centuries to come. With this bargaining power, will German follow the examples of Dutch or Danish in becoming further marginalized? Or should Germany choose to actively resist such a path?

Take Chinese as another example. Needless to say, the bulk (over 1.3 billion in mainland China alone) and, to a lesser degree, the spread of Chinese speakers in the world are strengths that no one can ignore. As with cultural tradition, the nearly uninterrupted several-thousand-year legacy of Chinese literature, philosophy, art, and so on will obviously render the Chinese language extremely competitive into the distant future. In fact, people often think that while many languages will definitely be conquered or overdominated by English, Chinese is probably among the very few (with Spanish or probably Arabic being two other such candidates) that might eventually be able to truly withstand the onslaught of English, or in the long run even compete with it. But is the future of Chinese really so assured, despite the great bargaining power it possesses?

While such wild guesses might have some point, they might not represent the complete picture. One most important thing we need to bear in mind is that, in addition to the two main factors mentioned above, there are other factors (see note 23) that might complicate the picture, and among these factors we should never leave out two subjective but equally crucial factors: the perseverance of the government in maintaining consistent and favorable language planning policies, and the readiness of members of the linguistic community to contribute to "language care."

8. *What should we aim at when talking about the future of a language?*

*Defending a native language as “object language” or as “operative language”:* In our discussion on the likelihood of a nation defending its language in an “englishized” globe, we left out a very important aspect of the issue, namely that a native language can be defended merely as an “object language,” or also as an “operative language.” By “object language,” I mean the language in which intellectual objects such as poetry, philosophy, and history are recorded. By “operative language,” I am referring to the language in which we operate when dealing with whatever issues require our attention. Obviously, classical Greek, Latin, or Sanskrit were great languages, but they are nowadays only objects of study because, except for very few users, people no longer operate in them. A pure object language, thanks to the “jewels” it carries, might be safe from immediate extinction, but as long as it does not operate, it is not vital and will never grow. In this regard, Wilhelm von Humboldt was perfectly correct when he said “language is one of the fields whence the general mental power of man emerges in constantly active operation.”<sup>24</sup>

Of course, when we talk about using a language to “operate,” we might understand operation loosely to embrace everyday usage. But if it is the future academic status of a language that we care about, then we should know that a language might remain in use by a sizable population but lose its esteem as an academic language that is intellectually operable. So we have to know what we are defending!

All of these reckonings are important insofar as they have much to do with the language policies of universities in Germany and elsewhere, including China and Hong Kong. Let me explain this, taking German again as an example: Up to the present moment, German is obviously still both an object language and an operative language, because Kant, Schiller, Weber, or Simmel are still being discussed in German by scholars in Germany and elsewhere. But in case the Germans themselves were to decide to stop using German to lecture or to publish, what would happen, say, in fifty years, or even ten? The truth is very simple: if an academic language stops operating vigorously, it will degenerate quickly into a mere academic object. And this was exactly the warning carried in the open letter to the German politicians.

**9. *Language as not merely a tool of expression but as the key to intellectual development; relevance of the mother tongue.*** Advocates of English-only policies often adopt a very biased conception of language, which can

be called an instrumental view, or the view that language is nothing more than an instrument for expression of what a person already clearly has in mind. But a closer look at the development of modern general linguistics will show that, contrary to this “instrumental” view, linguists are increasingly adopting a “*Bildung*-conception” of language, or the view that language is not merely an instrument for the expression of clear, ready-made ideas but a formative medium through which human intelligence and consciousness can at all take shape and gradually develop. In other words, for many modern linguists, including Humboldt, Saussure, and Jakobson, language competence and intellectual capacity are equiprimordial and inseparable. If language indeed has such an important role in the development of human intelligence, then the part played by the mother tongue should also be accorded special importance, because the mother tongue is precisely *the* language medium through which all human individuals actually acquire their basic intelligence. Since the acquisition of the mother tongue is a process that is irreversible and inevitable, fostering the learning of English at the cost of the mother tongue (as in the case of an ENL) is like building an edifice on a sand dune or developing a view from nowhere, which is pedagogically problematic and intellectually against the best interests of the learner. This explains why the overdominance of English is such an important problem. It is along this line of thought that some neo-Humboldtian researchers on language have studied the role of the mother tongue, which they think is the very basis for human intellectual existence as well as the very link to our social life-world and to our cultural heritage.<sup>25</sup>

10. *Multilingualism*: Having underlined the importance of the mother tongue for the cultivation and development of human intelligence, it is also important for us to limit this emphasis to prevent this position from degenerating into provincialism or ethnocentrism. In fact, we should note that all of the philosophical justifications that support the primary importance of the mother tongue also lend support to the advantage of supplementing mother tongue learning with the learning of foreign languages. As we suggested at the outset, the learning of a foreign language is beneficial since it helps to broaden the linguistic-intellectual horizons of learners by providing contrasts in perspectives, formulation strategies, conceptual networks, and so forth. In general

linguistics and in philosophy of language, many major theoretical positions are in fact closely related to this issue; for instance, the concept of linguistic value, lexical field theory (*Wortfeldtheorie*), world-picture (*Weltansicht*), the fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*), etc. All of these add up to the suggestion that as far as education is concerned, the more languages one learns, the better. Emperor Charles V's dictum, "How many languages one speaks, so many times is he a man,"<sup>26</sup> is a most radical formulation of this position. Naturally, with limited time and resources, there are limits to what can be achieved in the area of multilingualism in education. In order to strike a balance, therefore, I would suggest that, while bilingualism should be a minimum for preuniversity education, education from the undergraduate program onward should at least aim at trilingualism, which should even be made a requirement at the graduate level. Just one word on the concept of "trilingualism": instead of being a mere numerical compromise, many linguistic and philosophical studies have pointed out that the learning of at least three languages exhibits the intellectual advantage of "triangulation," i.e., the prevention of premature antagonism or bipolarity in conceptual comparisons, enabling the learner to thus be more receptive to complexities of our world and better prepared for multilateral discourses.<sup>27</sup>

11. *Toward a glocal language policy in the age of globalization:* Having underlined the importance of English as a global language but warned of its overdominance in local language policies, one general position we arrive at is the adoption of a language policy that is "glocal" in nature. What is a glocal language policy? In short, it is a language policy that is locally rooted but globally perspectivized. In practical terms, it is the combination of MTL and OFL strategies. While the significance of MTL is programmatically self-explanatory and pedagogically fundamental, we must note that an OFL strategy should not be confined to mere TESL or English learning but should include the teaching and learning of any foreign language relevant to one's respective disciplines. With the dominance of English, it is understandable that English will remain globally the most popular foreign language, but this dominance of English should not lead to monopolization in the world linguistic arena, especially not in academia. Given available resources, foreign languages other than English should never be excluded, for they can and do make

contributions of their own to global civilization. In other words, they are valuable cultural “capital” awaiting fruitful investment from every global citizen. If this global language policy is adopted consistently by a considerable number of nations with the support of their major universities, then every individual language will have a better future, both locally and internationally. How popular individual languages can become depends naturally on their “bargaining power.” So why shouldn’t Chinese scholars, depending on their disciplinary needs, learn alongside English some Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, German, French, Tibetan, Japanese, or even Tokharian in order to get the most intellectual benefit? Alternatively, Chinese is obviously a good candidate for all other peoples in the world.<sup>28</sup> Wilhelm von Humboldt once underlined the idiosyncrasies of the Chinese language with the wonderful remarks that Chinese and Sanskrit, despite their antipodal structures, represent the two “fixed extremes” or “end points” of linguistic perfection,<sup>29</sup> and that the Chinese script has “in a certain manner embraced philosophical work within itself.”<sup>30</sup>

Educationally speaking, as long as one learns a foreign language seriously enough, whether English or another language, one will be able to get a great deal from the effort. But whatever the combinations, the most important thing is that in any global language program the native tongue should always be in place, for without a solid educational foundation in one’s native tongue, which is the fountainhead of human intelligence and thus the “true” key to the outside world, all other linguistic maneuvers will become pointless and ineffective. For any country, any attempt to achieve a “better” standard in a foreign language (say, English) at the expense of the native tongue is intellectually and pedagogically unwise and culturally and politically suicidal.

## **Conclusion**

The dominance of English is the result of a long historical process that can hardly be reversed. It is a basic fact that no nation and no government can ignore. Unless a nation does not want to connect economically, politically, intellectually, and culturally with the world, strengthening the use of English is unavoidable. Yet, coming to terms with the dominance of English as an international language is one

thing; tolerating its overdominance or allowing English to intrude into domestic language matters is quite another. As I have explained, the overdominance of English amounts to the encroachment and endangerment of other native tongues, but whether or not this scenario should be allowed to prevail is to a large extent in the hands of members of individual linguistic communities, whether government policy makers, university administrators, professors, students, or the general public. What we are dealing with here is our very linguistic human rights, which we might all too easily forsake, if the overdominance of English is accepted without reflection. In this regard, Leibniz's notions of "language care" and of the establishment of a "[mother-tongue]-minded society" are obviously of great heuristic value.

## Notes

1. David Crystal, *English as a Global Language*, 2nd. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
2. Robert Philipson and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, "Englishisation: One Dimension of Globalisation," in David Graddol and Ulrike H. Meinhof, eds., *English in a Changing World* (London: AILA, 1999), pp. 19–36.
3. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 61; see also Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in J. Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 241–258.
4. See relevant charts in Minoru Tsunoda, "Les langues internationales dans les publications scientifiques et techniques," *Sophia Linguistica* 13:144–155; quoted in Ulrich Ammon, *Ist Deutsch noch internationale Wissenschaftssprache?* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 343–362, especially pp. 344, 346.
5. I am borrowing this expression from Richard J. Alexander, "Global Languages Oppress But Are Liberating, Too: The Dialectics of English," in Christian Mair, ed., *The Politics of English as a World Language: New Horizons in Postcolonial Cultural Studies* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), p. 91.
6. Peter von Polenz, *Geschichte der deutschen Sprache* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977), p. 108.
7. The two essays are now available in G. W. F. Leibniz, *Unvorgreifliche Gedanken, betreffend die Ausübung und Verbesserung der deutschen Sprache* (zwei Aufsätze), ed. Uwe Pörksen (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1983).
8. The expression *deutschgesinnt* has to be understood with great care, because

before and after Leibniz it has been used with a strong nationalistic flavor, which was not in line with Leibniz's largely cosmopolitan standpoint.

9. This Latin expression can be traced to a letter Leibniz wrote to his friend Gerhard Meier, in which he referred to his German essay "Unvorgreifliche Gedanken ..." as "dissertationunculam meam extemporaneam de linguae Germ. Cura" (*Unvorgreifliche Gedanken*, p. 79).
10. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
11. For a fuller account of this prehistory of the German language, see Kwan Tze-wan, "Leibniz and the Development of Modern German: On *Sprachpflege* and the Fate of National Languages" (in Chinese), *Journal of Tongji University*, Social Science Section, 16, no. 1 (Shanghai: Tongji University): 1–11.
12. On this issue, see George Steiner, "The Hollow Miracle," in George Steiner, ed., *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), pp. 101–109.
13. The open letter was initiated by professors Dieter, Simonis, and Vilmar and was countersigned by thirty-four other professionals from various disciplines (including the humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, and technology). The letter was published on July 24, 2001, and triggered a series of discussions. Related papers are available at <http://bibliothek.wz-berlin.de/pdf/2001/p01-003.pdf> (accessed May 26, 2005).
14. The same scenario holds, for example, for Denmark, one of the most "englishized" countries in Europe. Philipson and Skutnabb-Kangas reported that the editor in chief of a major Danish national encyclopedia has written that some contributors who are natural scientists are unable to communicate their scholarship in Danish for a Danish audience ("Englishisation," p. 28).
15. "Wer fremde Sprachen nicht kennt, weiss nichts von seiner eigenen" (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*, in *Werke* [Berliner Ausgabe], Band 18 [Berlin: Aufbau, 1960], p. 492). Refer also to a similar dictum usually ascribed to Rudyard Kipling: "What do they know of England who only England know?"
16. Because of previous colonial influence, the English teaching policy in Hong Kong has been exhibiting strong ENL tendencies for decades, with the great abundance of so-called English secondary schools being the most characteristic outcome. With a Chinese population of more than 95 percent, the linguistic ecology for running ENL in Hong Kong is of course not a very favorable one.
17. The populations of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands in 2005 were 5.43 million, 4.62 million, 9.04 million, and 16.30 million, respectively, compared to Germany's 82.69 million and China's 1.32 billion. See United Nations, *World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision Population Database*, <http://esa.un.org/unpp/p2k0data.asp>.

18. In 1999, Philipson and Skutnabb-Kangas reported on the situation in Denmark, relying on questionnaires returned by eighty-three academics (“Englishisation,” pp. 25–29).
19. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Briefe zu Beförderung der Humanität*, Fünfte Sammlung, §57, *Herders Werke*, Band 5, pp. 108–144, especially pp. 112f., 134f. (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1982).
20. Regarding the objectivity and universality of objects and concepts in the humanities, see the incisive reflections in Ernst Cassirer, *Zur Logik der Kulturwissenschaften*, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1942, 1961), especially chapters 1 and 3.
21. Wolfgang Frühwald, “Sprachen öffnen die Welt: Zur Funktion der Nationalsprachen als Sprachen der Wissenschaft” (lecture, Budapest, Beijing, and elsewhere, 2001; see <http://www.humboldt.hu/HN19/fruhwald.htm> [accessed May 24, 2005]). I am indebted to Professor Feng Jun, vice president of Renmin University of China, for bringing Frühwald’s lecture to my attention. The English text is my translation of the German text.
22. See a report on Godé’s speech at the Universitätstage Heidelberg-Montpellier on January 14, 2004 at [http://www.innovations-report.de/html/berichte/bildung\\_wissenschaft/bericht-24766.html](http://www.innovations-report.de/html/berichte/bildung_wissenschaft/bericht-24766.html) (accessed May 14, 2005).
23. Besides these two, other important factors determining a language’s potential to withstand the overdominance of English include: the prestige of a language in the eyes of other nations; the degree of self-esteem of native speakers for the language; the amount of new knowledge carried by a language; the average level of literacy of the respective linguistic community; the abundance of educational materials in the respective language; etc. But these factors will not be discussed in this paper. For some stimulating thoughts on related issues, see Elmar Holenstein, “Ist die viersprachige Schweiz ein Modell für plurikulturelle Staaten?” in Elmar Holenstein, ed., *Kulturphilosophische Perspektiven* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998), pp. 11–43. Recently, Holenstein has been actively involved in discussions with me on various linguistic-educational issues, either through e-mail or, during my visit to Yokohama in the summer of 2005, in person.
24. Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts*. Widely known as *Kawi-Schrift* and published in 1835, it is included in *Werke in fünf Bänden*, Band 3, *Schriften zur Sprachphilosophie*, ed. Andreas Flitner and Klaus Giel (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1963), p. 391; English translation by Peter Heath, *On Language: The Diversity of Human Language-Structure and Its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 27. Elsewhere, Humboldt made the related statement, “The

- intellectual merits of language therefore rest exclusively upon the well-ordered, firm and clear mental organization of peoples in the epoch of making or remaking language” (*Kawi-Schrift*, Flitner and Giel, p. 464; Heath, p. 81).
25. Among many neo-Humboldtians, Leo Weisgerber proposed in the 1950s the so-called humanistic law of language (*Menschheitsgesetz der Sprache*), which comprises the following three constituent laws: the law of linguistically conditioned human existence, the law of linguistic community, and the law of the mother tongue (*Das Menschheitsgesetz der Sprache als Grundlage der Sprachwissenschaft*, rev. ed. [Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1964]). Although Weisgerber’s theory long ago sank into oblivion because of his overconcentration on German when citing linguistic examples, it seems that the theoretical profile and the basic insights of his work are still highly relevant to our concern today with the overdominance of English and the need to consciously nurture one’s mother tongue.
  26. Quoted from Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga und Paralipomena* 2, zweiter Teilband, *Zürcher Ausgabe, Werke in zehn Bänden*, Band X (1859; Zürich: Diogenes, 1977), p. 616: “So viele Sprachen Einer kennt, so viele Mal ist er ein Mensch.”
  27. For the linguistic and philosophical justification of trilingualism, see *inter alia* the following three texts: (1) Elmar Holenstein, “Ein Dutzend Daumenregeln zur Vermeidung interkultureller Missverständnisse,” in Elmar Holenstein, ed., *Kulturphilosophische Perspektiven*, pp. 288–312 (English translation: “A Dozen Rules of Thumb for Avoiding Intercultural Misunderstandings,” *Polylog*, November 2, 2004, <http://them.polylog.org/4/ahe-en.htm>). (2) Joseph Harold Greenberg, *On Language: Selected Writings of Joseph H. Greenberg*, ed. Keith Denning and Suzanne Kemmer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), especially the chapters on typology and language universals. (3) Wm. Theodore de Bary, “Asian Classics and Global Education,” lecture delivered on the occasion of the Tang Chun-I Visiting Professorship organized under the auspices of the Philosophy Department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, January 2005. In this paper, de Bary made the following statement: “At least two other general principles seem applicable to this educational pattern or approach. One is that it is best, if at all possible, for the process to extend to more than one culture other than one’s own, so that there is always some point of triangulation and a multicultural perspective predominates over simplistic we/they, self/other, East/West comparisons.”
  28. Owing to the growing popularity of Chinese, an examination scheme for Chinese proficiency known as HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi, nicknamed the Chinese TOEFL) is now in operation in thirty-three countries (and more than eighty cities) around the world. For related information, see the

HSK main site, <http://www.hsk.org.cn/>, or [http://www.hsk.org.cn/test\\_arrangement/gw.asp](http://www.hsk.org.cn/test_arrangement/gw.asp) for the complete list of international examination points.

29. Humboldt, *Kawi-Schrift*, p. 676; Heath, *On Language*, p. 232. For further discussion, see Kwan Tze-wan, "Wilhelm von Humboldt on the Chinese Language," *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* (Berkeley) 29, no. 2, pp. 169–242.
30. Wilhelm von Humboldt, "Lettre à Abel-Rémusat sur la nature des formes grammaticales en général et sur le génie de la langue chinoise en particulier" (Paris: Librairie Orientale de Dondey-Dupré, 1827).