

The Promotion of English in East Asia at the Turn of the 21st Century: A Politico-Economic and Socio-Cultural Review

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This research provides an interdisciplinary and contextual study on the phenomenon of English promotion at the turn of the 21st century. Through documentary research and semi-structured interviews, it examines the politico-economic and socio-cultural dimensions of English promotion in the context of East Asian countries, including China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. It is suggested that in East Asian societies where economic development, education, and cultivation of manpower are emphasized, English as an acquirable competence is given high socio-cultural value due to its strong association with economic well-being. English is considered the resolution of national competitiveness and a prerequisite of individual economic achievement, and it not only leads to a series of economics-driven language and education policies but also boosts the economy of English-related industries in these non-English-speaking East Asian countries. Overall, English promotion in East Asia is an economics-and-politics-driven, self-justifying mechanism which illustrates how the value of English and the social and individual investment on English teaching and learning are legitimated and how English as commodity is marketed through a synthesis of discourses, presuppositions, and national policies.

Keywords: English promotion, East Asia, ELT industry, English education, English language policy

1 Introduction

As the significant and interrelated developments in the late twentieth and the early twenty-first century, globalization and the dispersal of English have resulted in great impact on the policies and practices regarding language and education around the world. In the non-English-speaking countries, English is considered a prescription for economic well-being and has been promoted by the state governments and educational or ELT institutions through various measures and discourses in the local context. It has become an important dimension of national policy and economy. In a way, English promotion in non-English-speaking countries plays a significant role in the consolidation of English as a global lingua franca and can be regarded as an integral part of

the mechanism of the global spread of English at the turn of the century. To a great extent, English is no longer merely a tool for international communication or a competitive skill for employment. In these countries, the promotion of English not only involves the efficiency of accessing English and the effectiveness of acquiring English but also a complex process of power struggling and decision making in terms of society, culture, politics, and economy. On that account, this study argues that there is a need to take these aspects into account in investigating global English. By focusing on the non-English-speaking East Asian countries, namely Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and China, it proposes an interdisciplinary and contextual study on the phenomenon of English promotion through the framework of global political economy.

The next section is a review of literature. It looks at the politico-economic development and the conceptualizations of globalization and the English language in East Asia. Section three illustrates the framework of global political economy and the research method adopted in this study. In the fourth section, the findings of this study are analyzed and discussed. It examines policies and practices of English promotion, the implications of the ELT business and English language tests, and the value of English perceived in these countries. Finally, a conclusion on the process and practices of English promotion in East Asia is presented.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Politico-economic development of East Asia in the late 20 century

The high-performing Asian economies have been epitomized as the Miracle in East Asia by the World Bank (World Bank, 1993). These economies have seen successful transformations from agrarian economies to newly industrialized countries since the postwar period. The explosive economic development of East Asia in second half of the twentieth century can be perceived clearly in the rapid increase in its share of the global market (see Table 1) where the East Asian share of world GNP (Gross National Product) between 1960 and 1999 doubled in contrast with the inactive share of most other regions. Arrighi *et al.* (2003) also examined the changes in the relative GNP per capita (GNPPC) in order to exclude the influence of factors such as regional increase of the share of world population (see Table 2 which shows the GNPPC of different regions as a percentage of ‘the world average GNPPC’, rather than as a share of world GNPPC).

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Table 1. Regional Shares of World GNP (and population)

Region	1960	1970	1980	1990	1999
East Asia*	13.0 (38.2)	19.5 (38.3)	21.8 (38.0)	25.9 (37.1)	25.9 (35.9)
Australia and New Zealand	1.7 (0.5)	1.6 (0.5)	1.5 (0.5)	1.5 (0.5)	1.6 (0.5)
North America	35.1 (7.9)	30.6 (7.4)	29.2 (6.8)	29.2 (6.2)	29.8 (6.1)
South and Central America	5.8 (8.2)	5.7 (8.8)	7.0 (9.3)	5.6 (9.5)	5.8 (9.7)
Western Europe	40.5 (12.4)	38.7 (10.9)	36.4 (9.5)	33.5 (8.1)	32.3 (7.7)
Sub-Saharan Africa	1.3 (6.8)	1.3 (7.2)	1.2 (7.8)	1.0 (8.8)	1.0 (9.4)
Middle East and North Africa	1.2 (4.0)	1.3 (4.2)	1.7 (4.5)	1.7 (4.9)	1.7 (5.1)
South Asia	1.3 (22.0)	1.3 (22.7)	1.2 (23.8)	1.5 (24.8)	1.9 (25.7)
Total	100.0 (100.0)	100.0 (100.0)	100.0 (100.0)	100.0 (100.0)	100.0 (100.0)

* Countries included in East Asia: China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand.

Source: Arrighi *et al.* (2003: 303)

Table 2. Regional GNPPC as Percentage of “World” GNPPC

Region	1960	1970	1980	1990	1999
East Asia	34.2	51.0	57.4	69.8	72.1
Australia and New Zealand	339.4	330.5	321.0	317.1	356.9
North America	442.9	415.7	432.8	468.9	489.4
South and Central America	70.7	65.0	75.7	58.9	59.9
Western Europe	327.6	353.4	384.2	411.4	417.4
Sub-Saharan Africa	18.8	17.4	15.5	11.8	10.5
Middle East and North Africa	31.2	31.1	37.5	35.5	33.9
South Asia	5.8	5.6	5.0	6.1	7.4
Weighted Average	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Arrighi *et al.* (2003: 304)

Table 2 again highlights the rapid growth of its economic performance in the East Asian region. The rise of East Asia has drawn much attention and to a certain extent has shifted the power of world economy eastward in the post-Cold War era. However, according to Table 1 and 2, the share of North America, Western Europe, and Australia and New Zealand,

though stagnant, remains significant and predominant, and in a way reveals the nature of the world economy in the late twentieth century.

The economic development of East Asia in the late twentieth century has stimulated discussion of these rising economic powers, namely: Japan and the four 'Tiger Economies' including South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, as well as China. As several writers show (Berger & Borer, 1997; Pape, 1998; Tipton, 1998), the rise of East Asia lies in the past events which helped transform today's Asia and in its relative standing with the West.

Berger and Borer (1997) argue that the Cold War determined the industrial rise of East Asia after 1945. It is suggested that the US-led politico-economic order in Asia and the economic resurgence of Japan provided the framework for the 'East Asian Miracle' (Cummings, 1984). Under the framework of the Cold War, the restriction of international and intra-national politics combined with the economic support and tolerance from the US had made economic growth an inevitable priority on the agenda of national development in East Asia.

In the Socialist camp, Mainland China took a very different route of economic development in the late twentieth century. Since 1978 China has been through major changes in its political system. Deng Xiaoping's rise to power signified a fundamental shift in China's national and foreign policy. By concentrating on economic construction, China maintained a dialogue with the Western countries and with the former socialist camp and made great efforts to re-integrate China into the world economic system (Li, 1999). For Deng, socialism became 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. Under this slogan, China as an economy has made liberal use of capitalist methods to jump-start and fuel its remarkable growth since the reforms began (Starr, 2001).

Consequently, the politico-economic development of East Asia in the late 20th century not only displays the significance of economic growth but also reveals the specific politico-economic characteristics in this region. As Shin (1998: 4) claims, East Asian economy can be characterized as 'authoritarian capitalism' and 'the core dynamic force of economic growth in East Asia is not market demand but state demand.' In the early 21st century, the characteristics of East Asian economy continue to play a part in national development and affect policy-making in response to the challenge of globalization.

2.2 Conceptualizations of globalization in East Asia

Globalization is a divergent idea in terms of its origins, conceptualization, dynamics and consequences, and therefore needs to be assessed contextually. As Kim (2000:6) points out:

The significance of contemporary globalization [...] varies according to actors' respective resources, skills, and strategic choices or policies. Its impact on a state's power or role depends not only on the type of state but also on the state's globalization strategy.

In China, it is suggested that globalization (translated as *quanqiuhua*) is understood as an objective condition in the world economy, rather than as a manifestation of US hegemony (Moore, 2000). Most Chinese observers and policymakers, including former President Jiang Zemin, conceive globalization as highly economic processes which will strengthen the trend toward multipolarity and constrain the US's pursuit of its hegemonic strategy around the world. Although globalization has created pressures for openness, it is regarded as exclusively economic. Therefore, China's increasing participation in globalization can be considered as means to exert greater influence over the process of globalization and to reinforce the multipolarization of world politics.

In contrast, Japan, as an economic superpower, sees globalization as forces imposed from the outside and which could be detrimental to Japan's interest. Grime (2000:55) makes the point that, unlike 'internationalization' (*kokusaika*) in the 1980s, 'Japanese commentators have tended to keep the concept of globalization (*gurobaruka*) at arm's length.' It is argued that the depressed state of the economy in the 1990s has resulted in an emerging consensus in contemporary Japan that globalization carries dangers and threats from outside and beyond Japanese control.

Rather than regard globalization as a pure economic phenomenon, globalization (*segzehwa*) in South Korea is used as a term of promoting political, economic, social and cultural enhancement in order to reach the level of advanced nations in the world (Gills & Gills, 2000). This broad notion of globalization involves changes in all aspects from politics to economics to culture, including issues from women's rights, social security to knowledge of the English language. In fact, South Korea's interpretation of globalization represents the ultimate goal of a national plan of development provided by the President Kim Young Sam's administration in the 1990s.

In the context of Taiwan, the notion of globalization is politically and ambivalently used. White (2000:151) argues that for Taiwan's leaders the global environment contains two parts: 'Mainland China, which threatens them intensely, and the rest of the world, whose trade and potentially protective functions are welcome.' Because of its isolated status in the world and the threats from Mainland China, Taiwan endeavors to participate in every possible aspect of its global environment and openly calls for a third party, mainly the US, to contain China's intimidation. But it also calls for a Taiwanese identity and localization within the island. The dialectical

discourse of globalization/localization in Taiwan is less about a long-term national plan than a short-term survival issue.

Kim (2000) states that most East Asian countries, except China, view globalization as a process of increasing interconnectedness which transmits values, ideology, global standards and organization principles. And among East Asian conceptualizations, with very few exceptions (e.g. South Korea) globalization invariably refers to economic globalization. Consequently, conceptualizations of globalization in East Asian countries, to a certain extent, reflect not only the global trends from the outside but also the local experiences and responses while encountering the processes of globalization.

2.3 Globalization and the English language in East Asia

In the context of East Asia where economic growth is prioritized, English is considered the key to secure economic well-being, for it is a necessary medium to communicate with the outside world and cope with the process of globalization.

Taking Japan as an example, the discourse of ‘internationalization’ in the 1980s can be seen as a response to the increasing interconnectedness of the world. It represented the demand for better communication with its international partners in order to assure its economic success while maintaining its own identity (Kubota, 1998). It also suggested an opening up to the world, and required intimate knowledge of the outside (mainly Western) world which particularly meant mastering the English language and promoting teaching and learning English. Although globalization for the Japanese implies uncontrollable changes imposed from the outside, it still results in local responses and solutions for the nation’s best interests.

In the context of Taiwan, it is argued that in spite of Taiwan’s competitive advantage in high-technology manufacturing industries, its non-alphabetic language has a competitive disadvantage if global markets for products such as software continue to be dominated by English-speaking countries (Winn *et al.*, 2002). Language is not only a means for business, but it also plays an important role in manufacturing. Therefore, expanding English education in Taiwan’s elementary school has been conceived as an important measure to enhance national competitive capability in a global world (MOE, 1998; 2000).

English ability and proficiency has become an important issue in most East Asian countries. Economic development, used as the major means to regain national power, has become the underlying force that has helped East Asia to promote English learning in order to obtain the greater knowledge of the world. It leads to great emphasis on the state English education as well as a rapid expansion of English-medium education in these regions albeit contextual and sociolinguistic variances (Choi, 2016; Dearden, 2014; Kirkpatrick, 2016). As a result, the intimate relation between globalization,

economic development and the English language is believed to be not only crucial for national development, but also the base of English promotion in East Asia.

3 The Framework of Global Political Economy and Research Method

The term ‘global political economy’ has its root in international political economy which emerged as a subject of study in Western universities in the mid-1970s and developed into a subfield of International Relations. Instead of viewing global political economy as a subject of study, this research regards it as

the environment from the last quarter of the 20th century until today. This is an era where states, corporations and citizens struggle to order their environment in a world characterized by intensified globalization (O’Brien & Williams, 2010:2).

The focus of global political economy is therefore on the transnational or global interaction of economic and political phenomena. Instead of taking a specific theoretical perspective (e.g. liberalism, realism, and Marxist approaches), this research adopts a synthetic and multidimensional framework of analysis proposed by O’Brien and Williams (2010). Under this framework, English promotion is regarded as a political-economic and socio-cultural process which is shaping and shaped by effects of historical change, domestic and international structures, institutionalism, and cognitive structures in a specific context. Therefore, significant issues or phenomena of English promotion in relation to certain political-economic and socio-cultural contexts are selected and examined in this study.

At the center of the investigation is the process of English promotion launched and conducted by the governments of East Asian countries, i.e. Taiwan, China, Japan, and South Korea, and by educational institutions such as schools and ELT institutions which offer a range of products and service related to the English language in these regions. By focusing on national and institutional promotion of English, the following research questions are proposed: (1) *How is English promoted by the governments and ELT institutions in the non-English-speaking East Asian countries including Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and China, at the turn of the 21st century?* (2) *How is the value of English perceived in these regions?*

In order to answer these questions, documentary research is used as the research method for exploring how English is promoted by the governments in East Asia and by educational and ELT institutions in these countries. All documentary sources were collected in a period of six months from August 2013 to January 2014 and are evaluated by considering its

authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning (Jupp, 1996). Documentary sources include governmental, institutional and media documents regarding English promotion at the turn of the 21st century in the selected countries. Based on the significance of the documents regarding English promotion, the following types of documents are selected for analysis:

1. National plans
2. Documents of ELT institutions
3. News reports on English promotion

Semi-structured interviewing is also employed in this research to investigate the process of English promotion in these East Asian countries. It is used as a source of evidence in conjunction with documentary research in order to increase the reliability and validity of this research. Based on the review of related literatures on English promotion in the selected countries, interview questions are generated according to the following themes:

- I. Experiences of English learning
- II. Experiences and attitudes towards English proficiency tests
- III. Attitudes towards national promotion of English
- IV. Attitudes towards the value of English

In general, convenience sampling in conjunction with quota sampling is employed. Interviewees are people who are familiar with the products or service (e.g. the English-language tests or courses) provided by the institutions of English promotion. Eight interviews were conducted in a period of five months from February to June 2014 with individuals who have experience of studying English in the state education system and of taking recognized English proficiency tests in Taiwan, China, Japan, and South Korea. They include two interviews in Shanghai China, i.e. one employee of an international provider of English education (EIC1) and one employee of a local company (ELC1); two interviewees in Seoul South Korea, i.e. one employer of a trade company (EK1) and one employee of an international company (EIK1); two interviews in Tokyo Japan, i.e. one employee of an international enterprise (EIJ1) and one employee of a local company (ELJ1); and two interviews in Taipei Taiwan, i.e. one employee of an international company (EIT1) and one employee of a local company (ELT1).

All the statements made by interviewees during the interviews were recorded and selectively transcribed for further analysis. Based on the research questions, the selected documents and interviewees' responses are analyzed and discussed through the following subjects: National plan and English promotion; the economy of English; the perceived value of English.

4 Analysis and Discussion

4.1 National plan and English promotion

National plans have been a significant aspect for the development of modern nation states. A national development plan is a large scale investment project which is designed to develop the infrastructure of a country and to meet short, medium or long term goals. In East Asia, national plans such as *Taiwan Six-Year National Plan* and *The Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century* were presented in the beginning of the 21st century when these countries faced the challenge of globalization and the rapid development of information technology. In Japan, after years of economic turmoil and stagnation and in face of the emerging economies, e.g. China, cultivating global talents has been regarded as a solution to pull Japan out of the depression. *The Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century* claims the need to enhance global literacy ('to acquire a working knowledge of English') in order to face the challenge of globalization and to master information technology, while Japan's good qualities and the value of the Japanese language and culture are recognized (PMC, 2000, chap. 1). In 2003, *Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities* was introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (MEXT, 2003). It maintains that English language ability is indispensable for all Japanese people and various measures should be carried out by the government in order to cultivate 'Japanese with English abilities'.

In the case of Taiwan, *Taiwan Six-Year National Plan* as a national blueprint from 2002 to 2008 includes almost all important issues related to economic growth and national development. The promotion of English is presented as one of the elements for cultivating talent for the e-generation. In 2009, *Plan for Enhancing National English Proficiency*, as a part of the general national development plan, *the i-Taiwan 12 Projects – A New Economic Development Blueprint for Taiwan*, was initiated (RECD, 2009). It expresses a simplified view of national English proficiency and a typical example of national plan for English promotion which intends to reinforce the prevalence of English in terms of education, communication and environment.

In these national plans, English is placed at the center and regarded as the key to enhance national competitiveness in this globalized world. A sense of scarcity and competition is consistently expressed through discourses regarding the need to cultivate manpower with English competence. State governments thus play a significant role in enhancing human capital to meet the demand of globalization through selective policies and measures for improving national English proficiency. The most prominent development is the extension and reinforcement of English instruction in the state education

system. Several issues and policies have been raised in order to establish effective English education and to enhance national English ability in these countries, including the introduction of state English education to an earlier age, the provision of English programs in the state education system, the promotion of English immersion, and the recruitment of more foreign English teachers in the state education system.

Overall, the national promotion of English in East Asia at the turn of the 21st century is economics-driven. For the non-English-speaking East Asian countries, policies and measures of improving the state English education can be regarded as educational as well as politico-economic practices in response to the new globalized economy where, conforming to neoliberal free-market doctrines, manpower with global literacy and expertise are considered essential for economic growth and thus highly demanded. Through the discourse of global English capital, English is regarded as a solution for the severe competition in the global market and thus becomes the main focus in the beginning of the 21st century.

4.2 The economy of English: English fever, the ELT business, and English language test

The development of national and educational English promotion also gives rise to the rapid growth of the ELT industry in East Asia. The boom of the ELT business in East Asian countries since the 1990s is depicted as ‘English fever’ or ‘the craze for English’ (Jiang, 2003; Jeong, 2004). For example, in China, the number of private ELT institutions has increased dramatically in the past decades, and there are more than 50,000 ELT schools across the country (CCFA, 2006). The situation is similar in South Korea. ‘English fever’ can be regarded as a reflection as well as a response to the perceptual and institutional promotion of English, including a recognition of the imperative of English-speaking workforce for the global economy and a series of reforms in the state English education which strengthen the gatekeeping role of English in the state education system and in employment (Jeong, 2004; Jeon, 2006).

The zeal of private English training courses can be attributed to the belief that education is the key to success in East Asian societies and the concern about the effectiveness of the state English education. All interviewees from Japan, China, Taiwan and South Korea expressed different degrees of distrust on English education in the state education system and the necessity of supplement English education such as English classes in private academies or cram schools. As indicated by an employee of a financial company in Seoul (EIK1), *‘English education in schools is helpful for grammar, and that’s it... In my school, almost all parents wanted to give their children good education. It’s like everybody has to go to academies.’*

The demand for private English courses is also associated with English language tests. In countries such as Taiwan and South Korea, a verification of English proficiency offered by a recognized English language testing institution is required at certain points of the process of education or employment. For example, most universities in Taiwan have imposed a graduation threshold which requires students to achieve a certain level of English proficiency according to their academic and professional needs. In South Korea, English language proficiency tests are the main cause for the boom of private English classes because it is not only an important gatekeeper for college entrance but also for employment, i.e. the English section of the College Scholastic Ability Test for entering a university, TOEIC for getting employed by a Korean company, and TOFEL for being admitted to the schools overseas.

English proficiency tests cannot only boost the recruitment of private English classes but also become profit makers. In Japan, TOEIC has been very popular and used widely in schools and business. According to the Institute for International Business Communication (IIBC) which administers TOEIC in Japan, in 2009 among 64% of 553 companies which used English language tests, 99.4% of them used TOEIC. TOEIC was used in around 500 universities in 2007 (Educational Testing Service, 2009a). It is suspected that the non-profit IIBC makes a considerable profit in test-taker fees (McCrostie, 2009). By actively promoting TOEIC in businesses, schools and universities and by publishing information and research which emphasizes the need of English skills, TOEIC in Japan illustrates how an English testing industry not only meet the existing need but also creates the need of English learning and testing (Kubota, 2011).

According to the informants in Japan, Taiwan and South Korea (i.e. EK1, ELJ1, ELC1, ELT1, EIK1, EIJ1 and EIT1), English proficiency tests are required at different points in the process of education and employment and TOEIC is favored among various English proficiency tests in these regions. In Japan and Taiwan, TOEIC is used as an entrance exam in some companies. Although most of the companies would require employees to prove their English ability of a certain level by taking English proficiency tests, English has limited function in work. As an employee of a local company in Japan (ELJ1) said, *‘actually I don’t feel TOEIC helps me... Maybe on my resume I have to write down the score. It helps me apply for the job, but in my job, I don’t feel it.’* It is indicated that one’s English competence is not the determining factor for promotion and that the result of his or her English proficiency test is more like an item of personnel information for reference.

In China, due to its enormous domestic market, local companies do not have to rely on global market or international trade and that limits the demand of English in certain fields. However, it is expressed by the respondents in China that English is considered core competitiveness for

employment. In Shanghai, English competence is emphasized and necessary for advancing to higher positions in international enterprises which offer higher pay comparing to local companies. A point worth noticing is that the informants in Shanghai China expressed a sense of unfamiliarity with TOEIC comparing to interviewees in other countries. The possible reason can be attributed to the extremely large size and regional difference of the China market, the late introduction of TOEIC into China in December 2002 (Educational Testing Service, 2009b), and the competition from other local and international English proficiency tests.

In the non-English-speaking countries where English capital is emphasized, although English language tests can be regarded as a convenient and standardized proof of one's English proficiency, to a great extent, they have become a gatekeeper in different fields and sometimes the ultimate goal of English learning. In a way, the institutionalization of English language tests in the state education system and the emphasis of English language tests in employment further reinforce the demand of English learning. As a result, in the context of East Asia, English language tests can be regarded as an important part of the ELT industry which transforms the originally non-profit testing institution into a business and at the same time stimulates the demand of English learning as well as creates testing need.

4.3 The perceived value of English

Corresponding to Kubota's (2011) investigation on adult workers and employers' expectations and views on English and English tests in Japan, the interviewees in this study, especially those in Taiwan and Japan, also indicated that English language skills do not always connect with economic returns and that there is a mismatch between the public expectation on English capital and the actual use and economic returns of English skills in employment. As a management engineer of a technology company in Taiwan (EIT1) stated, *'high English proficiency is only necessary for those who are responsible for communicating with foreign customers, and for those who don't have such kind of need, their English ability will not have any influence on their job.'* Although the association between English and economic prosperity is not guaranteed, through various policies and practices of English promotion and discourses and presuppositions regarding English, English communicative competence is given high value in these East Asian countries.

For most interviewees in these non-English-speaking East Asian countries, the value of English is constructed by its given role in education and employment. For instance, some informants such as a senior data analyst in a local company in Shanghai (ELC1) and an employee in an international financial company in Seoul (EIK1) expressed that the global spread of English and the development of the ELT industry has resulted in more attention paid to English education in their countries. The important role of

English in one's career is also emphasized by some interviewees. As indicated by a manager in an institution of English learning in China (EIC1) who received education in an English speaking country and is a fluent English speaker, *'to work in a foreign company or a global industry, English ability is the core competence. English ability is my advantage, and it is also my value.'*

Furthermore, English is often associated with one's financial condition and social recognition. Informants with high English proficiency who can express themselves fluently in English (e.g. EIC1 and EK1) usually have experience of private tutoring in English or studying in English speaking countries and are from relatively wealthy families. In addition, according to interviewees' responses, certain values and beliefs are embedded in the English language. As an owner of a trade company in South Korea (EK1) expressed, *'English is not just a natural talent. You have to have opportunity and training...Many people want to speak English. If she speaks English and I cannot, I would look up to her. Because my desire [of English] is high, but I know I cannot.'* It is indicated that people in South Korea normally feel admiration for those who could speak English fluently. A project manager in a local online-game company in Taiwan (ELT1) also commented that English as the global language is given higher status in Taiwan and thus results in admiration and high evaluation toward those who can master it.

To a certain degree, the perceived value of English in East Asia reflects a combination of national and institutional practices, presuppositions, and social expectations. English in the non-English-speaking East Asian countries can be regarded as a kind of capital or commodity which has been promoted by emphasizing its instrumental as well as socio-cultural value. And that creates national and individual aspirations for the possible economic and socio-cultural returns, which once again strengthen the promotion of English and encourage the development of the ELT industry.

5 Conclusion

Proposing a politico-economic and socio-cultural review of English, this research investigates the process of English promotion in the context of East Asia at the turn of the 21st century. According to the analysis of relevant documents and interviewees' responses, this study suggests that in East Asian societies where economic development, education, and cultivation of manpower are emphasized, English as an acquirable competence is given high socio-cultural value due to its strong association with economic well-being. English is considered the resolution of national competitiveness and a prerequisite of individual economic achievement, and it not only leads to a series of economics-driven language and education policies but also boosts

the economy of English-related industries in these non-English-speaking East Asian countries. In a way, the discourses regarding English, language education policies and the unsatisfied result of the state English education strengthen the demand of English in these regions as well as give rise to the prosperous development of international and local ELT industry which offer products and services of the English language, including English language tests. The development of the institutionalization of English language testing in education and employment has also resulted in a business of English language testing which further creates the demand of English learning. Overall, the process of English promotion in East Asia can be regarded as an economics-and-politics-driven, self-justifying mechanism which illustrates how the value of English and the social and individual investment on English teaching and learning are legitimated and how English as commodity is marketed through a synthesis of discourses, presuppositions, intuitional practices, and national policies.

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