

## **Study of Asian Languages and Cultures in Modern Context**

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### **Abstract**

Language represents the main instrument of communication. The thoughts and aspirations of any Nation in the form of culture are stored in language and conveyed mainly through language. Hence, language and culture are inseparable. In the era of globalization and scientific technological advancements, the language and cultural boundaries between different nations are being erased and world is slowly converting into a global village. However, there is an urgent need to protect cultural diversity because cultural diversity is as important as biodiversity. The aim of this paper is to focus on the significance of study of Asian Languages and cultures in the context of growing interconnectivity and interdependence of World in general and Asia in particular, in modern times. It calls for promotion research in Asian languages and cultures with an aim to formulate commonalities and differences in order to sketch a unitary picture of cultural bondness between different Asian cultures. Such study would further strengthen economic, political, trade and cultural relations among Asian countries.

**Keywords:** language, cultural diversity, globalization

The scientific technological advancements in recent times have truly brought revolution in generating, preserving and communicating knowledge. The size of knowledge has grown tremendously over past two decades with expansion of new fields of knowledge practically on day-to-day basis. There is a hardly any dispute over the fact that any knowledge is expressed in language. Because it represents a universal form and means of human communication, scientific theoretical and artistic thought. In the newly emerging knowledge-based society, there is a demand and need for better understanding of knowledge itself. One of the strategic challenges faced by the scientists is to redefine and reanalyze the current qualitatively new stage in overall human social progress which is based on higher economic growth, unbelievable penetration of science and technology in daily life. In the time of such rapid change, a major challenge for linguists to ascertain the crucial role of language and language science in building knowledge societies and identify the new trends within language structure and its function. Therefore, the vision and mission of language scientists need to be clearly reoriented towards framing broader goals and perspectives suitable to the needs and demands of society in order to protect and develop plurality of languages and cultures in the context of globalization.

The progress of any society depends on knowledge and its application to all areas of life. The study of Asian languages and cultures is not an exception to such scientific endeavour. Hence, the theme of present Conference is very much relevant and deeply thought. The current developed societies are based on a production and consumption model that is centred around science and technology. As a result, Humanities and Social Sciences in general are put aside and sometimes even totally ignored due to lack of their exchange value. However, increasingly complex application of technology which led to a hyper-technological society requires more sophisticated and systematic analysis of social and human aspects of different types of knowledge and its application. This gives rise to a fundamental question about the significance of linguistic science and its object of study-language. It can be easily proved by the fact that “in the emerging knowledge based society, there is a need for deeper understanding of knowledge itself” because knowledge is expressed (creation, generation, preservation and transmission) only in the form of language. Thus, the analysis of language and its function acquires paramount importance especially in a knowledge society. Hence, language study and for that, the study of culture, continues to be in the forefront of the Scientific Investigation, as long as Human and Cultural studies, Society exists. Approaching the issue from this pragmatic angle, linguistic science occurs to be more relevant today than ever before. Besides, linguistics has great deal of contribution to such important sciences like semiotics, informatics, computer science, history, anthropology, etc. It is recognized that language and culture play crucial role in promoting trade and economic relations among nations and contribute to the better understanding of ‘other’ societies. In a nutshell, even in the time of rapid economic and social growth, study of natural language and culture do not lose its value in life of individuals and entire society, because they encompass social life of human being, his psychology, intellectual formation and finally emotions.

Historical analysis and available experience suggest that language and culture serve as parameter of social development of a given period. All achievements in the sphere of social development and scientific technological progress are systematically reflected in both language and culture. For instance, it is found at lexical and grammatical level of language. The emergence of English now as a global research language which automatically gives an edge to English speaking or English medium education nations over non-English speaking nations in terms of axis to research and its presentation. However, there are many nations (Germany,

France, China, Japan, South Korea, etc.) who pursue education in their mother-tongue also coming up with extraordinary, equally competing with wealthy English-speaking nations, not only research in science and technology and its practical application. Simultaneously, there are many languages in the world which stand far behind from the social development and scientific-technological revolution. It is normally mentioned that out of 2500-3000 languages in the world, only 250-300 languages have writing system.

As per Ethnologue study published in Encyclopedia of Globalization (2007), out of 6,912 languages in the world, the regional share as follows:

*Table 1: Continent-wise Share of Languages*

<b>Continent</b>	<b>No. of Languages</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Asia	2,269	32.8%
Europe	239	3.5%
Pacific	1,310	19.0%
Americas	1,002	14.5%
Africa	2,092	30.3%

The above table clearly shows that Asia occupies a major place in terms of number of languages which speaks the importance of their study.

German philosopher Karl Marx in his “Manifesto of Communist Party” has characterized the raising and the development of international capitalist market in terms of economic, political and cultural history of mankind. As a consequence of the establishment of international market, as it was observed by Marx, there is an increasing interdependency of nations which results in converting the fruits of spiritual activities of individual nations into a common achievement. He further said that national over-sidedness and isolation becomes practically impossible and from immense national and local literatures form over world literature. Hence, the ultimate and all-encompassing aim is to encourage the study of Asian languages and cultures with an aim to identify commonalities and differences in the background historical relations between these nations. Such study must contribute to become Asian citizens, without losing their respective national cultural identity, to become integral part of world heritage, i.e., glocal citizens. To achieve this goal, scholars should be encouraged to carry out research in the following areas:

1. to identify the real parameters of cultural bondness among Asian nations through the study of languages, literatures, mythologies, folklore, history, philosophy, etc.;
2. to conduct an exhaustive and extensive socio-linguistic and entthrographic survey of tribes and small groups of people and their migration;
3. to suggest measures for the protection of endangered languages and cultures in Asia;
4. to expand the social domain of usage of literary/national languages and cultures to withstand the onslaught of English and other 'foreign' cultures and learn foreign languages and cultures for specific purposes;
5. to propagate unifying cultural parameters of Asian people within the frame work of multiculturalism and multilingualism;
6. to extensively use information technology for bridging gap between languages, cultures and societies in Asia.

The above list, of course, may not be exhaustive. However, the endeavours shall be made in the direction of studying, identifying and propagating the oneness of Asia in terms of culture. The process of globalization and intensified international contacts of cooperation in various fields have once again highlighted significance of languages and cultures to bring in different nations together for active collaboration in various fields. This is especially important to Asia. Hence, intensive research in Asian languages and cultures will give a push for further strengthening economic and trade cooperation between Asian nations and for that, ASEAN can play a decisive role.

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