

Small is beautiful

Sometimes size really does matter, in issues relating to English as in other things. Sheer vastness and numbers inevitably draw our attention, especially at the present time, to linguistic and many other matters in China, and in this issue (as in others in recent times) we continue to pay close attention to both the vastness and the numbers. Certainly, in *ET* – as elsewhere in print and on screen – matters relating to such a rising world player are of key concern, and notably in *ET76*, we continue the debate on issues that are fundamental to the world's way of acknowledging linguistic dynamism, statistics, and (in effect) clout.

The English language complex is vast and potently distributed throughout the planet, but the Chinese language complex is larger still, though it is concentrated in one region, yet through its rapidly increasing economic and cultural significance its nature and prospects demand thorough-going international reassessment. While that historic reassessment proceeds, English will continue to be the language most sought after among the Chinese themselves, and millions of them will in due course be competent in the world's two most extensive means of communication. This has not yet happened, as our contributors indicate in this issue, but when it does happen it will be a unique development in human history.

Yet there is another sense of size, as in 'Small is beautiful'. Here one thinks of nations whose core languages are not prominent on the world's stage, yet sustain and are sustained by cultures with passionately enduring stories, and such languages have to find a means of co-existing securely alongside such juggernauts as English and Chinese.

In this issue (heading our usual spread of topics) are reports on two such countries, Finland and Macedonia, the first in north-eastern and the second in south-eastern Europe. In these accounts we see how national languages of limited global reach (yet with their own diasporas) are sustained in the homeland, often despite complex and difficult historical situations. We also see how they co-occur in their respective educational systems with several other languages, among which English is inevitably significant – and not simply 'to be applied externally'.

Tom McArthur

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