

Learning Chinese: A fashionable trend

Learning mandarin has caught the attention of millions of people, emerging as a new must have language in many Asian countries, Europe and the USA, having many desperately trying to master one of the world's hardest languages. Mandarin is seen as a key skill for people hitching their futures to China's economic rise, bringing huge benefits and advantages. Since English is spoken so universally, it no longer offers companies and employees the edge it once did.

As China is rising, the world is embracing Mandarin, where it is spoken by one out of every six people on earth. In South Korea, there was an increase of 66% over the past five years of students learning the Chinese language. Japanese secondary schools have also been offering mandarin courses, the most taught foreign language after English. Moreover, Thailand's Ministry of Education has decided to include Mandarin education in all high schools starting 2008, and later on planning to expand it to junior high and elementary.

Chinese is daunting to learn for many, because of the tones used in speech, and the thousands of characters that must be memorized to be considered literate. Nevertheless, this has created a flourish in language centers, educational programs and improvement of electronic dictionaries teaching mandarin, as several countries such as the U.S just don't have enough trained mandarin teachers.

"The level of interest is high, but the level of expertise is low," says Scott Mc Ginnis, an academic adviser at the Defense language Institute in Washington.

The Chinese language was once discriminated against during the Cold War, being considered the language of the enemy. Right wing governments in Asian countries feared their regime would be toppled by the spread of communism. However, there are no longer any prejudices against the language, and even considered fashionable.

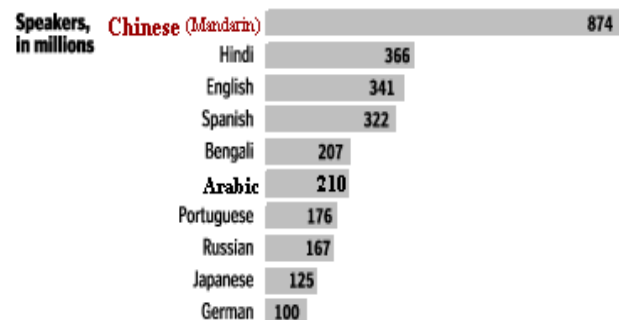
Many teenagers have used pop icons as an inspiration for learning the Chinese language, in hopes of decoding what is said during popular watched soaps and songs lyrics.

"Since Chinese is the language spoken by the largest population, in addition to many markets which have flourished in China, learning Mandarin would be a great benefit, since its is expected for China to become a hub for the future economy," commented Yeh, a Taiwanese 8th grader, fortunately having Chinese as her mother tongue.

As China's economic clout grows, learning Mandarin offers a strategic advantage such as reducing misunderstandings. Even though many predict it wouldn't overtake English as the common language, mastering the language would provide an edge in the 21st century.

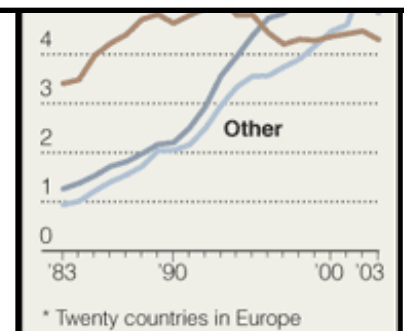
Top 10 Languages Spoken in the World

Chinese is the most widely spoken language in the world.



America Losing Its Dominance

The U.S has steadily begun to lose its dominance in areas such as science, and innovation against Europe and Asian countries such as Japan, China,



Singapore and Taiwan. Foreign advances in science often exceed America's, as industrializing countries are catching up aggressively.

David Baltimore, president of the California Institute of Technology and a 1975 Nobel laureate in Medicine, puts it bluntly: "We can't hope to keep intact our standard of living, our national security, our way of life, if Americans aren't competitive in science. Period."

European scientists have been making vast achievements, such as detecting methane in the atmosphere of planet Mars. In addition, Asia has been growing technology and innovative wise, seeing output number of papers skyrocketing to a peak.

The stance that America has in the scientific world is being shaken, competed and rivaled by foreigners. Even though many say President Bush is to blame by failing to provide enough money for research, the charge has been denied, stating that research budgets during the Bush administrations have been higher than ever before.

The numbers of doctorates and scientists have been falling drastically these previous years according to Dr. Hicks of Georgia Tech. Scientific papers have been falling by 10% due to rising foreign competition, and also a brain drain crisis. The number of doctoral students from China, India and Taiwan planning to stay in the United States began to fall by the hundreds, returning to their own countries. These numbers are significant since researchers from foreign countries account for more than a quarter of industrial patents awarded each year in the U.S.

"After the September 11 crisis, and tightening security on visas, I no longer want to go to the U.S for higher education as it is complicated, and would rather go elsewhere".

Taiwan and Singapore are surging way ahead of the U.S in electronics, and China rapidly growing on medical apparatus. These cause fewer skilled jobs in America, and a decrease of discoveries and innovations.

Several private groups in Washington have begun to promote industrial vigor, and agitate for action in order for the U.S to have a place in the scientific society.

Since science and technology are key to economic growth and prosperity, Jennifer Bond, the U.S. council's vice president for international affairs stated, "They're [foreign countries] catching up to us," warning Americans not to "rest on our laurels."

