

## English in China today

KINGSLEY BOLTON AND DAVID GRADDOL

The current popularity of English in China is unprecedented, and has been fuelled by the recent political and social development of Chinese society

### Introduction

According to a 2010 *China Daily* article, the number of English learners in China is now around 400 million, approximately one third of China's population (see also Wei and Su, this issue). The importance of English in the state education system has been supplemented by the rapid growth of privately-run language schools and training institutes across the country in recent years. The same article quoted a comment by Ms Xiao Yan, the public relations manager of the Wall Street English language school chain, who gave her explanation for the current popularity of English in the following terms:

More and more importance has been given to English after China carried out the policy of reform and opening up to the outside world in the late 1970s. And accompanying China's rise on the world stage in recent years are growing connections of commerce and culture with other countries, especially those developed English-speaking countries [...]. The entire Chinese society attaches high importance to the English study as sometimes it even plays a vital role for a person who plans to pursue further education and seek a better career. There is no doubt that people who have a good command of English are more competitive than their peers. (*China Daily*, 2010a)

The same article then went on to note that China's training market had an estimated value of 300 billion yuan (US\$ 47 billion) in 2010, of which the English-language training market accounted for around 30 billion yuan (US\$ 4.7 billion), with the cost of one six-hour course in a Beijing language school at 300 yuan (US\$ 47). The link between money and English has been imbricated in the discourse of English in the Middle Kingdom since the

days of 'pidgin' (from 'business') English, but is alive and well in current discourses, not least because of the perceived instrumental and pragmatic attractions of the language. In a more recent article in the same newspaper, Mr Le Yucheng, a high-ranking official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, compared the number of English learners



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commitment to Britain during the first World War. May 16 is the th day of the year (th in leap years) in the Gregorian  
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monarch to address the U.S. Congress. Moses said, "Eat this food today, for today is a Sabbath day dedicated to the  
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