
LANGUAGE POLICY AND MODERNITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and
Thailand

Language Policy

VOLUME 6

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Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and
Thailand

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



Source: *CIA World Factbook*, 2005

In this book, our goal is to understand how the language policies of various nation-states in Southeast Asia grapple with the challenge of modernity. Our focus will therefore be on language policies as these are explicitly articulated either in the form of constitutions or public proclamations made by political leaders. We do not

deny that language policies can be implicit (Spolsky, 2004:8) since ideologies about language are prevalent regardless of whether these lead to overt policy formulations or not. However, our interest is in the attempts by Southeast-Asian nation-states to maintain/legitimize particular 'nationalist imaginations' (cf. Anderson, 1991), and such attempts are best seen in the kinds of explicit declarations made by agents of the state. It seems clear that our objective includes the question of how these nation-states manage the spread of the English language, since English is often seen as the language of modernity par excellence (May, 2001). But the spread of English into the nation-states of Southeast Asia also impacts on the status of the indigenous languages, and if English is the language of modernity, what kinds of roles are left open to the indigenous languages? We do not think that it is possible to completely avoid the spread of English (Phillipson, 1992; Crystal, 1997), and consequently, a major point of interest in our investigation is how nation-states attempt to manage the relationships between English and the local Asian languages. Different nation-states are constrained in different ways by their unique histories, and in subsequent chapters, we focus on case studies of four specific Southeast Asian nation states: Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.¹ But we are also interested in the similarities as well as the differences encountered by these nation states and in the concluding chapter, we will extract possible generalizations. In this introductory section, we explain how we intend to go about investigating the impact of modernity on the language policies of Southeast Asia.

1-1 INTRODUCTION

We review a number of key approaches to the study of modernity and language policy later on in this chapter. At this point, though, we want to simply state that we are treating modernity as the rise and spread of the products of rational activity performed by state as well as non-state actors. Examples of such products would include scientific and technological knowledge, political systems (constitutional government), legal institutions, educational structures, the standardization of languages, and patterns of mass consumption. These are products of rational activity because they are geared towards the achievement of specific goals (control of the environment in the case of technology, maximization of profits in the case of mass consumption, linguistic uniformity in the case of standardization), and though both the goals as well as the means for attaining them are constrained by past practices or 'tradition', the challenge for nation-states, where language policies are concerned, is to find a judicious balance between the desire to maintain a sense of tradition or authenticity, and the need to accommodate the products of rational activity. This point is also made by Fishman:

Nationalist language planning must face two extreme positions in its attempts to reconcile modernization and authenticity. At one extreme is the view that such reconciliation is *impossible*; at the other, that it is *unnecessary*. One camp holds that the national language *cannot* (or should not) be employed for modern purposes.... The other camp holds that the delays and the trials of nationalist language planning (which optimally aims at expressing everything modern via indigenous roots) are simply so much *wasted time and effort*... But neither of the ... opposing views is nationalist in inspiration. The one is traditionalist; the other modernist. The nationalist *tour de force* is to combine authenticity *and* modernism; indeed, to find that there is no clash

between them at all. (Fishman, 1989:305, *italics* in original)

But it would be a mistake to assume that language policies directly confront the challenge of modernity. The relationship between language policy and modernity is mediated by a nationalist ideology since all nation-states have a sense, however fictional, of their histories and the kinds of people(s) who have participated in those histories. And because we want to take into account the influence of nationalist ideologies, our discussion of nationalism draws mainly on the work of Benedict Anderson. There are, to be sure, other theorists (Gellner, 1983, 1993; Hobsbawm, 1990) who along with Anderson, have argued for a modernist account of nationalism. That is, an account where nationalism is seen to arise from specific historical developments in nineteenth century Europe such as industrialization and print capitalism (see the following section). However, Anderson's theory is particularly attractive to us because he, more so than any other political scientist, has stressed the important role of nationalist 'imaginings.' Furthermore, perhaps because he recognizes their importance, Anderson does not adopt a judgmental stance on the truth/falsity of nationalist 'imaginings', unlike, say, Hobsbawm's 'inventionist' position (Hobsbawm, 1990; see May, 2001:68). For Anderson (1991), such imaginings are simply characteristic of all nations so that a nation is an 'imagined community', and it is the myths and stories constituting this nationalist imagination that both influence the formulation of particular language policies, and constrain how the products of rational activity can be accommodated. Again, we find Fishman's remarks highly relevant:

All types of modernization planning involve a partial utilization of the past as well as a partial fabrication/creation of that past Planning repeatedly requires both the selective abandonment of the past as well as its selective ideologization and reconciliation with the new ... More directly than in connection with many other aspects of planning, language planning depends on and interacts with decisions concerning the historical bonds that are presumed to unite hitherto disunited locals, the heroes they are to share, the classics they are to revere, the emotions they are to draw upon collectively ... Language planning provides populations with a new name, with a new mission – and, as a result, with the drive and the dignity that makes new schools, new factories, new homes and new diets not only acceptable but also necessary goals to work for and fight for. It is not important that the variety being produced is increasingly unlike anyone's real mother tongue or grand-mother tongue. It is only important that it represents a legitimization of a new identity and a new power with which new authorities and new masses are consensually related to each other to the point of believing that they have always been so related. (Fishman, 1973:31-2)

Therefore, to understand how language policies deal with modernity, we need to take cognizance of the influence of nationalist ideologies (cf. Spolsky, 2004). In this book, we will treat such nationalist ideologies as 'institutional narratives' (Linde, 1993, 2001). As Johnstone points out:

Narrative has been one of the major themes in humanistic and social scientific thought since the mid-twentieth century. The essence of humanness, long characterized as the tendency to make sense of the world through rationality, has come increasingly to be described as the tendency to tell stories, to make sense of the world through narrative. (Johnstone, 2001:635)

Moreover, there is increasing recognition of the importance of 'institutional narratives' in understanding policies (see Roe, 1994, for example). According to Linde, one important reason for seeing narratives in institutional contexts – including the narratives produced by nations – is that this helps us to appreciate:

... the work that narrative performs in institutions to reproduce the institution, reproduce or challenge its power structures, induct new members, create the identity of the institution and its

members, adapt to change, and deal with contested or contradictory versions of the past. We may understand this as the way an institution uses narrative to create and reproduce its identity by the creation and maintenance of an institutional memory. (Linde, 2001:518-9)

For example, in Linde's own study of an American company, the institutional narrative includes the following points (Linde, 2001:522):

- a charismatic founder with a strong vision: the idea that farmers of good moral character should be charged lower rates for auto insurance, since they ran lower risks than city drivers, and an exclusive relation between the company and its sales agents;
- the American rural and small-town origins of the founder and of the company, which still shape its values;
- the development of the company from selling auto insurance to a full service company offering fire, life, and health insurance as well, presented as an ever-growing commercial and ethical success;
- the idea that the company is a family, and represents family values.

As Linde points out:

... this story of the institution's origin gives a coherent account of the company's identity and values. For a member to know this story means to know what the institution is, and what that member must do to be a part of it. (Linde, 2001:522)

Thus, in a similar manner, the institutional narratives produced by nation-states as they attempt to balance tradition with modernity serve the crucial purpose of legitimizing specific language policies. We briefly discuss two examples, which will be taken up in greater detail in chapters 2 and 4. The Singapore narrative (chapter 4) includes the following:

Singapore reluctantly came into being after its ejection from the Federation of Malaysia. It has no natural resources, and thus the continued success and development of the nation depends purely on the industry and intelligence of its people. But because the people of Singapore are of different ethnic backgrounds, racial sensitivities must be respected.

This brief narrative not only provides an account of Singapore's origins, and the values expected of its citizens, it also helps to rationalize Singapore's language policy. English is widely used as the medium of instruction in the education system because of its perceived importance in the global economy. And depending on their ethnic background, Singaporeans are expected to also be proficient in their ethnic mother tongues. This allows each ethnic group its own cultural space so that, hopefully, no single ethnic group can claim dominance over another. The Singapore language policy is thus oriented towards bilingual proficiency in English and the ethnic mother tongue. Knowledge of the former is justified on economic grounds while knowledge of the latter is seen as helping Singaporeans retain their different ethnic identities.

In contrast, the Malaysian narrative (chapter 2) emphasizes the following:

Even though Malaysia is ethnically heterogeneous, the ethnic Malays (who are the largest bumiputera or son-of-the-soil, i.e. indigenous community) are privileged as the original inhabitants of the land. Because the ethnic Chinese were often associated with having more economic power than the ethnic Malays, the policies of the nation state had to be redirected towards providing protection for the Malays (and minority bumiputera) under the auspices of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1970, resulting in a form of affirmative action that is sometimes referred to as the bumiputera policy. This policy ensures, among other things, that the Malay language and culture are given specific Constitutional safeguards regarding the rights of Malays

and other indigenous people of Malaysia, and that the education system, and the Malaysian Civil Service (MCS) have to implement quotas to guarantee ethnic Malays and other bumiputera access to the universities and employment in the MCS.

This Malaysian narrative, unlike the Singapore one, explicitly privileges the ethnic Malays and pedestalizes the Malay language. Consequently, these different narratives impose different constraints on the nation-states as they attempt to deal with modernity. For example, in the case of Singapore, allowing the widespread use of the English language is less problematic since in the Singapore narrative, no particular Asian language is expected to be privileged. In fact, English, as we will see later, is officially constructed as an ethnically 'neutral' language, and hence its widespread use in Singapore is considered acceptable. In the case of Malaysia, however, the privileging of the Malay language means that the widespread use of English for official purposes is more problematic; it is seen as a threat to the Malay language and thus to the bumiputera policy. The use of English in official domains in Malaysian society, unlike that in Singapore, is therefore extremely sensitive and contested. Perhaps there is no better illustration of the hotly contested status of English in Malaysia than the angry responses evoked by a recent proposal, made by a Malaysian senator, to allow the use of English in the Malaysian Parliament (*The Straits Times* 25 November 2002). Angry responses included editorials from a Malaysian newspaper, *Berita Minggu*, which called such a proposal 'shameful', and a fellow senator who was reported to have said:

I do not agree, and in fact, oppose the proposal because in our excitement to improve our English language usage, let us not belittle our own national language. We fought hard to raise the Malay language as the official language and had won.

This brief discussion hopefully illustrates the mediating role that nationalist ideologies play in legitimizing specific language policies, as well as in coping with modernity. It also reminds us of the continuing influence of ethnicity in the formation of such ideologies. This is a point made most forcefully in the writings of Anthony Smith (1986, 1991, 1998), whose notion of *ethnie* or 'ethnic community' attempts to go beyond both essentialist and situational conceptions of ethnicity, to highlight instead the historical and symbolic nature of ethnic identities. Ethnic identities, for Smith, involve shared memories, a sense of intergenerational continuity, and a belief in a common destiny (Smith, 1991: 25). Ethnic identities, as we will see, feature prominently in the language policies of Southeast Asia, and precisely because we agree with Smith that such identities are not as open to change or self-fashioning as other identities (e.g. status) may perhaps be, we refrain from adopting a postmodernist stance on identity. A postmodernist stance would emphasize the fragmentary nature of identity, and perhaps how a wide range of identities are available to the modern individual, especially through acts of consumption, so that in deciding what commodities to purchase, an individual enacts and validates for him/herself the kind(s) of personae that he/she wishes to project (Bauman, 2005). However, it is clear that one's ethnic identity is not as freely constructed as one's desire to be seen as, say, 'environment-friendly.' Elements of constructedness are undoubtedly present in all kinds of identities, but the historical and collective nature of ethnic identities (May, 2001; Smith, 1986, 1991) gives them a resilience that poses significant challenges to any language policy of any sort. Even the notion of 'new ethnicities' (Hall, 1997), which emphasizes the emergent, hybrid and local nature of ethnicities, is not clearly a

distinctive phenomenon; it seems to be found in various societies regardless of their relationship to modernity (Bucholtz, 2002), and does not seem to pose any serious challenge, empirically or theoretically, to less transitory notions of ethnicity.

In the rest of this chapter, we provide a brief review of various studies of modernity and language planning. We then close the chapter by introducing three possible relations that can figure in any narrative of nationalist ideology: equivalence, displacement, and complementarity. We also discuss a phenomenon that we call 'linguistic instrumentalism', and raise the hypothesis that as indigenous Asian languages respond to the spread of English, they too will come to be viewed in instrumentalist terms. In other words, we think that a significant consequence of how four nation-states in Southeast Asia cope with modernity is to emphasize the instrumentalist values of the indigenous languages, thus contributing to a general rise in linguistic instrumentalism.

1-2 QUESTIONS OF MODERNITY

Modernity has been defined in a number of ways by different scholars, and its beginnings have also been traced back to various points in modern European history ranging from the sixteenth century right up to the twentieth century (Tomlinson, 1991:140; Sekiguchi, 1994:825-826). However, it is generally agreed that by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in European history, a new kind of society emerged that was fundamentally different from the kind of societies that had existed before although there are disagreements over the exact nature of this difference.

For example, William E. Connolly (1998:13-14) argues that modernity is about the drive to "force everyone and everything into slots provided by a highly ordered system and to pretend the result is self-realization, with achievement of reason, and attainment of common ground". And Gianni Vattimo claims in *The End of Modernity* that modernity exists as an era of history that is "opposed to the ancient way of thinking governed by a cyclical and naturalistic vision of the course of events in the world" (Vattimo, [1985] 1988:3-4). In the ancient way of thinking that Vattimo refers to, events such as earthquakes and tidal waves were attributed to the displeasure of the gods or some superior being rather than to what the moderns now know as the Forces of Nature. The way of thinking in modernity is differentiated from the ancient way because the modern way of thinking involves the use of scientific and technical vocabularies that signify greater human control over the environment than the ancients ever thought possible. Unlike the ancients, modern people *living in modernity*² are no longer fearful of the 'Forces of Nature', at least not in the way that the ancients were. As such, rather than aiming to appease the 'gods' through rituals and other constructed practices, the moderns now take logical steps toward avoiding the problem of the unpredictability of Nature. There is therefore a great divide between the ancient and modern ways of thinking and conceptualizing the world.

And while Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Weber generally agree that modernity is associated with the 'death' of god, and the rise of humanism, capitalism, mass culture, and industrialization, more recent scholars such as Stephen White, Zygmunt Bauman, and Theresa Brennan would be quick to add other equally important

dimensions to modernity such as globalization, communications technology, the commoditization of culture, advanced capitalism and the marketization of business, trade, and finance. Bauman also sees modernity as being ‘liquid’ and ‘fluid’; by these metaphors he means that it destroys traditionally ‘solid’ loyalties and obligations at all levels of society from the macro to the micro. The result, according to Bauman, is “an individualized, privatized version of modernity, with the burden of pattern-weaving and the responsibility for failure falling primarily on the individual’s shoulders” (Bauman, 2000:8). According to Bauman, under modern conditions, it is the individual who must make the primary effort to make sense of social life; larger institutional structures and traditions cannot be relied upon for this task. Bauman’s optimistic view thus challenges the pessimism in Claus Offe’s warning that modernity would be antithetical to self-reflection and self-critique (Bauman, 2000:4-5).

In a similar vein to Bauman, Connolly’s analysis of modernity draws attention to what he sees as the breaking down of traditional identities. Connolly argues that the political culture of cosmopolitan cities, for example, is contingent on the extent to which (1) ‘time is being sped up’ – we do things much faster today than we ever did before (Connolly, 2000:597); and (2) “the [greater] speed at which we perform tasks today—through the agency of modern technology – tends towards softening up universal explanations of life” (Connolly, 2000:609). The ‘speeding up of time’, and the ‘softening up of universal categories’ makes it difficult, indeed, almost impossible to sustain the value and applicability of universal laws. However, Connolly is relatively optimistic that the result will be a cosmopolitan modernity where we live a life that is no longer tied to simplistic, traditional identities with expected or predictable behavior, nor will we discover much value or function in sticking to these simple categories. As such, he argues for a more complex view of social order, one which challenges “the closures of nationalism and civilizopolism with a more rhizomatic or network conception of political culture” (Connolly, 2000:603).

While Connolly is interested in how the speeding up of time causes a breaking down of traditional identities, Brennan argues on the other hand that the global economy has faster and more efficient means of extracting the surplus value of natural substances needed for capitalist production (Brennan, 2000:118). *Exhausting Modernity* builds on her early work on Lacan and history and has at its center, a Lacanian interpretation of the ego in modernity that is “built on the destructive objectification of the other, together with a destructive objectification of knowledge” (Brennan, 2000:34). For Brennan, the objectification of the other and of knowledge in the new political economy is extensively illustrated in environmental degradation and the depleted psychic lives of human beings (Brennan, 2000:34).

Moving on from Brennan’s Lacanian perspective, Anthony Giddens discusses in his book on *Modernity and Self Identity* (1991) the manifold ways in which the self and society are dynamically different from preceding forms of historically-situated social organizations. Like Connolly, Brennan and other academics who have worked on modernity, Giddens’ work seems equally concerned with the reorganization of time and space, seen in the globalizing influence of modernity’s reflexivity. For Giddens, modernity’s reflexivity refers to “the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity and material relations with nature to chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge” (Giddens, 1991:20). It is this ‘chronic revision’ as new information becomes available that makes it difficult, if not impossible for traditions to be sustained.

From this brief survey, we see that while there is some controversy over exactly how 'modern' societies differs from 'pre-modern' or 'traditional' ones, these attempts to theorize modernity all clearly reflect a shared belief: that a fundamental change has taken place in the nature of social life. And despite the differences between these contemporary political and social theorists, it is also generally agreed that a key characteristic of modernity is the rise and spread of the products of rational activity. As Touraine points out (1995:9-10):

It is impossible to describe as 'modern' a society which tries primarily to organize and to act in accordance with a divine revelation or a national essence. But nor is modernity pure change or a mere sequence of events; it means the diffusion of the products of *rational* activity: scientific, technological and administrative activity.... The distinctive feature of Western thought, at the point when it identified most strongly with modernity, was the attempt to move from a recognition of the essential role of rationalization to the broader idea of a *rational society* in which reason would take control of not only scientific and technical activity, but also of the government of human being as well as the government of things.

Thus, the spread of rationality was originally motivated by achievements in science and technology, which then led to a strong belief that rationality could and should also be extended to questions or problems in the social and political arenas. Modernity therefore marks the movement away from a god-centered universe to a man-centered one. It is characterized by an emphasis on logical and secular thought; it seeks exploration and discovery, and controlled attempts to improve, develop and build upon the past. With modernity, the future is not defined in terms of being tied to the past but by learning from and perhaps even breaking with aspects of the past. We will say more in the concluding chapter about the distinction between (simple) modernity and high modernity (Giddens, 1990, 1991; Lash and Urry, 1994), although this distinction will recur in the intervening chapters as well. For now, we simply note that the distinction is typically based on the idea that in late modernity, authoritative knowledge and institutional structures are considered to have a less foundational status, so that there is a greater opening up of the possibility of critical and reflexive monitoring, leading to the rise of various cultural industries (of dress, dance, music, etc) concerned mainly with the production and consumption of cultural objects (Lash and Urry, 1994). Such a conception of late modernity, we emphasize, is still consistent with the notion of modernity as the spread of the products of rational activity; the key difference is that in late modernity, strategies for coping are assumed to fall more directly onto particular individuals or ad hoc communities or cultural 'tribes', given the erosion of institutional authority. While cultural industries are highly developed in the West, they have a much more nascent form in Southeast Asia. In the concluding chapter, though, we briefly explore the possibility that such cultural industries can serve as a venue where indigenous languages can find some social and economic value that allows them to carve out a space in relation to English.

1-2-1 *Modernity & the Modern*

Why must there be a distinction between 'modernity' and 'modern'? To be modern is to be grounded in a perspective, an attitude that separates us from being ancient, from being traditional, from being old-fashioned (Berman, 1982). While modernity refers to a complex societal-level phenomenon, being modern refers to a mindset or perspective of individuals. So, of course, 'being modern' and 'modernity'

share much common ground since they are both built on reason and rationality. The term 'modernity', however, is often used to characterize a phenomenon that individuals and societies must willy-nilly grapple with (e.g. Tomlinson, 1991), that is, the spread of the products of rational activity. The term 'modern', on the other hand, refers to an outlook or attitude that increasingly embraces the secularization of life and its concomitant rationalization.

This spreading of this attitude of being modern was in no doubt propelled by attempts to extend rationality into social and political arenas. But this not only meant that an increasingly secular outlook was coming to predominate, it also meant a breaking down of feudal bonds, partly because rationality was understood to be a natural process that governs individual behavior. The celebration of rationality then required a greater respect for individual autonomy and also opened up a greater expectation of social mobility. This meant a weakening of social structures that immobilized people to permanently ascribed roles, as was the case with the feudal system. But the disappearance of the feudal system created a structural crisis in that different means had to be found to provide a relatively mobile and disparate group of individuals with the sense of belonging to a larger collectivity. While we should be careful not to appeal too easily to some form of Parsonian functionalism, where the rise of nationalism is 'explained' by both the breakdown of feudal ties and the need to maintain some form of social equilibrium, it does seem clear that the feudal system was gradually replaced with a greater emphasis on nationalism where the unity of an 'imaginary community' had to be constructed across class barriers, aided by the development of 'print-capitalism' (Anderson, 1991). The term 'print-capitalism' refers to the trade in books and other printed materials, which resulted in public forms of communication such as newspapers and novels becoming primary channels by which a shared culture and shared interests were being created. This was further aided by the fact that print-capitalism also contributed to the creation of 'mechanically reproduced print languages' so that certain vernaculars were eliminated or modified in favor of others, leading to the formation of standardized languages which were then able to reach ever more diverse groups of individuals. In Anderson's words (1991:46; see also Loomba, 1998:186), "the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation". As Anderson makes clear, language is an integral part of modernity. A major challenge thus posed by modernity is both the construction and maintenance of the nation-state, and any attempt to answer this challenge must come to terms with the role of language in the nationalist imagination, both as a medium or channel for the creation of the imagined community, as well as a representation of the community's sense of identity.

1-3 THE NATIONALIST IMAGINATION

Partha Chatterjee's (1993) work is a response, from a post-colonial perspective, to Anderson's (1991) argument that the nation is an imagined community. The motivation for Chatterjee's work stems from the question of whose imagination dominates in such nationalist imaginings. According to Chatterjee, Anderson's major contribution is to demonstrate that a nation is not predetermined by the kind of language spoken or by the race of the people. Rather, a nation is a product of the

imagination. But Chatterjee takes issue with Anderson's point that this process of imagining nations into existence, having taken place in Western Europe, the Americas, and the former Soviet empire "had supplied for all subsequent nationalisms a set of modular forms from which nationalist elites in Asia and Africa had chosen the ones they liked" (Chatterjee, 1993:5). As Chatterjee points out, the implication of Anderson's argument is that the kinds of nationalisms imagined by the nations of Asia and Africa are secondary, in the sense of being derived from forms already created in the West. In specifying the nature of his objection to Anderson's argument, he says:

If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine? History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized. (Chatterjee, 1993:5)

This response suggests that social institutions and practices may be divided into two domains: the material and the spiritual. Therefore:

The material is the domain of the outside, of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. In this domain, then, Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture. This formula is, I think, a fundamental feature of anticolonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa. (Chatterjee, 1993:6)

In the material domain, Chatterjee freely admits to the superiority of the West, and suggests that for Asian and African nations to achieve success in this domain, the only option is to imitate the relevant 'Western skills'. But it is in the spiritual domain where freedom and autonomy are still possible, where, according to him, the preservation of the distinctness of an Asian or African culture will allow these nations to claim an autonomous form of nationalism.

We think Chatterjee's position to be too rigid, and hence, problematic. The separation between the material and the spiritual domains cannot be easily sustained for two reasons. One, there are certain things such as language which may be said to occupy both the spiritual and material domains. For example, English is often seen as the language that provides access to economic development as well as scientific and technological knowledge. But as we will see in our discussion of Singapore, English is claimed by some to also be a mother tongue, a marker of identity. The converse is also attested, where there are attempts to present an Asian language (Mandarin in the case of Singapore and Malay in the case of Malaysia) as not merely being a cultural marker, but also a language of economic development and modernity. Languages in the narratives of Asian modernity may move from the material to the spiritual and vice versa. And on occasion, one and the same language may simultaneously be said to occupy both domains.

Secondly, by acknowledging Western superiority in the material while focusing on the spiritual as the bastion as cultural distinctness, Chatterjee is unable to accommodate narratives where links are made between the two domains so that even activities in the material domain are not merely attempts at imitating the West.

Narratives of modernity in Asia are 'moral-political' projects (Ong, 1999; see below also) where Asian values such as Confucianism do not merely exist in a separate domain from the material. Rather, a crucial ingredient in these narratives is the claim that Asian values actively contribute towards the achievement of economic success and political stability. For example, in a discussion of industrial development in East Asia, Lee Kuan Yew, the first Prime Minister of Singapore, suggests that "the more communitarian values and practices of the East Asians – the Japanese, Koreans, Taiwanese, Hong Kongers, and the Singaporeans – have proven to be clear assets in the catching-up process" (in Gardels, 1995:247). Furthermore, it is not just a matter of creating narrative links between the material and the spiritual. Often, the claim is made that Western 'notions' such as liberal democracy cannot be simply imported wholesale so that there is explicit rejection of any attempt to simply reproduce as faithfully as possible such political institutions. Rather, these institutions are claimed to necessarily take on an Asian inflection in the light of such Asian values. The result is that, contrary to Chatterjee, the material domain, too, and not only the spiritual, is often claimed to be distinct in narratives of Asian modernities.

Because we see the formulation of a language policy as part of a larger nationalist narrative, we are suspicious of any *a priori* binaries such as the one put forward by Chatterjee. To understand such narratives, we also do not believe that there are any grounds for predicting that certain factors (e.g. language, ethnicity, economy) will necessarily be more relevant than others in the construction of such a narrative; different narratives privilege different factors. We believe, however, that the structure of such narratives contain particular recurring relations that are of analytical value. These are the relations that we call 'equivalence', 'displacement' and 'complementarity'. We also believe that an interesting hypothesis can be made concerning the discourses surrounding particular languages. The hypothesis concerns a phenomenon we call 'linguistic instrumentalism'. In the later part of this introduction, we elaborate on these ideas.

1-4 MODERNITY AND MODERNIZATION

As mentioned, part of the inspiration for extending rationality to the social and political arenas was the optimism that its success (in the form of the 'scientific' method) in dealing with technological and scientific problems seemed to promise a way of delivering societies from an assortment of social and material ills. However, the failure of modernity to fulfill its promise resulted in attempts to explicitly theorize about the costs of modernity (Tomlinson, 1991:142-3). Again, not surprisingly, there are disagreements over the exact nature of these costs. According to Marx (1975), modernity engenders alienation, which, through the structures of capitalist domination, refers to the worker's psychological distancing from the product of his/her labor. For Durkheim (1984), the cost of modernity is anomie, where rapid social changes, particularly those brought about by the process of industrialization, lead to a sense of normlessness so that the power of tradition to provide normative guidance or to act as a cultural anchor is weakened. With Weber (1971), it is the 'iron cage' of instrumental reason, where the rationality of means is given priority over the rationality of ends, resulting in a divorce between moral values themselves and the technical means