

English and Liberal Arts in a New Age

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For the last couple of decades English language teaching and learning has quite often been discussed in Japan in relation to such sugar-coated ideas as international communication, globalized economy, and cross-cultural understanding as if English had been proven to be an ideology-free, politically neutral *lingua franca*. However, an in-depth survey of how English is used, taught, studied, and sometimes promoted in many parts of the world will reveal all sorts of communicative and economic inequalities, linguistic power structures, and conflicting interests. For example, postcolonial writers' vengeful claim that English is no longer a possession of their former colonizer but their own language and means for self-expression and a vested interest Britain has in promoting a more or less standardized version of British English, which has been their most profit-making cultural product, are bizarrely and inseparably intertwined in the idea of 'World Englishes'. 'English as an international language [or a global/world language]' is by the same token more of a chimera that may possibly disrupt wholesome cross-cultural interactions than a putative hero of communicative unification. The true value of English language teaching and learning in liberal arts education in Japan, therefore, should consist in acquisition not so much of practical skills of oral and written communication as paradoxically of immunity from all illusions, misunderstandings and misbeliefs concerning this language.