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## Complacent, wrong-headed

**EXPLAINING** Victoria University's gob-smacking decision to chop Chinese language teaching, Vice-Chancellor Elizabeth Harman says the university opted to intensify English as a second language teaching for an "ethnically diverse community" while dropping a key Asian language ("Uni axes foreign languages for English", 5/5). How short-sighted! It seems to reflect the common, complacent and wrong-headed assumption that Asians will all learn to speak English, so Australians don't need Asian languages.

We are entering the "Asian Century", and Australia's largest trading partner is not the US or Europe but ASEAN as a bloc, with China coming second. But Australia — the one Western country in Asia (New Zealand is oriented to the Pacific) — is already the OECD country with the poorest level of second-language skills, and Asian languages are at their lowest ebb in schools and universities since the 1960s.

Yes, enrolments for Asian languages are declining, but Australia's pressing economic and strategic needs mean that the challenge is to reverse this, not to walk away.

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