

OCAC'S Program to Promote Mandarin Learning Cultivation in Europe and the US

A. Taiwan-US cooperation in promoting Mandarin learning with Taiwan characteristics

“Mandarin learning fever” is an important phenomenon in international society and there is ever increasing demand for Mandarin learning across the world, with the number of learners increasing all the time and governments attaching increasing importance to Mandarin education. Many overseas compatriot schools that have been involved for a long time in Mandarin teaching have grasped this wave of Mandarin learning fever and demand and have begun to develop in the direction of linking with the mainstream; they are not limiting students to students of ethnic Chinese origin, with the proportion of non-Chinese students increasing all the time. Consequently, overseas compatriot schools have begun to have an active function in terms of activating local community cultural diversity and promotion of exchange.

In October 2020, the US Federal Government announced the National Security Language Initiative-Youth with emphasis on Mandarin learning opportunities outside of China. With the gradual warming of Taiwan-US relations in recent years, Taiwan and the US signed the Taiwan-US Education Initiative in December, emphasizing and consolidating Taiwan's important role in providing Mandarin learning opportunities for students from the US and other countries.

With Mandarin learning fever spreading around the world, Taiwan's excellent Mandarin education will have more space for promotion round the world, consequently, the Overseas Community Affairs Council (OCAC) has put forward the Taiwan Center for Mandarin Learning program and will encourage overseas compatriot schools in Europe and the U.S apply to establish such centers and cooperate in promoting Mandarin education with Taiwan characteristics in local mainstream society.

B. Taiwan advantages: democratic and free Mandarin teaching and diverse and innovative culture

Language is a tool for exchange and models of thinking and also the base of various values and behavior methods. Countries around the world have established institutions for promoting language and engaging in cultural activities, such as the Goethe-Institut of Germany and the British Council of the UK, which have, in recent years, followed the wave of globalization and actively been promoted outside of the countries; they play an important role in promoting the freedom and cultural diversity of western countries overseas. Taiwan Centers for Mandarin Learning will be based on the foundation built by overseas compatriot schools over many years and Taiwan's innovative and smart teaching advantages, emulating the model of European and North American countries; apart from the teaching model that shares Taiwan's democracy and

freedom and diverse and innovative culture, they will also meet unmet demand for Mandarin learning in European and North American countries.

The democratic system enjoyed by Taiwan and western countries is an universal value. Freedom, diversity, protection of academic freedom and freedom of speech form Taiwan's key competitiveness. The teachers in Taiwan's Mandarin teaching system are autonomous, teaching is flexible, teaching materials are diverse, teaching methods are varied and learning models have been flipped in recent years in combination with smart teaching and digital technology and innovation; all are teaching advantages born under a democratic system and thus fully meet the overseas Mandarin learning requirements of European and North American countries which uphold freedom and democracy.

The intention of the putting forward of the Taiwan-US Education Initiative is to expand Chinese and English teaching opportunities and, at the same time, protect academic freedom. As AIT director Brett Christensen said, Taiwan's Mandarin teaching shouldn't only teach Chinese language, it also should tell the story of Taiwan to US students who are learning Chinese more fully. The story of Taiwan is glorious and eye-catching; it is the story of how the hardworking and self-sacrificing Taiwanese built a vibrant democracy and sound economy and nurtured a highly educated and technically skilled workforce.

C. OCAC promotes Mandarin learning in Europe and North America with three strategies and six pillars

At present there are 1,029 registered overseas compatriot schools in 50 countries that interact frequently with the OCAC; of these, 429 schools are in Europe and North America and more than 600 teachers of Taiwanese extraction teach at mainstream elementary and junior high schools. The OCAC assists schools operate locally and develop soundly by providing diverse measures to frequently-interacted overseas compatriot schools; they also promote the use of traditional character Mandarin to overseas compatriots and people in mainstream society, becoming the best bases for the promotion of Mandarin teaching with Taiwan characteristics overseas.

To take advantage of the excellent opportunity to expand the overseas market today, the OCAC will draw up the Overseas Mandarin Learning Cultivation Program directed at Europe and North America. The following three strategies will be adopted, including: 1) Assist existing overseas compatriot schools establish Taiwan Center for Mandarin Learning; 2) Enhance links with teachers of Taiwanese extraction at mainstream elementary and junior high schools in Europe and the US; as well as encourage teachers at overseas compatriot schools to earn credits toward a teaching license and teach in mainstream elementary or junior high schools; and, at the same time, maintain exchange and cooperation with Mandarin teachers at mainstream schools; 3) Enhance cooperation with Taiwan's Mandarin teaching institutions and smart education industry.

To expand the aforementioned three main strategies, there will also be the six pillars described below: first, through physical and digital methods, nurture US Mandarin teachers, including inviting US Mandarin teachers to come to Taiwan to attend training courses.

No. 2, in terms of teaching materials, as well as the Huayuworld Website, which is extremely popular worldwide, being able to provide teaching materials, the OCAC has three sets of teaching materials that it can provide to US students for Mandarin learning, including 12 books of the bilingual Let's Learn Chinese series and the beginners' textbooks Speak Mandarin in 500 Words and Speak Mandarin in 1000 words. A bilingual teaching material suitable for adults is currently being developed and it is expected that it will be provided to overseas Taiwan Centers for Mandarin Learning in September this year.

No. 3, promoting and sharing the cultural events held by OCAC's culture centers so that US friends can learn Mandarin by getting to know Taiwan's culture; language is a vehicle but more important is the cultural meaning. In the past, the OCAC has held several thousand cultural events in the US; in future, more people in US mainstream society will be invited to attend such events, giving everyone more opportunity to learn about Taiwan.

No. 4, invite US youth learners of Mandarin to attend youth camps, language classes and youth study in Taiwan to give them a more direct experience of Taiwan's culture and life and let them learn Mandarin in a democratic, free and diverse environment.

No. 5, invite US learners of Mandarin to Taiwan to take part in English service camps, in doing so promoting two-way cultural exchange and language learning; on the one hand, in Taiwan it is easier to have deeper Mandarin learning and experience of Taiwan's culture, on the other hand, US students with a grounding in Mandarin can provide English learning guidance to Taiwan's elementary and junior high school students.

No. 6, promote Mandarin teaching and learning through international exchange and competitions. It is planned to hold the Mandarin Teaching International Summit in Taiwan at the end of this year. The OCAC held the Global Overseas Compatriot School Mandarin Speaking Competition last year; 511 teams of students from 159 overseas compatriot schools took part; the US took four of the top five places. The OCAC will also continue to use AI technology and will hold the expanded Global Overseas Compatriot School Student and Foreign Student Mandarin Speaking Competition, Global Overseas Compatriot School Student Essay Competition and the Overseas Compatriot School Students and Overseas Compatriot Students in Taiwan Singing Competition this year. It is hoped that Taiwan's smart education industry and its Mandarin teaching institutions can be joined the network, and resources of the overseas compatriot education system used to implement the goals of the Taiwan-US Education Initiative.

D. Win-win-win

In future, the OCAC will continue to combine the power of industry, government and academia and use Taiwan's Mandarin teaching advantages to help overseas compatriots schools and Taiwan Centers for Mandarin Learning develop. This development will deepen the diverse linkages and wide cooperation between overseas compatriot schools and Taiwan. The aim is to help Taiwan's Mandarin teaching institutions and smart education industry export, to create a win-win-win situation.