



A family of three has become a norm in Taiwan, where birth rates are among the lowest in the world.

raise the quality of life through education, promote environmental protection and sustainable development, and formulate an appropriate immigration policy.

Measures to reverse the falling birth rate include improving pre- and post-natal care, building an environment conducive to child-rearing as well as providing care and birth subsidies. In 2011, a nationwide child care subsidy program was launched for qualifying families with children under 2 years of age. Taipei City also implemented its own package of subsidies that includes birth grants in addition to monthly child care allowances.

Languages

The written language intelligible to speakers of all Sinitic tongues is Chinese, one of the few ideograph-based writing systems still in use on a large scale. While mainland China adopted simplified characters in 1956 in a bid to ameliorate its widespread illiteracy, the ROC continues to employ traditional written characters. Although Mandarin is the official

language of the ROC, large segments of its population speak Holo 河洛語 and Hakka 客語, and Austronesian languages are still used by indigenous peoples. At the same time, the study of foreign languages has taken root as the nation becomes more connected to the world community and as more immigrants have made the ROC their home.

Official Language

Mandarin, known as *Guoyu* 國語 in the ROC, is the nation's official language. To help people learn proper Mandarin pronunciation, the Ministry of Education (MOE) formulated the Mandarin Phonetic Symbols 注音符號 in 1913 as a standard phonetic system. This system, consisting of 37 phonetic symbols and four tone marks, is still taught in schools today.

Over the years, a variety of Romanization styles have been developed to make Chinese phonetics easier to learn. The most popular among these are the Wade-Giles system, the Tongyong Pinyin system 通用拼音 and the Hanyu Pinyin system 漢語拼音. To conform to a global

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convergence spearheaded by the 2006 U.N. Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, the ROC government decided in 2008 to switch to the Hanyu Pinyin system. (For a comparison of different Romanization systems, see Appendix IV.)

With a substantive commitment to language education, the ROC offers some of the best resources in the world for foreigners wishing to study Mandarin. The Mandarin Training Center 國語教學中心, established in 1956 by National Taiwan Normal University 國立臺灣師範大學, was the first institution to offer language courses for foreigners in Taiwan. Today, 30 university-affiliated institutions provide Mandarin programs. Details on Mandarin programs are available on an English-language website set up by the MOE at <http://www.studyintaiwan.org>.

Other Languages

Over the last decade, there has been growing awareness of the importance of preserving Taiwan's rich linguistic heritage. This has led the central and local governments to promote education in Holo, Hakka and Austronesian languages. Since 2001, primary school students have been required to take courses in at least one of these languages.

Holo

Holo is the mother tongue of the Holo population in Taiwan. Among a variety of methods for representing this language in written form, the earliest and most popular one was the Romanization system known as *Pêh-oē-jī* 白話字, which was first introduced by Presbyterian missionaries.

Many attempts have been made in Taiwan over the years to promote a natively formulated written system. The MOE, for instance, unveiled the

Taiwanese Language Phonetic Alphabet 臺灣閩南語音標系統 in 1998. In 2006, the MOE rolled out the Taiwanese Romanization Scheme 臺灣閩南語羅馬字拼音方案 for use in Holo teaching and language textbooks. However, most native speakers of the Taiwanese dialect of Holo remain untrained in reading these systems.

Hakka

The Hakka language in Taiwan has five variants, of which the Sixian 四縣 and Hailu 海陸 dialects are the most widely spoken. Sixian is prevalent in Hakka communities in Kaohsiung City and Miaoli and Pingtung counties; and Hailu is most commonly spoken by the Hakka population of Hsinchu County.

Like Holo, Hakka is primarily an oral language, and fluency in Hakka is becoming increasingly rare among young people in Taiwan. To promote the language, the Council for Hakka Affairs (CHA) 行政院客家委員會 has carried out a number of plans, including creating a database for basic Hakka language materials, publishing dictionaries of the various Hakka dialects, providing funds to schools to teach Hakka and sponsoring research on the Hakka language and culture through university programs.

The CHA also administers language proficiency tests at various levels. In 2010, a record number of over 15,600 people registered for the elementary-level test, which was an increase of 135 percent over the previous year, while some 6,000 registered for the intermediate and high-intermediate levels. The pass rate for the elementary test was 69 percent, and the intermediate and high-intermediate tests 84 percent. Indicative of broad interest in the language, exam passers in 2010 ranged from ages 7 to 84. Nearly 10 percent of the elementary exam takers came from non-Hakka backgrounds.

Indigenous Languages

Taiwan's indigenous languages, classified by linguists as Formosan languages, belong to the same Proto-Austronesian language family as Malay and Hawaiian. A number of Taiwan's indigenous languages were Romanized by Christian missionaries during the Dutch colonial period in the 17th century (see Chapter 3, "History"). A notable example is the writing system developed for the Siraya who used this system for signing contracts with Han people into the 19th century. In 2005, the CIP and the MOE jointly promulgated the Romanization-based Writing Systems for Indigenous Languages 原住民語言書寫系統. To date, these writing systems cover 14 indigenous languages and 42 dialects.

Overall, the number of indigenous language speakers has been declining largely due to an education policy in the second half of the last century that promoted Mandarin and discouraged the use of Holo, Hakka and indigenous languages in schools. As a result, younger generations of students gradually lost fluency in their mother tongues.

To help keep indigenous languages alive, the MOE has included these languages in school curricula while the CIP has conducted proficiency tests. A policy has also been instituted to encourage indigenous students to acquire language certification, whereby a student's high school and university entrance exam score is increased by 35 percent if he or she passes an indigenous language proficiency test.

Foreign Language Education

For decades, English as a foreign language has been a required subject for students in junior and senior high schools in Taiwan. In 2005, English was made compulsory from the third grade. In support of English learning, the MOE commissioned the Language Training and Testing Center 語言訓練測驗中心 to develop tests for five proficiency levels. From its inception in 2000 to 2010, nearly 4.3 million people had taken these exams.

As for alternatives to English, the MOE implemented the Plan for the Promotion of Second Foreign Language Study in Senior High Schools 推動高級中學第二外語教育計畫 in 1999. By the first semester of the 2010-2011 school year, about 530,000 students had taken elective courses under this plan, including Japanese, French, German, Spanish, Korean, Russian, Vietnamese, Indonesian and Latin. The most popular choice in 2010 was Japanese.

Numerous public and private educational institutions provide the public with ample opportunities to learn foreign languages. While the most popular foreign languages taught in Taiwan remain English and Japanese, interest in major European languages has been growing. Also, a rising number of immigrants and guest workers from Southeast Asia has prompted schools to provide courses in such languages as Indonesian, Thai and Vietnamese. These languages were, for the first time, included in the MOE's subsidy program in 2010.

RELATED WEBSITES

- Ministry of the Interior: <http://www.moi.gov.tw>
- Council of Indigenous Peoples: <http://www.apc.gov.tw>
- Taiwan Indigenous Peoples Culture Park: <http://www.tacp.gov.tw>
- Council for Hakka Affairs: <http://www.hakka.gov.tw>
- Ministry of Education: <http://www.moe.gov.tw>
- National Immigration Agency: <http://www.immigration.gov.tw>
- Council for Economic Planning and Development: <http://www.cepd.gov.tw>