

Scholarly Ties, Cooperative Research, Academic Dialogue, and International Student Exchanges in US–Taiwan Relations

By Dr. Randall L. Nadeau, PhD

On December 3, 2020, the American Institute in Taiwan and the Taiwan Economic and Representative Office in the United States (TECRO) signed the [US-Taiwan Education Initiative](#) (台美教育倡議), “aimed at expanding access to Chinese and English language instruction, while safeguarding academic and intellectual freedom.” This agreement—while specifying language study—is part of broader efforts by both governments to strengthen educational and cultural exchanges between the United States and Taiwan, especially in light of worsening relations between the United States and the People’s Republic of China (PRC), exacerbated by China’s Zero-Covid policies that have effectively closed the border to American students and scholars for over two years.

Dr. Randall L. Nadeau, PhD, Executive Director, Foundation for Scholarly Exchange (Fulbright Taiwan), explains the importance of “strengthen[ing] educational and cultural exchanges between the United States and Taiwan, especially in light of worsening relations between the United States and the People’s Republic of China.”

The Foundation for Scholarly Exchange (Fulbright Taiwan) is one of the beneficiaries of warm US-Taiwan relations, and has seen explosive growth in both funding and grantee numbers, doubling its budget and awardees over the past four years. As Executive Director of the Foundation since August 2019, I have overseen a period of unprecedented expansion, with increased stipends for Taiwan scholars and students in the United States. This expansion includes a number of new awards, including the Critical Language Enhancement Awards (CLEA), master’s degree scholarships for English- and Chinese-immersion programs, and a policy debate coach/trainer award. Lastly, Fulbright Taiwan’s English Teaching Assistant award is the second largest in the world, with teachers working in 13 of Taiwan’s 22 cities and counties, many in remote and underserved communities.

The Fulbright Program enjoys cooperation agreements with over 160 countries worldwide. The larger programs are administered by “commissions” or foundations. The Foundation for Scholarly Exchange (Fulbright Taiwan) was founded in 1957, and ratified by an *Educational and Cultural Exchange Agreement between the Republic of China and the United States of America* (中美教育文化交換計劃協定) in 1964. The Program coexisted with the Fulbright Program in

China until President Trump terminated the China and Hong Kong programs in July 2020, on the heels of the withdrawal of the Peace Corps in January. Though there have been discussions in Congress and in the Biden Administration about restoring the Fulbright Program in China, no concrete steps have been taken to date. Of the 42 American scholars and students whose 2020- 2021 China plans were thwarted by the program’s suspension, 35 shifted their grants to Taiwan and worked in Taiwanese universities and research institutes on research projects related to the mainland and to Chinese history, literature, and social sciences. For the 2021-2022 and 2022- 2023 cohorts, more and more applications are related to traditional sinological research, making Taiwan the first alternative for historical, literary, and sociological research on the mainland.

Other than the CLEA award, other State Department and university programs that have relocated to Taiwan include the National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y), Chinese Flagship Programs, the Gilman and Boren Fellowships, the Harvard Beijing Academy, and the Teachers of Critical Languages Program (TCLP). Filling the gap created by [the closure of more than 100 Confucius Institutes](#) in the United States, Taiwan’s Overseas Community Affairs Council (OCAC) has opened 15 Mandarin education centers in the United States, and the TCLP and Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant awards will send over 50 Mandarin educators to

American primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities this fall—an increase from 3 in 2011. Inter-university educational exchange agreements are booming, and Taiwan’s Ministry of Education will send a top-level delegation to the NAFSA (Association of International Educators) annual conference in Denver in early June 2022.

The Foundation for Scholarly Exchange is the most visible platform for educational and cultural exchange between the United States and Taiwan, and now sponsors a wide variety of programs, supported by revenues from the US Department of State (through Congressional appropriation); Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Culture; local cities and counties; and private donors. Among the programs:

Taiwan-based Programs for American Scholars and Students

- Up to 12 Senior Research and Lecture Grants per year in the arts and humanities, social sciences, and STEM fields
- Fully funded 2- and 3-year master’s degrees with 18 university partners in Global Health, Neuroscience, Creative Industries, International Relations, Brand and Fashion Management, Indigenous Studies, Chinese Medicine, Mandarin Education, and more
- Critical Language Enhancement Awards for intensive Mandarin study
- 150 English Language Assistants in 13 cities and counties
- Debate Coach/Trainer awards in cooperation with 10 senior high schools and Taiwan’s competitive debate community Cooperative agreements with Taiwan’s Ministry of Education in primary, secondary, and tertiary professional teacher development, TEFL certification, and mental health and inter-cultural communication awards
- Semester- and short-term tailored study abroad programs in partnership with 50+ Taiwan and US colleges and universities

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US-based Programs for Taiwanese Scholars and Students

- Scholar-in-Residence Program: placing Taiwanese scholars to teach in US institutions
- Foreign Language Teaching Assistants: Mandarin teachers in more than 50 American colleges and universities and primary/secondary schools
- Non-academic Professional Awards in cooperation with Taiwan’s Ministry of Culture in arts administration, museum management, and educational exchange
- More than 30 fully funded 2- to 5-year master’s and PhD degree-seeking grants in Humanities, Social Sciences, and STEM fields
- Academic research awards for teachers and scholars from primary/secondary schools and colleges and universities (Distinguished Award in Teaching)

There is no doubt that the suspension of the Fulbright Program in China is part of a larger trend of weakened US-China ties that were built painstakingly over a generation—a significant set-back to the vitally important work of mutual understanding. For American students and scholars, Taiwan may take the position that it occupied for an earlier generation of researchers, as the primary source of Mandarin language education, and of both Taiwan Studies and Sinology. Understanding China must continue to be a central strategic and inter-cultural objective, and Taiwan—in spite of its distance from the Mainland—should strengthen its role as a cultural bridge between the US and the broader Sinosphere. This is one of the core values of the Fulbright Program for over 65 years.

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