

## I study Mandarin at school

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✘ The world is not just outside of our front door. And it is not even beyond the borders. It is everywhere. Therefore, in this world, Italian schools are longing to keep up with changes; in their role of educators they have to accept the challenges of globalisation. Taking the chance of the school-reform that is changing completely the programmes and courses, the Gadda Rosselli high school in Gallarate is launching its first innovation: among the foreign languages that will be taught from September, there will also be Chinese.

This will not just be taught during afternoon classes for interested students, but in regular classes in the morning. "Next year we are going to start also the language school education path," explains the headmaster Giovanni Ballarini, "so we wondered how we could shape our school in order to make it more suitable with the future scenarios. In our discussion with the Province, it came out that there is a need to start a class where they learn also Chinese, not just the language (that is complicated enough), but also the culture."

Therefore, after some meetings with the regional institutions and the school management, the details about this new class of the tourism course are being defined, and it will offer the opportunity to learn Chinese, but it will maintain the other European languages. "We clearly understand the difficulties that we will have to face, also because it is one of the first attempts and we have to define the syllabus, the number of hours and the professors that we will need. In order to guarantee the certification, we will start a class of 66 hours per year (two hours per week), but we would like to increase them to 99 very soon".

At an international level, China is encouraging the diffusion of its languages and cultures: "A new sensibility is spreading and it concerns also the University world. With regard to us, we think that the proximity of Malpensa airport, but also the presence of an industrial sector that is projected toward the Asian giants, requires an adjustment of the education."

The discussion within these high school institute has begun: they talk about contents, hours, but also teachers; "It's a tricky issue: we are evaluating whether it is better to search for teachers who have studied in our universities or in theirs".

And it is the teachers chapter that animates the discussions of the the "Montale" school of Tradate where the teaching of Arabic and Chinese has taken place for several years now: "Our children" – said Professor Donatella Iemallo – have the opportunity to choose as well as English, between German and French and between Arabic and Chinese. So, like this until their 4th year they experience languages and

cultures from different and distant worlds. Students choose these languages to deepen their knowledge of worlds so far apart from ours, whilst parents think they are useful skills for the future."

In the projects of the president Calogero Montagne there is a further enhancement of these courses to the extent that he has become leader of a network of schools committed to implementing the urgent request of the Ministry that wants to expand the range of languages offered to students (English, a second European language and a third option with foreign Chinese and Arabic in pole position). The only hesitation concerns, then, the teachers: in structures that are already full, where you are managing the policy of labour cuts, innovating the educational offering so radically innovative is certainly not easy.

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