

How China's Confucius Centers affects Cameroon's Culture

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of China's Confucius centers on Cameroon's culture; specifically it analyzes Cameroon's languages, foods, music and art works .it also examines how China's Confucius centers influences Cameroon culture. Cameroon has a rich and diverse culture made up of various ethnic groups, languages and customs. Recently the opening of Confucius centers in Cameroon has had a great impact on the culture of Cameroon as the Confucius centers aims at teaching Chinese language and also the various aspects of Chinese culture such as food, dressing, kung Fu, art works and paintings to its students. This has therefore led to an increase in the number of youths, workers, organizations and enterprises who are enrolling into the Confucius centers in the hope of having a better life tomorrow. Never the less Cameroonians still hold closely to their culture and trying hard to keep the culture alive as they still practice some cultural values inherited from their fore fathers.

Keywords: China, Confucius centers, Culture, Cameroon, Kung Fu association, Language

1. Brief introduction of Cameroon history

The Cameroon culture is an amalgamation of the traditions and customs of the Cameroon people. Different aspects of the culture of Cameroon are witnessed in the language, literature, music, art, religion and cuisine of the country. Cameroon language constitutes of various indigenous languages spoken by the ethnic groups and French and English being the official languages. The food, clothing, arts, literature, artifacts, and the popular Cameroon music, Makossa, all form parts of Cameroon culture.

1.1 British and French influence on Cameroon's language.

Cameroon has distinct regional, cultural, religious, and political traditions as well as ethnic variety. The division of the country into British- and French-ruled League of Nations mandates after World War I created Anglophone and Francophone regions. The English-speaking region consists of the Southwest and Northwest provinces, where Pidgin English (Wes Cos) is the lingua franca and English is taught in school. The educational system and legal practices derive from those of England. The French-speaking region consists of the remaining eight provinces, where French is the lingua franca, the French school system is used, and the legal system is based on the statutory law of continental Europe. Besides French and English been the official languages in Cameroon, there are approximately 230 languages spoken in the territory. These include 55 Afro-Asiatic languages, two Nilo-Saharan languages, 4 Ubangian languages, and 169 Niger–Congo languages. This latter group is divided into one Senegambian language (Fulfulde), 28 Adamawa languages, and 142 Benue–Congo languages (130 of which are Bantu languages).

1.2 Food and dining etiquette

Furthermore, food and dining etiquette is an important aspect of Cameroon's culture. The sharing of food and drinks is one of the major ways to demonstrates hospitality and trust. Social support networks among kin and friends, particularly between country folk and their urban relatives, are held together symbolically with gifts of cooked and uncooked food.

The major staple foods are root crops such as cassava and coco yams, plantains; maize, sorghum, millet, rice and pasta. These foods may be boiled, pounded, fried; or most commonly they are made into porridge. Sauces are mostly made of tomatoes, peanuts, nuts and some traditional spices. Cameroon is blessed with a wide range of vegetables such as Amaranth (greens), okra, tomatoes squashes, garden huckleberry, eru, African eggplants are common. Hot peppers, onions, ginger, garlic and are popular condiments. Dried or fresh fish or meat may be included in the sauce.

In many regions, men and guests eat before women and children. Hand washing is part of the etiquette of meals. Whether from a separate dish or a common pot, a small ball of porridge is formed by three fingers of the right hand and then dipped in sauce. Westernization has led families to eat together around a common table, using separate place settings and cutlery. Cameroonians are somehow formal and believe good table manners demonstrate respect. Some of these table manners are; when eating there should be little or no talking, no clearing of throats and no spitting. When in doubt, watch what others do and emulate their behavior. Hierarchy dictates that the eldest person is the first to take food from the communal bowl

1.3 Religion

In terms of religion Cameroon religion comprises of a number of religions including Islam, Christianity along with several indigenous religions. The Constitution of Cameroon promotes freedom of religion. As a result the citizens are free to practice any religion of their choice. Cameroonians have a variety of religious beliefs, and many individuals combine beliefs and practices of world religions with those of their own culture groups. Approximately 53 percent of the population is members of Christian denominations, about 25 percent practice mainly "traditional" religions, and approximately 22 percent are Muslim. Most Christians live in the southern areas, and most Muslims in the north. Christian missions constituted an informal second layer of colonialism. Traditional religions are systems of practices and beliefs that adapt to changing social conditions. Most involve the veneration of ancestors and the belief that people, animals, and natural objects are invested with spiritual power.

1.4 Art works

Furthermore arts work Cameroon is blessed with a lot of craftsmen and artists. The Cameroon Grassland is one of many places in Cameroon where there is a high percentage of craftsmen and artists. The western culture also has an impact on Cameroon culture, but that notwithstanding a majority of Cameroonians continue to follow the traditions of their ancestors. Many combine the new with the old, creating a vibrant culture.

2. The influence of Confucius Centers on Cameroon culture

Cameroon culture is gradually being influenced by the coming of the Chinese culture mainly through the establishment of the Confucius institute. The Confucius Institute programme was founded in 2004 to promote Chinese culture on the international scene. It draws its values from the Communist Party of China and has seen its presence throughout the world surge to about 480 schools as of December 2014, representing nearly half of its target of 1,000 institutes by the year 2020. This rapid expansion within a short period has coincided with the steady rise of China as an emerging global superpower and reflects a long-term strategy aimed at securing the country's growing influence abroad and fashioning its cultural imprint into the world order.

2.1 Curriculum

The first Confucius Center in Cameroon was founded on the 9th November, 2007. In December 1995, China and Cameroon made a cooperation to found a Chinese Language Training Center in Cameroon. The sponsor of China was the Zhejiang Normal University (ZNU) and the sponsor of Cameroon was the University of Yaoundé II. The center was founded at the International Relationship Institute of Cameroon. In 2007, the Chinese Language Training Center was upgraded to the Confucius Institute which has 7 teaching centers. Since the foundation of the Confucius Institute, the promotion of Chinese Language and culture in Cameroon came to a new step. Since the foundation of the Center, the Center in Cameroon had delivered the Chinese programs for more than 20,000 talents from Cameroon and other African countries. The Confucius Institute also enroll students from all works of life and holds the training classes on Chinese culture which has a huge impact and is praise as the "model embodies of South-South Cooperation". So far, they have set up 15 language teaching centers in Yaoundé, Douala, and Maroua, from universities, primary and secondary schools, ministries, organizations and enterprises.

As of November 2013, the number of enrolled Chinese language learners totals almost 6,500. Confucius Institute (in IRIC) also has its own library with a collection of over 20,000 books, which is open to Chinese learners for free. The Confucius Center in Cameroon offers language courses like Chinese major undergraduate course, Chinese as an optional course for university, secondary, and primary students, Chinese course for government officials, and Chinese training program for managers. Meanwhile, various Chinese cultural training courses, including Taijiquan, calligraphy, paper-cutting, Chinese painting, traditional Chinese opera and skills of traditional Chinese massaging are available.

Furthermore the institution also organizes HSK (Chinese Proficiency Test) which is an international standardized exam that tests and rates Chinese language proficiency. It assesses non-native Chinese speakers' abilities in using the Chinese language in their daily, academic and professional life. It consists of a writing test and a speaking test (HSKK), which are independent of each other. According to regulations by China's Ministry of Education, foreign students can enroll in degree-granting major courses in a Chinese university/college based on their HSK test results. The HSK results are essential to applying for scholarship. In 2013, Confucius Institute has granted scholarship for further study in China to 18 Cameroonian students who have passed HSK Level 3 and/or above, the most in number ever in Cameroon.

2.2 Extra curriculum cultural activities

Besides, the institute carry out various extracurricular cultural activities, including the Spring Festival celebrations, Lantern Festival performance, calligraphy contest, Chinese gourmet festival and Wushu competition (martial arts) for instance on May 23th this year the Confucius Institute at the University of Yaoundé II and Chinese Kung Fu Association of Cameroon hosted the "Chinese Kung Fu Day" at Siantou University. Members of Chinese Kung Fu Association of Cameroon and teachers and students from the Confucius Institute at the University of Yaoundé II attended the activity (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Members of the Kung Fu Association of the Confucius Institute, Yaoundé.(shown below)



Figure 1: Members of the Kung Fu Association of the Confucius Institute, Yaoundé.

The Confucius Institute at the University of Yaoundé II in Cameroon organized a "Chinese Open Day" program Wednesday to enrich students' knowledge on the Chinese culture like paper cutting, calligraphy, tea making and dumpling making. Foods like dumpling and Chinese noodles are eaten on such occasions. For example, during the spring festival in 2010 the Confucius institute in Cameroon organized activities aimed at experiencing Chinese culture. Apart from making the Chinese dumpling, they also prepared more than 10 kinds of Chinese dishes. This activity improved the friendship of Confucius Institute with its teaching centers, and also made the students experience the Chinese cuisine culture.

2.3 Summer camps

Also the Confucius institute every year organizes summer camps at the University of Yaoundé II (IRIC), offering language course and courses of traditional Chinese cultural skills. The summer camp aims at enriching Cameroonian students' life and increasing their understanding of China. For example, on September 29, 2010, a two-week summer camp was successfully completed by the Confucius Institute at the University of Yaoundé II. The camp, a true native one, opened on September 16 at Confucius Institute. Twelve society leaders from the University of Yaoundé I took part in the camp. To enable students to better experience Chinese and to feel traditional Chinese culture, Chinese teacher Yu Hongfei, not only taught the basic Chinese, but also carefully prepared a series of cultural feasts, such as an intense "folder peanut Competition", an elegant tea ceremony, watching kung fu movies, singing Peking Opera, trying Chinese knots, practicing Chinese calligraphy, tasting Chinese food and learning about traditional festivals. Campers felt the colorful Chinese culture, and had learned a lot.

2.4 Scholarships

Moreover "Chinese Bridge" Competition, Chinese proficiency competition, is another important platform for Cameroonian students to learn Chinese language and know about China, and a bridge to exchange minds between young people in China and Cameroon. Contents of the Competition include Chinese language competence, knowledge about China, Chinese cultural skills and integrated language skills. Contestants first participate in preliminary contests, the final winners of which qualify for the second-rounds and finals held in China. The winners in China will be awarded scholarship for study in China. In 2013, the champion of Cameroon Finals, PRISCA TELIANE, won second prize, among top 15 in the Finals in China, which was the best result achieved by Cameroonian contestants.

Also, The Confucius institute in china offers scholarships to Cameroonian students under "Confucius china studies Program" to help foster deep understanding of China and the Chinese culture among young generations from around the world, enable the prosperous growth of China studies, promote the sustainable development of Confucius Institutes, and enhance the friendly relationship between China and the rest of the world.

Moreover, Confucius teachings on the 5 virtues which are; **Jen** – goodwill, empathy, generosity, **Yi** – rightness, duty as guardians of nature and humanity, **Li** – right conduct and propriety, demonstrating your inner attitude with your outward expressions, **Chih** – wisdom, **Hsin** – faithfulness and trustworthiness and the five relationships which include; Father/Son, Ruler/Citizen, Husband/Wife, Older Brother/Younger Brother, Friend/Friend are evident amongst most Confucius students in Cameroon. As these virtues and relationships are being taught to them in the various Confucius centers. Therefore, incorporating it as a way of life.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, China Confucius institute in Cameroon is playing a leading role in spreading Chinese culture throughout the Cameroon society. This could be evidenced through the teaching of Chinese language to students in universities, ministries, organizations, enterprises, secondary schools and even in primary schools. Following the corrupt nature of our government the majority of the youths are leaving the country to other countries like China, USA, and Europe. Learning Chinese language and culture in Cameroon is increasing everyday as the youths sees it as a greater opportunity to easily further their studies in china through a scholarship or to easily gain employment into a Chinese company back home. Confucius institute also teaches students on how to cook some Chinese traditional dishes, this is usually done during Chinese festival like spring festivals. The Chinese dining etiquette such as the use of chop sticks is also perform during such occasions. The Chinese Kung Fu (martial art) has creep so deeply into Cameroon culture as most youths and children finds it fascinating to practice it. Most Cameroonian parents like their children to be taught the Chinese Kung Fu. Moreover Chinese paintings and artworks can also be seen in the various Confucius centers in Cameroon and students also participate in Chinese paintings and artworks.

From the above analyses it could be seen that the Confucius institute is widely spreading the Chinese culture in Cameroon through the domains of language, scholarships, food, Chinese paintings, art works, kung fu, music and dressing.

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