



With Learning Chinese, a Dose of Indoctrination

OE Watch Commentary: English has an increasingly strong rival on the African continent for the new language many want to learn...Chinese. As the accompanying excerpted article from the website *African Arguments* explains, an increasing number of Africans, especially those who have or want to have business with Chinese companies, are lining up for Mandarin lessons. With trade between Africa and China growing rapidly, as well as large numbers of Chinese manufacturers setting-up shop in Africa, many Africans feel that learning Chinese will open up new opportunities for them.

Catering to much of this burgeoning quest for language lessons are schools affiliated with the Confucius Institute, which is overseen by what is known as Hanban, an arm of the Chinese Ministry of Education. Both Australia and the US have accused some of these Chinese language schools of spying, propaganda, and censorship, but that has not stopped Africa from allowing and even embracing them. Presently, there are nearly 50 Confucius Institutes – schools that are part of the Confucius Institute, a trademarked name – on the continent, with that number likely to significantly increase in the coming years.

While language training is ostensibly the goal of the institute, a certain amount of indoctrination in Chinese thinking is inevitable. This appears to be quite acceptable to many Africans, as reflected by a pedagogically questionable, but culturally revealing comment from an official with Tanzania's Ministry of Education, who, in urging Tanzanians to learn Mandarin, stated they would also “acquire the technological knowledge and skills of the Chinese who are very successful in this area.” That push to learn Chinese was just one of many from the Tanzanian government, as it actively fosters increased bilateral cooperation with China.

There is another route for Africans eager to learn Chinese besides studying at a Confucius Institute in Africa...attend school in China. Interestingly, more English-speaking African students now choose to study in China than in English-speaking countries such as the US or England. Scholarships and generally low tuition costs have helped such students choose China over the other locations. The Confucius Institute, as a form of soft power, has made considerable inroads in Africa in the last few years. It has not needed to push its way in; instead, many Africans, including their governments, are pulling it into their nations. They recognize the increasing importance the Chinese government, Chinese businesspeople, and the Chinese language will play on the continent. Unfortunately, however, the article did not answer one question...To what extent will this be at the expense of learning English? **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“The Chinese are coming here to do business and they don't speak English.”

Source: Claire van Den Heever, “It started as hype: Chinese spreads fast in Africa as language of success,” *African Arguments*, 25 June 2018. <http://africanarguments.org/2018/06/25/started-hype-chinese-spreads-fast-africa-language-success/>

“I read that, by 2050, China will be number one in the world,” he says. “The Chinese are coming here to do business and they don't speak English.”

Speaking at the launch of a pilot programme in Dar es Salaam in February 2016, a Tanzanian Education Ministry official urged citizens to learn Mandarin. “If you learn Chinese language and culture well, you will also acquire the technological knowledge and skills of the Chinese who are very successful in this area,” he said.

“More people speak Chinese than any other language; if I can speak to the majority of the world's people, I can support or disagree neatly with more people,” says one student.

“Considering Zimbabwe is now trading immensely with China, knowing their language will break down communication barriers when conducting business,” adds another.



Confucius Institute Logo.

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Confucius Institute at Seneca College in Canada.

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