

Chinese Hanban corner Launched at knls Nairobi Area Library

The Kenya National Library Service (knls) Nairobi Area Branch hosted the Launch of the Chinese Hanban Corner at the Maktaba Hall on 28th April 2015. The successful event brought together the Chinese language teaching institutions, partners from the French Embassy, government officials, knls Library staff, library patrons, media and the general public. The event began with the visitors getting a tour of the knls Nairobi Area Library, National Library Division, Book Processing Department and a tour of the Upcoming New Library. This was followed by the Launch of the Corner, entertainment, speeches and an interactive session where visitors were able to network and sample the information materials available at the Corner. All the key guests present applauded knls and Hanban for the establishment of the corner, which they said was a great resource for those who want to learn the Chinese Language.

Earlier in the year 2008, the Chinese Government through the Chinese Embassy in Nairobi partnered with Kenya National Library Service (knls) in the setting up of a Chinese corner, where they donated some books. With the new partnership with Hanban, knls has received lots of information materials targeting all audiences at the Library. Further, the information materials received from Hanban also include Chinese – Kiswahili translations which is even friendlier to more library patrons. Hanban funded the acquisition of 300 Chinese titles and a variety of other information materials ranging from the basic Chinese– to new language learners – to advanced level books. The event's Master of Ceremony who is also a Librarian Mr Pancras Kimaru, in passing mentioned renowned philanthropist Andrew Carnegie as having said that libraries can be a source of international peace and propagation of education.

During the speeches, Dr. Milcah Chokah the Director of the Confucius Institute at Kenyatta University spoke in part on the need for Kenyans to learn the Chinese language, a reason she cited made her and others lobby the government to introduce the study of Chinese Language in the secondary education curriculum. Guo Hong, her counterpart from the University of Nairobi's Confucius institute which is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year, also gave emphasis to the same. Mr Richard Atuti, the Kenya National Library Services Director said it was a global trend to promote language and cultural relationships. During his speech, he also spoke on the importance of Kenyans knowing their dialects as much as they wanted to learn a foreign one. The Chinese language which is taught in Kenya in different proficiency levels in accordance with the Chinese HSK system would be ideal for those wishing to teach or study in China, do business with China, dealing with Chinese visitors/Customers among others. Locally, opportunities are in translation, trading, travel and tours and also in the construction industry.

China Hanban, through China Educational Imports and Export Corporation Ltd (CEPIEC) sought for knls collaboration to rejuvenate the current Chinese corner with additional Chinese information resources. This culminated into signing of an agreement between Hanban and the Knls Director, Mr Richard Atuti late 2014. Hanban is committed to developing Chinese language and culture teaching resources and making its services available worldwide, thus meeting the demands of overseas Chinese learners to the outmost degree and contributing to global cultural diversity and harmony.

Unlike the earlier collection donated by the Chinese Government through the Chinese Embassy in Nairobi, which mainly covered Chinese culture and social life, history and traditional medicine, the new stock targets persons learning Chinese language at all levels. This will go along way in providing the much needed support to several institutions and colleges in Kenya which teaching the Chinese language. Already Confucius Institutes have been established in leading universities in Kenya like the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University which have a high enrolment of Chinese language learners. Apart from university partnerships, Local Language teaching Colleges also offer Chinese language teaching programs. One such successful college is the Nairobi based Air Travel and Tours Training College whose students have Chinese as a major foreign language in their course program. To display their mastery of the language, students from the college presented a popular Kenyan melody, " *Jambo bwana,.....Kenya yetu hakuna matata*" translated in Chinese language. This moved and stimulated the audience who requested to be taught basic Chinese language and suddenly Maktaba hall was filled with Chinese speakers.

The partnership between Hanban and Kenya National Library Service shall indeed create an avenue for all to access Chinese language books and information resources even after they are through with their language studies since the library is open to all. Guests during the event praised knls for its efforts in ensuring that Kenyans access useful information that shapes their lives. The event also attracted personnel from the French Cultural Center who were happy to see the unity brought about by collaboration.

During this ceremony, the knls Director who was the Chief Guest, Mr Richard Atuti, paid tribute to the long term Sino/Kenya Cooperation which has seen many knls staff access higher education in China. He thanked Hanban for rejuvenating the Chinese corner and appealed to other countries to consider opening their corners in the knls, now that the world is a global village due the technological advancement and the ever narrowing digital divide He hinted that the new library under construction will dedicate a whole floor to language development where space will be set aside for different nationality corners.

While concluding, he appealed to library users young and old, business people and all members of the public to utilize the services at the Chinese corner to perfect their communication skills with the Chinese, who are currently the major investors in our country and in Africa at large. Over 150 visitors attended the event and most of them promised to make good use of the materials during the interactive session.