

KUNGFU MOVIES AS DRIVER OF CHINA-AFRICA CULTURAL EXCHANGES: CASE STUDY OF CAMEROON

Taling Tene Rodrigue*

Zhejiang Normal University, China.

ABSTRACT: This article put forward the interest of African youth for Kungfu Movies, highlights the driver's role and the cross-cultural communicative competences of Kungfu Movies in strengthening the cultural exchanges and boosting the China-Africa Movie Cooperation. The content of this paper relies on the author's previous research and surveys conducted on 197 Cameroonian residents and fans of cinema in the cities of Douala, Yaounde and Bafoussam. But also, on scientific journals and articles as well as official reports most of which are available online. Cameroon is used as case study. The article suggests the "Sino-African Kungfu Movies" as new approach for the China-Africa Movie Cooperation. Namely adapting Kungfu Movies in the Sino-African cultural context by associating Some African martial arts styles, traditional wrestling and war dances with Chinese martial arts styles, and so come up with an innovative style of Sino-African actions movies" in which Africans and Chinese will work together for the common prosperity of their cultures.

KEYS WORDS: Kungfu Movies, China-Africa Cultural Exchanges, Sino-African Kungfu Movies, Cameroon

Date of Publication: 5th January 2022

Ijamact Unique ID: IJM11054073

1. A SHORT BACKGROUND STORY OF CHINA-AFRICA CULTURAL EXCHANGES

Cultural exchanges are dialogues between minds, communications of sentiments and ties of friendship between people. Cultural exchanges between different countries help to enhance mutual understanding and promote win-win cooperation. In human history, cultural exchanges began with the very emergence of culture. Africa is known to be the origin of Mankind, and together with China both are cradles of human civilizations with long histories and splendid cultures. Cultural exchanges between China and Africa can be traced back to a distant past. In fact, "As early as 2000 years ago in the Han dynasty period, China and Africa got to know each other and began indirect trade relations. In 1405-1433, the Ming dynasty navigator Zheng He sailed westward through the Indian Ocean and beyond for seven times, out of which he reached the African coast four times. Nowadays, the story of Zheng He's voyage is still counted in countries such as Kenya. The foundation of New China in 1949 opened up a new era of China-Africa relations. In May 1956, China's establishment of diplomatic ties with Egypt opened up diplomatic relations between new China and African countries." (Assistant foreign minister of the People's Republic of China, Zhai Jun 2009). However, the Cooperation between China and African countries has often been portrayed as an economic one. Despite multiple exchanges in the areas of culture and knowledge production, not much is written about Chinese culture in Africa (and vice versa) or knowledge production interaction between both China and African countries (Mulinda 2015). Since the end of the 20th century, the China-Africa cooperation has been gradually oriented and rationalized; more attention has been devoted in the field of cultural exchanges and cooperation. Especially in the areas of culture and education (Yang Lihua 2013). In the past five decades, relations between China and Africa have grown in leaps and bounds. This relationship has gone beyond political and economic ties, to cultural exchanges, deepening friendship between the two sides (Mwongeli 2013). At present days, the cultural exchanges between china and Africa have reached a new level and can be summed up in the following points (Chinese minister of culture 2014):

- (a) the frequent inter-governmental high-level visits. Only between 1997 and 2000, China and African countries have exchanged more than 200 government cultural delegations including ministers and cultural celebrities.
- (b) Performing arts groups visits. In the past few decades, performing arts groups such as Acrobatic Troupes, National Ballets, Folk Art Troupes visits between China and African countries amounted to hundreds of thousands of people.

- (c) Art exhibitions. In recent years, China and African countries have mutually Held art exhibitions of all types and sizes up to a hundred times.
- (d) Cultural institutions are increasing in Africa, such as the Confucius Institute in Cameroon, Egypt etc., the cultural centers established in Benin, Mauritius, the Africa division of the China Central Television's in Kenya (CCTV Africa) and the Martial arts museums established in different African country etc. In china, more and more Chinese students have started to study the African culture in universities and primary schools such as Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua QiuBing school, etc. Special cultural events like "Culture Day", "Film Week" and book fairs, etc have been organized. For instance, the "Algerian Film Week", the "Tunisian culture Exhibition" to the Chinese audience, the "Chinese film week", "Chinese culture month", "Chinese book Fair" to the African audience.

It is clear that China and Africa have enjoyed a long history of cultural exchanges, and that the booming and diversity of cultural exchanges between China and African countries in recent decades has deepening the ties between both parties and open the gate to people-to-people communication and understanding. But we can notice a lack of cooperation in the sector of Cinema and movies productions. In fact, it is not very common to find contemporary Chinese movies in African cinemas. Even though a considerable step was made by Bruce Lee with his series of Kungfu Movies as well as many Kungfu related movies productions that had followed the trend that epoch, still European and American movies remain dominant in the African local cinema. "As film workers, it is our unshakable responsibility to convey the correct information to Africa through movie and TV products." (FOCAC Archives 2016) said Lu Xiaoxiu, former head of the African group of the Company for Export and Import of Movies when he was talking about the process of setting up an African group. He was full of sadness over the interruption of China-Africa movie exchange. Similarly, African movies are almost inexistent on the Chinese market. From movie theaters to online movies, African movies are quite inexistent for the Chinese audiences. "Early movies related to Africa such as "Casablanca", "English Patient", "Out of Africa" and recent ones such as "Rwanda Hotel" and "Blood Diamond" are well known, but are not real African movies (these movies as well as those that fall into the same category are a reflection of a western perspective of Africa by westerns storytellers, therefore could not represent the African reality as lived by Africans). Movies can help both the Chinese and African cultures to better understand each other. But there is a long way to go when it comes to China-Africa movie exchange and cooperation. In the recent FOCAC Summit held in Johannesburg in December 2015, China proposed the "ten

major cooperation initiatives” to Africa which brought the China-Africa movie cooperation and exchange onto the agenda. This may propel the China-Africa cultural exchanges to a new stage of development. But lots of challenges remain to be faced with regard to the lack of research, innovation as well as the inadequacy of existing mechanisms and structures in that particular area. This article highlights the potential driver’s role that Kungfu Movies could play in pushing forward the China-Africa Movies Cooperation and may be a little contribution to the whole agenda of China-Africa cultural exchanges.

2. PIONEERS OF CHINESE KUNGFU IN AFRICA

The late 1960s, the Vietnamese Kungfu master Huangnin was the very first to display a Chinese Kungfu performance to Cameroonians when he was on business trip in the city of Douala. He was then invited in 1969 by the master Hong in the capital city of Yaounde to show the Chinese Kungfu, after a wonderful performance the Chinese Kungfu got popular in Cameroon since that time (ZhaoYang 2016). The diplomatic ties established between China and Cameroon in 1971 have speed up the development of Chinese Kungfu in Cameroon. In the meantime, the appearance of Bruce Lee on the international stage made a tremendous contribution to the popularization of Chinese Kungfu around the world and in Africa in particular this was through his famous Kungfu Movies such as: “The Big Boss”, “Fist of Fury”, “Enter the Dragon”, “Game of death”, etc. Following the establishment of diplomatic relation between China and many African countries, many Chinese workers arrived in Africa and introduce the Chinese martial arts in some African countries. Among them Master Di GuoYong was one of the first professional of Chinese Wushu (Martial arts) who in real life introduced the Chinese Kungfu to Cameroonians the late 1980s. For over 20 years, Di Guoyong has taught daily martial arts classes in Beijing's Zizhuyuan (Purple Bamboo) Park. This well-known figure in the city's martial arts circles also introduced Wushu (literally meaning Chinese martial arts or sometimes can be understood by foreigners as Chinese Kungfu) in Cameroon in the late 1980s. The daily newspaper ChinAfrica’s reporter interviewed Master Di Guoyong about his experience of teaching Chinese Kungfu in Cameroon. The following lines are the interview of Master DI by the reporter (source: ChinAfrica vol.3 September 2011).

Reporter: How long have you been practicing martial arts?

Master DI: I started when I was 15 years old. Now it's been nearly 50 years. At first, I learned Shaolin boxing for health reasons, and then I went through the teachings of Xingyi Quan and Bagua Zhang (the two styles are often categorized as internal

boxing).

Reporter: What brought you to Cameroon?

Master DI: I stayed in Cameroon in 1988 and 1989 at the invitation of a construction company under the Chinese Ministry of Railways. Some Cameroonians [where I was] who were practicing martial arts wanted to learn Wushu (Chinese martial arts). But at the time there was only one Chinese cook who knew some martial arts, and he himself admitted that he was an amateur. So, they asked me to teach.

Reporter: How well known were Chinese martial arts there at that time? How did you teach your students?

Master DI: At that time, Cameroonians only knew about Japanese martial arts: aikido, karate, judo. But after they watched the films of Bruce Lee, they admired Chinese martial arts. In the street when children saw a Chinese person, they would run to him and shout, "Chinese! Kungfu!" I was the first person to introduce Chinese martial arts to that country. I taught at the club "Kamikaze" and I decided to divide the course into three classes: Shaolin boxing for children and adolescents, self-defence for adults, and Taijiquan for older people. My students were practicing very seriously. They were very good at sports in Cameroon.

Reporter: Wasn't it difficult to teach people who did not speak your language?

Master DI: At first there was an interpreter who accompanied me all the time, then I started to learn some French for my classes. But there are also Chinese words that my students eventually learned to understand, and it was not necessary to translate.

Reporter: For you, how do you understand the teaching of Chinese martial arts?

Master DI: It's not just sports. Behind the physical practice, there is a system of thought about human beings that is directly inherited from Chinese philosophy and traditional Chinese medicine. This, the system, is also sometimes a barrier to the teaching, because not everyone studies what is inside [the moves] – not to mention the language barrier.

In relation with Kungfu movies, this interview clearly shows two things: firstly, Bruce Lee's movies have influenced a great deal of Cameroonians, have kept their attention and shifted their interests toward Chinese Kungfu. Secondly, the interest and curiosity of Cameroonians toward Chinese Kungfu settled down by Kungfu Movies were their core motivation in learning the Chinese Kungfu in real life (despite the language barrier and the belief systems link to the art itself). Master DI Guoyong as many other pioneers of the Chinese Kungfu in Africa of that epoch, did opened a new window for many Africans to rediscover and re-appreciate the Chinese martial arts culture (in comparison to what was shown in movies).

Recent studies show that as early as in 1985, the first Chinese martial arts school established in Cameroon, namely “Ecole Tran shaolin Kungfu” was established by the Cameroonian Master Mana Jean Jacques. When studying abroad, Mana Jean Jacques has studied the Shaolin Kungfu for more than 5 years before returning home and creating the very first Kungfu club in Cameroon. His first disciple master Mballa Lucien later developed and propagated the shaolin Kungfu all over the countries. With the recent opening up of China, more and more Cameroonians went abroad to learn the Chinese Kungfu, and then returned home to create “clubs”, among others are Toni Belinga, who set up the first “Taijiquan club” in 1990, and the “Wushu Federation” Founded by Victor Fouletier in 2004 (ZhaoYang 2016).

3. CHINESE KUNGFU MOVIES IN CAMEROON

Surveys made on development of Chinese Kungfu movies in Cameroon show that Kungfu movies have increasingly gaining popularity among young people. We can go further to say that Kungfu movies have become a guideline for younger generations to learn about the Chinese culture. To understand this situation in the case of Cameroon, two surveys (Taling 2016), were made in a previous study. Firstly, we issued a survey questionnaire to 165 in the cities of Yaounde, Douala and Bafoussam. The goal of our survey was to know if our subjects were interested or not in Chinese Kungfu and if their interests were driven by Kungfu movies. The second survey was a random interview in front of a movie theater called “CINEMA LE WOURI” in the city of Douala. We interviewed 32 cinephiles and the main question was to know what kind of movies they were most interested in. Among the most popular movies in the local cinema were “American war movies”, “French romance movies” and “Chinese Kungfu movies”. In the survey, many of our subjects were youngsters from primary and middle school; the results of our surveys were summed up as followed:

Table1A (questionnaire)

Question1: Are you interested in Chinese Kungfu?			
Age	Yes	No	Total
[7-14]	48	5	53
[15-24]	42	5	47
[25-54]	26	11	37
[55 →[14	14	28
Total	130	35	165
Percentage	78.78%	21.21%	100%

Table1B (questionnaire)

Question2: how did you come to be interested in Chinese Kungfu?			
Age	Motivated by Kungfu movies	Other reasons	Total
[7-14]	45	3	48
[15-24]	39	3	42
[25-54]	20	6	26
[55 →[7	7	14
Total	111	19	130
Percentage	85.38%	14.61%	100%

Table2 (interview)

Question: What's your favorite kind of movies?		
Options	Number of people	Percentage
French romance movies	4	12.50%
American war movies	8	25.00%
Chinese Kungfu movies	20	62.50%
Total	32	100%

The surveys show that Kungfu Movies are welcomed in the local cinema (Table2) and have a remarkable influence among Cameroonians' youngsters (Table1B). That influence is the potential driver of their interests toward the Chinese Kungfu (Table1A). There is no doubt that the development of Chinese kung fu movies in Cameroon has been welcomed by many people, especially young people. In short, the reason why many want to understand China and the Chinese culture is mainly due to the curiosity arisen by Chinese Kungfu films. Therefore, Chinese Kungfu Movies appear to be a driver that could easily bring Africans closer to the Chinese culture. But the present surveys are far limited and present many shortcomings. For instance, in the first survey, many of our subjects were youngsters from primary and middle school, all from the same School. In the second survey, all the 32 subjects were less than 20 years old and our survey was limited to only one Movie theater. Despite these limitations, we can still conclude that Chinese Kungfu Movies are

welcome in Cameroon and are a driver of youngsters' interest toward the Chinese culture in general and Chinese martial arts culture. However, further studies need to be done before generalizing these conclusions to the entire continent. Studies also need to be done in the spread of African culture in China through movies or other canals.

4. SINO-AFRICAN MOVIES COOPERATION: SHORTCOMINGS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The popularity and charm of Kungfu movies in Cameroon and in Africa in general is not only a prerequisite for the China-Africa movies cooperation, but can be a big advantage when it comes to bring together Chinese and Africans through the movie industry. However, there is a long way to go; in other words, in this global village of the 21st century, the China-Africa movies cooperation is undermined by lot of difficulties and challenges, but still presents various opportunities.

4.1 Shortcomings

4.1.1 Concept Confusion

Just like many other foreigners, Africans may have some misconceptions when it comes to understand or interpret the concept "Kungfu" and this could influence their appreciation of Chinese Kungfu movies. From a narrow perspective, there's a clear distinction between the concepts "Kungfu" and "Wushu". The Chinese Martial Arts translated into the Chinese Language as "中国武术", literally "Chinese Wushu" are an integrative part of Chinese culture with thousands of years of history. "Wushu" is a unique Chinese cultural sport blend into Chinese philosophy and belief systems such as Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism etc. (Deng Ming 2009). However, "Kungfu" basically refers to a variety of fighting skills, it stresses on using the martial skills to attack or defend oneself against a given opponent. In this regard, "Kungfu" may appear to be a universal concept common to all martial arts styles. The concept "Kungfu" was made popular and introduce for the first time to foreigners by Bruce Lee. For him, "Kungfu" was nothing but an effective way to get rid of an opponent using the physical means of the body, while keeping in mind 3 keys parameters: speed, preciseness and efficiency. No superfluous move should be use in the process of attack and defense when dealing with a given opponent; this search for more effectiveness and efficiency is precisely what differs the concepts of "Kungfu" and "Wushu". "Chinese Kungfu" and "Chinese Wushu" are sometimes both interpreted by foreigners as Chinese martial arts. Africans are not exempted from this confusion and this can influence their appreciations of Chinese Kungfu Movies in the sense that

some fighting scenes or Kungfu styles displayed in Kungfu Movies that do not reflect a certain realism (in reference to Bruce Lee) may be qualified as “unpractical or fake” (花拳绣腿) and therefore could be depreciated by the African audience (for instance scenes such as flying actions, fight hundreds at once, etc. displayed in some Chinese Kungfu movies).

4.1.2 Cultural Shock

The 21st century’s globalization and the rapid development of the Information Technology industry have brought together different people from different cultures. Nowadays, it is estimated that more than 100 million Chinese people live and work in Africa (Li Anshan 2000), while around 30 thousand Africans reside in China (Mathews, Gordon & Yang yang 2012), The difficult coexistence between the Chinese and Africans either at workplace or in everyday life where the difference of cultures and behaviors result sometimes in conflicts have been pointed out (Serge 2008). Therefore, overcome the cross-cultural challenges between Chinese and Africans are a matter of priority.

4.1.3 Lack of Professionalization in the Sino-African Movies

In recent years, African Movies have increasingly used China as the backdrop for their movie sets as well as focused on dramatizations of romantic relationships between Chinese people and Africans (Nuša Tukić 2015). Over the last decade, more than a dozen of Sino-African documentaries have been produced. However, the Sino-African filmic production is still in its infancy, the materials used are part of a wider assemblage of visual contents such as documentaries, movies, music videos, personal recordings that are put together (this reflects the lack of professionalization). The ones that reflect a certain degree of professionalism remain dominated by westerners and therefore lack the Sino-African perspective. Below is the list of the 5 must watched films about Chinese in Africa and Africans in China:

Movie’s title	Main content	Details
1. When China Met Africa (UK, 2010)	Focus on Chinese in Zambia, Explore the many layers of Chinese involvement in the country.	produced by the British brothers Nick and Mark Francis http://whenchinametfrica.com/

2. Empire of Dust (Belgium, 2011)	Features the cultural clash of a Chinese and a Congolese in Congo.	Directed by the Belgium <u>Bram Van Paesschen</u>
3. The Africa China Connection (Netherlands, 2012)	'The Africa China Connection' is a 'Western' reflection on why are Africans going to China – and not to Europe.	Directed by the Dutch <u>Pieter van der Houwen</u>
4. China Remix (USA, 2015)	Explores Guangzhou's African entertainment industry through the lives of three African hip-hop artists who are trying to find success in the face of China's challenging labor and immigration laws.	American directors <u>Melissa Lefkowitz</u> and <u>Dorian Carli-Jones</u> http://www.chinaremixmovie.com/
5. African boots of Beijing (South Africa, 2006)	Documentary film about Afrika United, a team of Africans playing in a football championship league in Beijing, China.	by Luke Mines and Jeremy Goldkorn (South Africa, 2006)

Similarly, the Chinese audiences will certainly be more interested in Sino-African movies that focus on Chinese migrants living across the African continent. Several movies and documentaries falling in that category have already been made, but are still largely surrounded by mindsets, misconceptions and prejudices due to the fact that many directors and specialists of those movies do not understand Africa, while those who understand Africa (mainly Chinese living and working in Africa for decades) instead do not understand the movie industry. Perhaps it suffices to mention one of the most illustrative examples: "Crazy Safari" (Hongkong 1991) directed by Chen Huiyi, counting the adventures of a Chinese zombie lost in the wilderness and savage jungle of Africa. "Crazy Hong Kong" (1993) directed by Qian Shengwei, "African Superman" (1996) directed by Cao Jiannan as well as many others falling into the same category not only cannot help the Chinese audiences to understand what Africa really looks like, instead contribute at reinforcing that negative image of Africa already depicted by western medias. In a word, there is a long way to go in

narrowing the cultural gap and bringing the people of China and Africa together through the movies exchange and cooperation. Numbers of TV channels have been broadcasting documentaries and short movies about Chinese and Africans. Among others ALJAZEERA, BBC, CCTV came up with some of the most interesting episodes of Sino-African documentaries. The list below represents some outstanding examples:

ALJAZEERA	
1. King Cobra and the Dragon (2012)	An investigation in Zambia during the presidential elections of September 2011 on whether Africa has entered a new era of colonialism with Chinese firms maltreating workers and devouring the continent's natural resources. By Sino-French academic Solange Chatelard and filmmaker Scott Corben went
2. The Battle for Africa (2014)	China's big arrival on the continent has challenged Western powers and sparked debate about a new Battle for Africa. But the real Battle for Africa is between Africans and its leaders – a battle for better governments. Documentary hosted by veteran journalist Sorius Samura.
BBC	
The Chinese are Coming (UK, 2011)	While many in the West view Africa as a land of poverty, to the Chinese it is seen as almost limitless business opportunities. From Angola to Tanzania, Justin meets the fearless Chinese entrepreneurs who have travelled thousands of miles to set up businesses. By BBC correspondent Justin Rowlatt
CCTV	
中国人在非洲 The Chinese are in Africa	This is a recently released documentary series on CCTV-News showcasing Chinese presence throughout the African continent. In Mandarin. Part 1 Part 2 Part 3 Part 4 Part 5 Part 6 http://m.news.cntv.cn/2016/02/08/ARTIidGXt0EcuwTpptLe2D8j160208.shtml

It is obvious to notice that an overwhelming majority of these films and documentaries are done by westerners. Africa is not in shortage of talents

(Filmmakers, actors, singers, dancers, etc.), but the continent has not been able to profit from its human resources.

4.1.4 Weak Capacities for African Countries

Africa's presence in the global market for creative goods and services has been stagnant due to its limited supply capacity, lack of intellectual property knowledge and lack of strict copyright regulations. Piracy plagues the film industry as regulations on rights and distribution are lacking, which means that the filmmakers are incurring substantial losses in addition to working on already very tight budgets. In addition, lack of infrastructure such as cinemas and theatres make the probability of profit from creative sectors slim. In comparison to 40000 cinemas in the US, 20000 in India and 13000 in China, Africa in total has less than 1000 cinemas, which accounts for roughly 1 cinema per 1 million people (Nuša Tukić 2015).

4.2 Challenge and Opportunities

4.2.1 Emerging Markets

Africa appears not only to be the youngest population in the world (with more than 50% of its population under 30 years old), but also is the less connected continent to the global village. Movies seem to be one of the most adapted cross-cultural tools given that they can be compacted on CDs, DVDs, etc. and could be distributed in the most remote and isolated areas such as countryside. Kungfu Movies could take a leading place (given youngsters' interest) if enough attention and efforts are put into play. With China's recent reiteration (mainly through the FOCAC summit, Johannesburg December 2015) of the importance of its strategic partnership with African countries, and its commitment to co-operation for mutual benefit and pledging for further investments in Africa's much needed infrastructure sectors, the movie industry and the accompanying infrastructures (cinemas, production studios, theatres, etc.) may be another potential investment opportunity for China and a growth opportunity for Africa (Nuša Tukić 2015). As matter of fact, the Chinese movie industry has reached a certain level in terms of technologies, able to enter the European and American markets. Africa with its fast-growing population is beyond doubt a promising market both for movies products and technologies transfer from China. This also means more investments for African countries. This illustrates that there are untapped opportunities of investment for China as well as potential economic growth for African countries.

4.2.2 Adequate Source of Inspiration

There's no shortage of stories that can be counted between Chinese and Africans.

Not only Africans living in China are good source of inspiration for Sino-African storytellers and movies directors, but Chinese living in Africa can also be a good topic for future China-Africa movie cooperation. There are many stories about Chinese living in Africa, including several thousand Chinese businesses and over one million workers building roads, railways and bridges, whose stories are the real lives of the Chinese in Africa. Having different histories of development and relationship with China, African countries have different needs for movies and TV series. Numbers of Chinese documentaries and TV series have been translated and introduced in several African local cinemas and TV channels. But they remained far to meet the needs and expectations of the African people.

4.2.3 Cultural Bridge

Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, Jet li, and Donnie Yen are among the most popular Chinese Kungfu stars on the African continent. Their movies have ever since been seen by the African audiences as reference of Chinese Kungfu Movies and at the same time has served as a gate for Africans to view the Chinese society. In fact, a great deal of African audiences who have never been in china still believe that being “Chinese” is synonymous of being “Kungfu master”, and it is not uncommon to see youngsters asking some Chinese people living in Africa “if Shaolin monks can fly” (Taling 2016). Just as once said Zhang Yong the executive director of African Movie Research Center of Zhejiang Normal University, “When we visited Africa several years ago, some local people thought every Chinese is a Kungfu master. They learned about us through the movies of the 70s and 80s.” (Duan Jingjing 2016). A part of that audience has so far travelled to china to fulfill their passion and curiosity Vis a Vis of the Chinese Kungfu. Some outstanding examples can be brought about here: The first is the Gabonese Jean-Luc Godard who, amazed from his childhood by flying actions in Kungfu movies, made up his mind to travel to China for more Kungfu adventures. After 30 years in China, Jean-Luc Godard has acted in more than 20 movies, and is sometime referred as “the African Kungfu star”. “I thought the Chinese could all fly like those in the movies, but came to realize it is not like what has been shown in the movie.” said Jean-Luc Godard. He added that the African audience is more familiar with Kungfu Movies from the mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan, they know about Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jet Li, but Kungfu Movies have few dialogues and are not close to reality, thus unable to show what China really looks like to the African audience (Duan Jingjing 2016). Another outstanding example is the Cameroonian Dominique Saatenang who in his childhood used to spend hours in front of Bruce Lee’s movies. “My father wanted me to be a soccer player. It is thanks to Kungfu Movies and thanks to Bruce Lee that I found myself in

China. I became the African Bruce Lee” (Afrizap 2016) he said. In 1999, he landed for the first time in China and it was the beginning of a new life. “I was lucky. At the end of a few weeks of training course, I met the spiritual leader of the temple, Shi Yongxin. He invited me to come and spend six months there. I have stayed there four years (Roger Adzafo 2015). Today, Dominique Saatenang is known to be the first African Buddhist monk and the only foreign international referee of Kungfu. He has also been working in films, just like his idol Bruce Lee. My personal experiences reflect similar stories. Since my childhood I was marked by Bruce Lee’s Kungfu Movies, and then attracted by Jacky Chan and Jet Li movies too. Full of passion about Chinese Kungfu, I had to wait for several years before having the opportunity to have my first lesson of Chinese Kungfu in real life. But soon I was disappointed by the gap between the Kungfu displayed in movies and the ones in practice. Moreover, I realized the existing set of beliefs as well as the language barrier between the art itself and the practitioner that I was (Hong Jintao, Taling 2016). So I set up my mind for a trip to China. Today I’m PhD from the College of Chinese Wushu of Shanghai University of Sport. Among my contributions is the Kungfu club I’ve created in 2009 in Cameroon gathering youngsters full of passion about Kungfu just like me. Since then, the club has grown up and multiplied and today amounted to hundreds of followers. But it’s far from narrowing the Cultural gap between Chinese and Cameroonians. I firmly believe that Kungfu Movies can be bridge of China-Cameroon as well as China-Africa cultural exchanges and therefore hope to become a cultural ambassador between China and Africa.



Figure¹: A 2011 photograph with some of my club’s members

¹ Photograph taken in 2011 in Cameroon before my coming to China with some of the earliest members of the Kungfu club I created (I’m standing behind hands backward)

5. “SINO-AFRICAN KUNGFU MOVIES”: A NEW APPROACH OF CHINA-AFRICA MOVIES COOPERATION

The idea of “Sino-African Kungfu Movies” is a new approach designed to bring freshness and creativity to the China-Africa Movies Cooperation given the lack of research and innovation already undermining the sector. Overcome the intercultural challenges through movies should take into account people’s needs and interests. Previous research has shown that Kungfu Movies with their cross-cultural communicative competences are of great interest for youngsters in African countries. By adapting Kungfu Movies to the reality and daily life of African people, they could be more attractive and accepted by a wider audience. Chinese movies are becoming an essential tool in learning the Chinese language. In a previous study; we issued anonymous survey questionnaires to 69 overseas African students studying in China. We wanted to know if movies were for any help in their process of learning the Chinese language. As result, 56.52% of our subjects chose to practice their listening and speaking skills firstly by watching Chinese movies or TV programs, 24.63% opted to chat regularly with a Chinese friend or teacher while the other 18.84% opted for reading materials (Taling 2013). Among those who opted for movies and TV series, more than 2/3 (representing about 40% of the overall number of people that were surveyed) was in favor of Kungfu movies. Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jet Li were among their favorites Kungfu stars. Kungfu Movies appear to be a powerful carrier of language and culture and can be an efficient tool in strengthening the China-Africa cultural exchanges.

5.1 Cross-Cultural Communicative Competences of Kungfu Movies

Cross-cultural communication refers to people from different cultural background communicating with each other in a situation that makes communication difficult and sometimes impossible (Larry, A., Samovar, Richard, E., Porter 2012). Some scholars believe that in people's daily communication activities, during the transfer of information, 30% of information are transferred through verbal language while 70% rely on non-verbal means of communication, and in some cases non-verbal transfer of information can reach the 90% (Taling 2013). This study is of great interest when it comes to the study of cross-cultural competences of Kungfu Movies in particular. In fact, it is not surprising to see youngsters in Africa trying to eat with chopsticks, greeting each other in the traditional Chinese style or imitating some movies actions after having watched a Kungfu movie. Furthermore, with the growing interest of Africans to the Chinese language (In my country Cameroon for instance, since the establishment of Confucius institute in 2007, the promotion and teaching of Chinese

language and culture has reach a new stage. Currently in Cameroon and more than 20 African countries, the Confucius institute provides Chinese language training for more than 20,000 people. Moreover, since September 2012, the Cameroon government has integrated the Chinese language in middle school education as a required course (Taling 2013).

5.2 “Sino-African Kungfu Movies”

By “Sino-African Kungfu Movies” we simply mean the adaptation of Kungfu Movies in the cultural context of China-Africa. China and Africa have long histories and splendid martial arts cultures. Some African martial arts styles such as Dambe, Laamb, Nguni, Sile Tia and Donga stick fighting etc. as well as many African traditional wrestling and war dances still practiced in many African traditions, could be the starting point of a juncture with the Chinese martial arts to set up an innovative style of “Sino-African Kungfu Movies” were Africans and Chinese could work together for the common prosperity of their cultures. The goal is to bring Kungfu Movies close to the reality and daily life of African people as well as to introduce some African Combats Traditions to Chinese people. The idea could then be extended beyond the martial arts culture and implemented between China and different African countries considering the particularities of each country. For this end, further investigations need to be done to understand the market and the needs of the people in each individual African country. In the case of Cameroon, we have started some basic field works and research. The overall project aims at creating a “Sino-Cameroonian cultural center” (Taling 2016), which will encompass three main sections: a linguistic section, a martial arts section, and a movie section.

5.2.1 The linguistic section: Language is the medium of cultural exchanges between China and Africa

Communication is at the heart of all human’s contacts. Furthermore, language is the basic tool necessary to all humans’ communication. In the process of cultural exchanges, language appears to be a powerful tool that makes possible the dialogues between minds. Language is the roadmap of a culture. It tells you where its people came from and where they are going (Larry, A., Samovar, Richard, E., Porter 2012). Therefore, have a good knowledge of languages in play is of capital importance. Language is not only a communicative tool, but also a cultural crystallization. Therefore, the cooperation cannot be separated from the popularization of languages. At present, more and more countries in Africa not only have started to pay attention to their own local languages, but also have gradually integrating new foreign languages such as the Chinese language. So the gradual increase in Chinese teaching

institutions has contributed to the China-Africa cultural cooperation. Base on this, it is important to include a language component in a new cooperation strategy. Unlike formal language teaching institutions, this component will encompass both the Chinese and local languages for local talents development needs. In the Sino-Cameroonian context, English/French (both official languages of Cameroon) and Chinese mandarin (official language of China) are the primary languages targeted (some Cameroonian local languages are to be included). Given that Cameroonians and Chinese will come to work together to realize this project and that our targeted audiences are mainly Chinese and Africans (in majority English or/and French Speaking African countries), our centre through its linguistic section will aim at providing basic language trainings and translation services (covering the scope of our project). This will facilitate communication between the working staff, will help to perfect the finished product and make it available in the languages of our audiences (primarily Africans and Chinese audiences).

5.2.2 The Martial Arts Section: Kungfu Is a Breakthrough in The China-Africa Movies Cooperation

Kungfu movies can be used as a carrier to promote the development of film and television cooperation. There is no doubt that Chinese Kungfu in Cameroon has influenced many young people, this window was opened by Kungfu movies and successfully welcome by young people. However, many African films or movies about Africa focus on documentaries and mostly about natural sciences, geography, etc. action movies are not very popular in the African movie industry. And many of these movies are quite absent in the Chinese movie market. So, Chinese people have a very limited space and selection to understand Africa through films, except African films made by western countries. Meanwhile in African countries, despite that the Chinese films supplies have increased in recent years on the African movie market (both in quality and quantity), still remain far from meeting the people's needs. The "i-generation" of Africans seems to be more interested in movies which have more body languages, creative actions, and at the same time can help to understand the background culture. In this regard, "Kungfu" seems for them to be the best answer. The martial arts cultural component can offset the language barrier and facilitate the people-to-people communication. In this section, martial artists and talents from both sides (China-Cameroon) will be collected and trained. Various styles of martial arts and traditional dances will be taught. (I've started to work in that regard in 2009 by opening my first martial art club in Yaoundé-Cameroon where I taught for three years before leaving for China to deepen my understanding of Chinese language and martial arts. Since then, the club has grown up and multiplied and today we count

hundreds of followers and martial Artists in Cameroon ready for such an initiative).

5.3.3 The Movie Section: Films Are Digital Windows of The Sino-African Cultural Exchanges

As one of the most popular cultural media, movie can effectively accelerate the cultural exchanges between China and Africa. Our primary focus will be on actions movies (putting forward the martial arts cultures and combat traditions of China and Africa) as well as documentaries and daily stories between Africans and Chinese. Martial arts are to be use as point of interest and basic skills learning to set up the action movies section; from this perspective, Kungfu movies will plays a vital role in the Sino-African cultural exchange. Further investigations still need to be done on the ground to understand in more details people's needs as well as the markets demand. Moreover, the shortage of capitals, the lack of infrastructures as well as expertise will be among the most Challenging difficulties to overcome. In short, the "Sino-African Kungfu Movies" initiative aims at bringing a new approach and more creativity to the China-Africa cultural exchanges and movies cooperation. Even though few steps have been made so far, the overall project is still at an embryonic stage. However, the prospects of cooperation and opportunities between China and Africa are unlimited, but lots of efforts need to be done from both sides.

6. CONCLUSION

Although China and Africa have enjoyed a long history of cultural exchanges, the 21st century's demands have pushed forward the need for people-to-people cooperation and contacts between China and African countries. As a result, the Sino-African movies cooperation has come onto agenda but remains hindered by various obstacles; among others there's a serious lack of research and innovation. Since the 1970's, the African audience has gradually kept attention on Kungfu movies. Today, Kungfu Movies have become a gate for many Africans to access the Chinese culture and language. Therefore, we have witnessed an increasing number of young Africans shifting their interest towards Kungfu movies. In a word, Kungfu Movies come to be a potential driver of China-Africa cultural exchanges and the idea of "Sino-African Kungfu Movies" suggested in this article could be an excellent approach that can bring freshness and innovation to the China-Africa Movies Cooperation. In this new initiative, China can provide the necessary infrastructures, technology and experience for African movie industries while African countries despite of providing talents can provide a local perspective for the Chinese movie industry as well as new emerging markets. The cooperation will be designed to overcome the cultural differences and then to promote a more effective people to

people dialogue. This will propel beyond doubt the China-Africa cultural exchanges agenda to a new stage.

REFERENCES

- [1] Assistant foreign minister of the People's Republic of China, Zhai Jun (2009), "Deepen the understanding of Africa, Promote china-Africa friendship". <http://ias.zjnu.cn/wkxy/list.htm>
- [2] Mulinda, C.K. (2015). On Cultural and Academic Exchanges between China and African Countries. *International Journal of Asian Social Science* 5(4), 245-256.
- [3] Yang Lihua (2013). A Comprehensive Strategic Study of China-Africa Cooperation. *China Social Sciences Publishing House*, 223.
- [4] Mwongeli, S. (2013). China-Africa cultural exchange: A chord in our hearts. <http://english.cntv.cn/program/newsupdate/20130409/104663.shtml>
- [5] Cai Wu (2014). Minister of culture Cai Wu talked about deepening china-africa cultural exchanges and cooperation: the two wheels of economic and trade humanities. <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2014-05-10/191730105067.shtml>
- [6] FOCAC Archives. China-Africa Movie Exchange Expects a New Future. <http://www.focac.org/eng/zfgx/t1329939.htm>
- [7] ZhaoYang (2016). Genesis of Chinese Martial Arts in Cameroon. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/nd8oIPsy5Sn9IiuZb4mIlg>
- [8] ChinAfrica (2011). A Chinese Kungfu Master in Africa. *Beijing Weekly newspaper*, 54.
- [9] Rodrigue Taling, T. (2016). Kungfu Movies in Cameroon. *Contemporary Cinema* (3), 103-105.
- [10] Deng Ming (2009). Influence of Confucianism on Traditional Chinese martial arts. *Education Science & Culture Magazine* (15), 226.
- [11] Li Anshan (2000). The history of Chinese in Africa. *China overseas Chinese publishing house*, 1-30.

- [12] Mathews, Gordon & Yang yang (2012). How Africans Pursue Low-End Globalization in Hong Kong and Mainland China. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 15.
- [13] Serge, M. (2008). When China Met Africa. *Washington post LLC*, 38-46.
- [14] Nuša Tukić (2015). Nollywood: an untapped opportunity for deepening China-Africa relations? *Centre for Chinese Studies*, 1-2.
- [15] Larry, A., Samovar, Richard, E., Porter (2012). Cross-Cultural Communication. *Peking University Press*, 7e, 171.

***TALING TENE RODRIGUE:** *PhD. from Cameroon, is a Research Fellow at the Institute of African Studies, Vice Director for the Center of Francophone Studies, Secretary-General of the Center for African Film and TV of, Zhejiang Normal University, China. The author's main field of research is Kung-Fu movies' communication in Africa and the rebirth of Traditional African martial Arts Cultures in the context of Sino-African cultural exchanges. The author is founder of China-Cameroon Cultural and Linguistic Center, and has published various articles in Chinese and international Journals.*

Contacts: *Zhejiang Normal University, No. 688, Yingbin Avenue, Jinhua, Zhejiang, China, Postal Code: 321004. Email: rodriguetailing@outlook.com; drtaling@gmail.com;*

Conflict of Interest: *This paper has already been published previously in another journal. However, as the author has revised his work and has granted full rights of re-publication to IJAMACT, there is no conflict of interest to declare.*

How to cite this Article: Rodrigue, Taling T. (2022). Kungfu Movies as Driver of China-Africa Cultural Exchanges: Case Study of Cameroon. *International Journal of African Martial Arts & Combat Traditions*, 54-73.