

The Development and Recent Changes in Chinese Language Education in Mauritius——A Case Study of Xinhua School

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Abstract

With over a century of history, the Mauritius Xinhua School stands as a microcosm of Chinese language education in Africa, witnessing its evolution throughout the decades. Analyzing the school's history and current status provides insights for advancing Chinese language education among overseas Chinese communities in Africa. Initially operating in the Hakka dialect, the school reached its peak during the 1930s and 1940s amid global conflicts and China's national rejuvenation efforts. From the 1950s to the 1970s, however, its decline occurred as overseas Chinese shifted from returning to their ancestral roots to establishing new communities. With the growing economic significance of Chinese language proficiency, the school experienced a gradual revival after the 1970s. Today, facing challenges such as scarce educational resources, building a "Chinese Language Education Community" has become a crucial pathway for the development of these century-old institutions.

Keywords

Mauritius, Xinhua School, development of Chinese schools, Chinese language education community

1. Introduction

Xinhua School was established on November 10th, 1912. In 2011, Bian Yanhua, Ambassador of Mauritius to China, praised, "Without Xinhua School, no Chinese education in Mauritius." [1]. In the year 1949, Xinhua School raised the first Five-Star Red Flag on Mauritius Island. In 2012, Xinhua School was selected as one of the 100 model overseas Chinese education institutions by the State Council Overseas Chinese Affairs Office. The century-long development of Xinhua School has witnessed the evolution of Chinese language education in Africa.

With the proposal of the Belt and Road Initiative and the concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind, amid the "great changes unseen in a century" and driven by the strong aspiration of overseas Chinese for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, overseas Chinese education is poised to embrace new development opportunities. In 2014, during his meeting with representatives at the 7th World Conference of Overseas Chinese Associations, President Xi Jinping stated that the united Chinese nation is the

common root of all Chinese people at home and abroad; the profound and extensive Chinese culture is the common soul of all Chinese people at home and abroad; and the realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the common dream of all Chinese people at home and abroad” [3]. Currently, there are approximately 60 million overseas Chinese worldwide, with over 20,000 Chinese schools, more than 100,000 Chinese language teachers, and millions of students. China has established 304 model Chinese schools in over 50 countries and regions [4]. Overseas Chinese at home and abroad have consistently safeguarded the “root” of the Chinese nation, carried forward its “soul”, and strived to realize the “China Dream”.

On April 15th, 2022, the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Mauritius marked the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. In May 2022, the two nations signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Education Cooperation, further strengthening their increasingly close ties. As early as the 1990s, Mauritius was hailed as Africa’s “Economic Tiger”. According to the World Economic Forum’s 2018 Global Competitiveness Report, Mauritius ranked 49th globally and first among African countries, with a per capita GDP of USD 8,812.1 in 2021. The island nation is often referred to as the “Pearl of the Indian Ocean”.

Among African countries, Mauritius boasts the oldest and largest Chinese community. Mauritius is a multi-ethnic and multicultural nation with a relatively complex linguistic environment. The current population consists primarily of people of Indian and Pakistani descent (69%), Creoles (27%), Chinese descent (2.3%), and European descent (1.7%). English is the official language, while French is widely used, and Creole is the most common language among locals [2]. Chinese is considered a “minor language” in Mauritius. Chinese education plays a vital role in the Belt and Road Initiative, the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, international Chinese language education, and the cultivation of urgently needed national talents [5]. Studying Chinese education in Mauritius, particularly the century-old Chinese schools that have witnessed societal transformations, holds significant research value and social benefits for advancing the China-Mauritius and China-Africa “community with a shared future”.

2. Background of Xinhua School’s Establishment

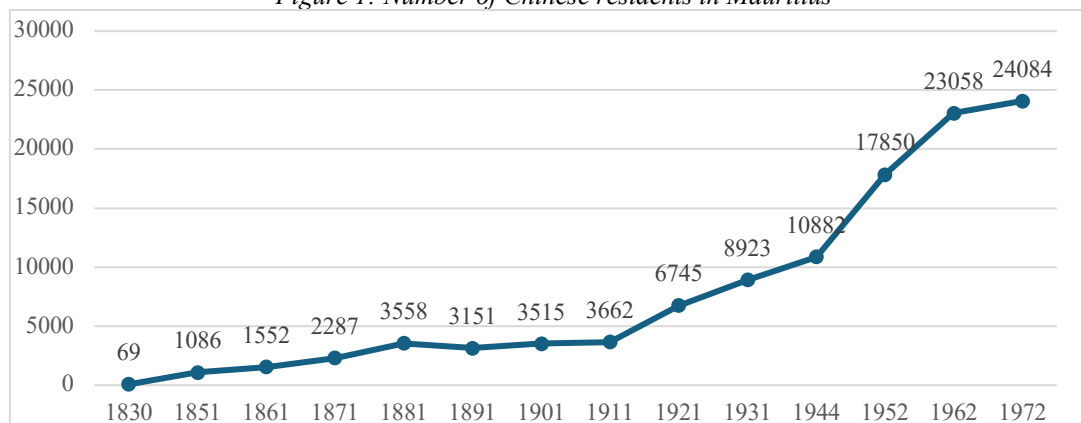
2.1 The Formation of the Chinese Community in Mauritius

Where there are Chinese communities, there are Chinese schools. Xinhua School was established on November 10th, 1912. The earliest Chinese immigrants settled in Mauritius. The origins can be traced back to the first half of the 18th century (1735). Most of them were laborers and craftsmen from China who participated in the construction of the capital, Louis.

During the port’s construction, their spouses went to French families as maids, constituting forced migration [6]. As early as 1817, the Port Louis in Mauritius already had residential areas such as the “China Camp” and the “China Village”.

We have consulted many historical documents. According to them, the number of Chinese settlers is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Number of Chinese residents in Mauritius



Source: *The History of Chinese Overseas in Africa* [7], *Chinese Overseas in Africa* [8].

In early days, there were three major Chinese communities in Mauritius: Fujian, Cantonese, and Hakka [9]. In 19th century, the British colonizers implemented a system of agents to manage Chinese. The selected agents were prominent Chinese merchants. They drafted legislation and maintained order associations.

The first recorded agent is Lu Caixin (Hahime). He was from Fujian. In 1821, Lu Caixin obtained a special permit to recruit workers from China. During 1826 to 1872, he introduced Fujian immigrants. The Chinese population in Mauritius was up. The second group consisted mainly of Nanhai and Shunde, naming Nanshun people. The agent was Affan Tank Wen. From 1886 to 1890, the Guangdong natives reached much more. The third group comprised Hakka people from Meixian of Guangdong province. Although they arrived later, the number of Hakka settled increased for many reasons. In 1860, the first batch, about 400 Hakka, arrived in Mauritius from China. Hakka communities develop rapidly. By the end of the 19th century, the Hakka population reached 2,000, over the numbers of Fujian and Guangdong natives. The Hakka took leadership in Chinese communities.

In 1908, Chinese Chamber of Commerce was established and recognized by the Mauritius government. During the late 19th to the early 20th century, Hakka continued to grow and strengthen. Today, Hakka residents account for approximately 80% of the Chinese population. Most were from Meizhou of northern Guangdong.

2.2 The Chinese Social and Culture in Mauritius

In the early 20th century, the Chinese community in Mauritius began to form. The culture was closely linked to the immigration history and the demographic composition. We have compiled a brief history of Chinese immigration as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: *A Brief History of Chinese Immigration to Mauritius*

Time	Number of people	Source
Early-17th century	unknown	The Dutch colonizers exiled Indonesian residents who resisted their colonial rule, including people from China, to this region.
Mid-17th century	few	The Dutch colonizers sent the so-called "criminals" from Batavia (present-day Jakarta, Indonesia) to Mauritius to serve time in labor, working on sugarcane plantations.
1760	300 Households	The French colonial government recruited Chinese immigrants from Batavia to engage in sugarcane cultivation.
1783	132	Chinese laborers from Guangzhou.
1824	Dozens	Fakual, the British Governor of Mauritius, recruited labors from Penang Island and Singapore.
December, 1826	5	Arrived from Singapore aboard the "Mei Meng" ship, under the leadership of Lu Caixin.
1829	40	Sugarcane plantations from contracted Chinese labors of Southeast Asia.
1830-1850	All one ship	Contracted labors
1840-1843	3000	Contract Chinese labors solely from Singapore and Penang Island to Port Louis, where they worked in shipbuilding and dock operations.
1843	838	830 Agricultural Contract Labors From Xiamen.
1848	27	Contracted labors from Réunion.
1854	More than 1800	unknown
Around 1859	2500	1,200 From Nanhai and Shunde, 1,000 From Meixian of Guangdong Province, and 300 From Fujian Province.
1860	379	People who migrated to Mauritius.
1875	500	Contracted labors from Singapore and Penang Island. Hundreds were recruited annually thereafter.
1881	3549	In 1877, the British colonial government abolished the requirement that prior approval before foreign immigrants enter the country.
1892	Several hundred	Residents Hong Kong from Xiamen, Shantou, and other locations.
1895-1900	Nearly 7,000	Relocating
1921	5233	Relocating
1944	6808	Relocating
1952	10421	Relocating

Source: Chinese Workers and Chinese Residents in Mauritius [12], Chinese Communities in Mauritius [13], and Chinese Diaspora in the Western Indian Ocean [14].

According to Table 1, the early Chinese communities in Mauritius were closely linked to Dutch, French, and British colonial rule. The early immigrants were the first to introduce sugar production techniques to Mauritius. In 1760, Desstan, the French colonial expedition commander, wrote in a letter: “I will return to Île-de-France, and endeavor to bring the Chinese settlers with their families from Bengkure (modern-day Bengkure, Indonesia) They would be highly beneficial to your island. As they are intelligent, skilled, and live frugally.” Most of the Chinese arrivals in Mauritius were merchants. They refused agricultural work and requested to return. In 1761, these settlers were sent back to original locations [10]. In 1783, Charles de Costan, a French, stated: “On the ships bound for Île-de-France from Britain, Denmark, and France in 1783, there were over 3,000 Chinese settlers. I personally transported 132 individuals aboard Sir Dariffa ship from Guangzhou to Port Louis, including 19 skilled workers: cobblers, blacksmiths, tailors, and carpenters. The following year, I persuaded 12 sugar farmers and workers to go to Île-de-France with tools. They requested by the Governor and the Chief Administrator [11]. The early Chinese from Fujian, Guangdong, and Hakka were skilled labors: farmers proficient in sugar production, cobblers, blacksmiths, tailors, carpenters, and sailors. They were often forced to migrate from Southeast Asian colonies such as Singapore and Penang to Mauritius.

Early Chinese language education in Mauritius emerged alongside the Chinese community formation and development. Hakka and Cantonese and other dialects were the teaching languages. And Xinhua School was subsequently established.

3. The Development of Xinhua School

3.1 Established in the Early 20th Century

In 1911, Hakka Chinese immigrants established a Chinese private school. The teachers were from Meixian of Guangdong province [15]. On November 10th, 1912, Xinhua School was founded in Port Louis, It was the first full-time Chinese school in Africa, with funding and premises provided by Renhe Guild.

Renhe Guild was established by Hakka communities. And it managed Xinhua School [16]. It provided monthly subsidies for the school’s expenses. Renhe Guild supplied low-rent buildings, offered free electricity and water supply [17]. As an original Hakka Chinese organization, it was officially registered with the government in 1904. Its mission was to assist the needy and resolve disputes. It evolved into the most influential association, called as “Top Company”. Renhe Guild had high prestige among Chinese overseas.

Xinhua School was organized by Hakka. It was founded by Mr. Wu Yunqin, Mr. Li Dafu, and Mr. Gu Wenbin. Mr. Li Dafu served as the first principal. In early periods, Xinhua school only had an elementary division, just over 20 students. And then it gradually increased to about 100 students,4 teachers. With the principle of “returning to roots”, the curriculum mirrored mainland China. It ensured that the overseas’ children would not forget ancestral heritage. So the aim of School was to help them understand and inherit the excellent cultural traditions of China. It prepared them for future studies and development backing to China [18]. The teaching language was the Hakka dialect. It adopted mother-tongue teaching ways. For promoting Chinese culture, Xinhua School evolved into Xinhua Middle School, offered both secondary and primary education. It cultivated lots of talents for Mauritius.

3.2 Reached Its Peak in the 1940s

The 1940s was the golden age of Xinhua School. Many Chinese residents came to study here. They were from Indian Ocean islands, such as Réunion and Madagascar. Xinhua School was regarded as “the premier School” for Chinese in Africa. In 1941, the school expanded to include a secondary school and evening public classes. By 1942, it had over 700 students and 20 faculty members, and hosted a school-wide sports meet at the Central Military City. In 1944, Xinhua School accounted for 44.4% of all Chinese adolescents of school age [19]. By 1945, the number of student grew to 86 with 34 faculty members across 15 classes [20]. In 1946, Mr. Deng Junkai became principal. By 1947, the school reached its peak with 1,019 students and 39 faculty members.

The peak prosperity of Xinhua School in the 1940s was closely linked to its steady accumulation during the 1920s and 1930s.

The revolutionary spirit of Dr. Sun Yat-sen was deeply rooted in the Chinese community of Mauritius. The overseas Chinese in Mauritius actively supported Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary endeavors. As mentioned, Tang Wen, a second-generation Chinese leader from Guangdong, with the support of prominent merchants, renovated the China-Hong Kong Association Hall and established its operational headquarters, keeping pace with domestic reforms. During this period, the China National Government continuously dispatched cultural instructors and Scout instructors (responsible for discipline, physical education, and ideological education) to Mauritius to support the teaching at local Chinese schools. By 1937, there were six or seven primary schools run by overseas Chinese in Mauritius, all offering instruction in Chinese. The National Government recognized the academic qualifications obtained there, enabling Chinese students to pursue further studies upon returning to China.

The intense patriotic fervor of the Chinese community in Mauritius during World War II. Throughout this period, overseas Chinese in Mauritius actively donated funds and provided strong support to their homeland's resistance against Japanese aggression. They raised funds and purchased military equipment to donate to the government, aiding the nation in combating the Japanese invaders [21]. After World War II, Chinese communities expanded schools extensively. The commitment to mastering the Chinese language and culture. Like this, they could return home at any time to serve their country, contributed significantly to the substantial increase in student enrollment at Xinhua school.

Beyond the intrinsic factor of patriotic sentiment, this phenomenon is also closely linked to the well-developed maritime transportation network between Mauritius and Southeast Asia. At that time, a dedicated vessel named the "Mauritius" operated regularly between Southeast Asian countries and island nations in the Indian Ocean. Early Chinese immigrants to Africa typically landed in Mauritius, using it as a stepping stone before continuing their migration to other Indian Ocean islands and across the African continent.

"The overseas Chinese are the mother of the revolution" —Dr. Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary ideals received widespread support in Mauritius. During the 1930s and 1940s, for their homeland's revolutionary and anti-Japanese endeavors, the strong patriotic fervor of Chinese were key factors behind the flourishing of Chinese schools in Mauritius and globally.

3.3 Experienced a Period of Decline From 1950s to 1970s

After 1952, the student enrollment plummeted, and Chinese children began attending Western-language schools. As a result, Xinhua School declined from its previous prosperity in the 1950s onward. The primary reasons for this decline were:

The overseas Chinese community in Mauritius actively participated in the political reforms of China. In 1949, because of the new China was established, the international situation underwent rapid changes. There were significant divisions among the Chinese community in Mauritius regarding their attitude. These divisions led to a profound historical polarization within the community. Driven by the deeply ingrained belief in "returning to roots" and reuniting with homeland. Many alumni of Chinese schools returned back to China, demonstrating their exceptional talents across various sectors.

But some overseas Chinese chose not to return and integrated into Mauritian society. The diminished practical value of the Chinese language deprived most fundamental and powerful motivation [22]. This had a fundamental impact on Chinese language teaching in Mauritius.

Chinese residents in Mauritius enjoyed limited political rights, particularly in electoral participation. Until 1948, only male citizens who owned fixed assets or earned a monthly income of ₹50 were eligible to vote. Electoral rights were concentrated among a small but influential group of French-Mauritians and a minority of Creole plantation owners. The British colonial authorities overlooked this demographic. A sustained political campaign demanded broader government representation. And in 1948 then, authorities declared that "all literate individuals with fixed assets, regardless of gender, possess voting rights" [23]. The Chinese population constituted less than 2% of Mauritius's total population. It rendered the electoral influence negligible. Thus Political power shifted from French-Mauritian and Creole communities to the Indian community. It created a

disparity between the political status and economic position. Many Chinese residents subsequently emigrated to other countries, such as Canada, the UK, the USA and Australia.

And the second reason is the localization of Chinese. By the 1950s, the indigenous Chinese population had significantly surpassed that of non-indigenous Chinese. It further highlighted the community's integration into local society. They shared political and economic interests transcend ethnic boundaries. Due to the Treaty of Paris, French culture, language, and Catholic faith remain prevalent among Chinese elites. The 3% of the population speaking the two dialects are predominantly French descendants beyond their Chinese heritage. During French colonial rule, they were compelled to embrace French cultural influences, resulting in what could be described as near-total Frenchization of the island.

The scholarship policy of the Mauritian government schools is the third reason. In 1926, the scholarship policy of British colonial government established. It stipulated that only students attending local schools were eligible for government scholarships to study in countries, such as the UK and France. Since 1926, 30% of the government scholarships have been awarded to the Chinese community. It accounted for less than 3% of the population [24]. In the 1950s, the first generation of Chinese returnees who had studied abroad achieved significant personal development. It encouraged some Chinese to pursue Western-language education at government schools. For those planning to immigrate, it was essential that they mastered the compulsory English and French courses at government schools. For overseas Chinese who did not return to their home country, the practical value of Chinese language proficiency gradually diminished.

For these various reasons, Chinese language learning became merely a means of preserving Chinese culture. And the number of Chinese learners in Mauritius plummeted sharply between the 1950s and 1970s. By 1962, Xinhua School had only 250 students left. In the early 1970s, the daytime program was discontinued, leaving the school on the brink of closure.

3.4 Revitalized From Late 1970s to the Present

In September 1961, Mauritius achieved self-government. On March 12th, 1968, it declared independence. And then it ended British colonial rule. On April 15th, 1972, it were established Diplomatic relations between China and Mauritius. In 1975, through the concerted efforts of Xinhua and Chinese alumni organizations, including the Renhe Association, Xinhua School was reopened. It operated as a full-time Chinese kindergarten and weekend Chinese tutoring program.

The revival of Chinese language teaching at Xinhua School is inseparable from Mauritius's language policy and the development of China.

Mauritius's rapidly growing economy created a substantial demand for language professionals. After independence in 1968, the economy was highly concentrated on sugar production and exports. By the late 1970s, the Mauritian government restructured its economy through a diversified industrial policy. It established four key economic pillars: manufacturing, financial services, tourism, and technology. Coupled with active expansion into international markets, this strategic shift fueled rapid economic growth, hailed as the "Mauritian Miracle". The government sought foreign-invested enterprises to address severe labor shortages. It fostered favorable conditions for economic development. Chinese communities played a pivotal role in Mauritius's economy. Characterized by the hardworking spirit, strong credibility, and flexible business models, Chinese entrepreneurs have developed a thriving retail and wholesale trade sector. With the nation's economic strength growing, Chinese residents have enjoyed rising social status. Their professional activities diversified across light industrial processing, exports, hospitality, tourism, healthcare, legal services, and even government positions.

Chinese language education was integrated into Mauritius's national education system. In the early 1970s, the Mauritian government implemented a multicultural policy, introducing Eastern language courses in government-run primary and secondary schools. Chinese language education was subsequently incorporated into the national education framework. It promoted the outstanding cultural traditions of Eastern civilizations within this multicultural context. Chinese became an elective subject in primary and secondary schools. And it was officially included as an examination subject in 1992. Chinese language tutoring classes were offered on weekends or evenings. And each class enrolled 25 students. The government provided monthly subsidies based on teachers' educational qualifications. It ranged from ₹2,000 to ₹1,500 to ₹1,000. In addition to Xinhua

School, institutions such as Huaxia Chinese School, Guangming School, and Zhonghua School also offered Chinese language tutoring programs. By 2015, nearly a thousand students were enrolled in these programs.

Finally, China provided strong support for Mauritius Chinese language education. In 1983, China and Mauritius signed a cultural exchange agreement. The Chinese government dispatched experts to Mauritius to promote Chinese language teaching, marking a turning point in Chinese language education. With China grew increasingly prosperous and global trends reversed, the social Chinese benefits diminished. Before 2000, only a small number of Ethnic Chinese studied Chinese in schools. After 2002, at the request of the government, a group of Chinese language teachers from Malaysia, Singapore, and China were sent to Mauritian primary schools to teach Chinese. Their salaries covered by the Mauritian government. “China Youth Volunteer Overseas Service Program Mauritius Project” started from 2008. The Chongqing delegation’s dispatched multiple batches of young volunteers to Mauritius to provide services in Chinese language teaching, physical education, and information technology. In January 2015, the National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (Hanban) dispatched a large number of Chinese language teachers to Mauritius.

In 2006, Xinhua School had 265 students, 12 faculty members, and 12 classes, along with two adult classes totaling over 30 students. By May 2007, the student enrollment had increased to 300 [25]. The development of Chinese language education in Mauritius, including at Xinhua School, flourished due to various factors.

Xinhua School currently operates multiple classes. Most students in the lower grades are Ethnic Chinese, and many in the upper grades belong to other ethnic groups. However, Xinhua school is a weekend-based part-time institution offering supplementary tutoring. It cannot issue a socially recognized or officially recognized Chinese language graduation certificate issued by the Malaysian government.

Additionally, challenges related to its financial operations impose higher demands on the school’s development.

4. The Challenges Xinhua Faced

Guo Xi (2013, 2020) identified several distinctive features of overseas Chinese language education. There was a broad participant base, uneven development, diverse operational models, the transformation of traditional Chinese schools, a trend toward younger learners, and varied learning motivations [26]. The development of Xinhua Schools also faces challenges. Such as insufficient educational resources, with teachers, teaching materials, and instructional methods often fall short of meeting demands.

4.1 Short of Teachers and Economic Investment

The growing demand for Chinese language learning is severely mismatched with the available teaching staff. Xinhua School is primarily operated through financial and operational contributions from its board members. The headteacher Lin Nuhong serves as a part-time principal. And most other teachers are substitute instructors with low job stability. Many teachers teach across multiple grades and schools. These result in substantial teaching burdens. Given its remedial school, it serves a diverse student population ranging from preschool children to adults. So significant age variations and differing levels of Chinese proficiency is a big challenge.

Additionally, many local non-Chinese students join into Xinhua to learn Chinese. The school lacks effective teaching methodologies tailored to its diverse students. The root cause of the limited teaching resources and heavy workloads lies in insufficient educational funding allocated to the institution.

4.2 Lack of Various Teaching Resources

There is no locally tailored Chinese language teaching syllabus. And teaching materials and methods are not updated in a timely way. In terms of textbooks, Xinhua School primarily uses the “Chinese” textbook from Jinan University provided by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (Qiaoban), along with some self-compiled materials by individual teachers.

The relevance and professionalism of these textbooks fall short of the actual demands of the Chinese language market. Developing systematic and coherent locally adapted Chinese language teaching materials has become an urgent priority for the school.

4.3 No Authoritative Language Proficiency Certificates

The graduates do not hold Chinese language diplomas recognized by society or official authorities. Given its nature as a supplementary school, Xinhua School cannot issue Chinese proficiency certificates with high societal recognition. In 2014, the National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (Hanban) established an HSK test center in Mauritius, and the Confucius Institute at the University of Mauritius was inaugurated on December 14th, 2016. Currently, both the Mauritian society and enterprises show limited recognition of the HSK examination. The Chinese language learning outcomes of Xinhua School graduates lack official verification or substantial evidence supporting their advantages in further education or employment.

4.4 No Fully Utilize Abundant Chinese Industry Resources

The resource advantages of “industry-academia-research collaboration” possessed by Xinhua School have not been fully utilized. Established for over a century, Xinhua School boasts extensive connections with Hakka business communities. However, its interactions with local enterprises, institutions, and educational organizations remain insufficient.

At present, Xinhua School is facing severe challenges. Under the Belt and Road Initiative and the vision of building a “Community with a Shared Future for Mankind”, Chinese schools like Xinhua also encounter development opportunities, making it possible to establish a “Chinese Language Education Community”.

5. The Establishment of a “Chinese Language Education Community”

In September 2015, President Xi Jinping delivered an important speech stating, “In today’s world, nations are interdependent and share a common destiny. We must uphold and promote the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, build a new type of international relations centered on win-win cooperation, and forge a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind.”

The concept of “community” is widely used in social sciences such as philosophy, political science, and anthropology. In the 20th century, nation-states became the political practice for fostering community identity, and Mauritius’s post-independence multicultural linguistic environment provided an ideal framework for establishing a “Chinese language education community”.

5.1 CSFM and B&R Provides a Theoretical Foundation

CSFM stands for a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind, and B&R means The Belt and Road Initiative. They have provided favorable development opportunities for Chinese language education in Mauritius. President Xi Jinping, with a focus on enhancing Africa’s capacity for independent development and attracting foreign investment, emphasized that China will adhere to the principles of “teaching people how to fish” and “building nests to attract phoenixes” [27]. In Sino-African cooperation, areas such as human resource development, technological exchange, infrastructure, and the establishment of special economic zones and industrial parks will be key investment priorities. Mauritius in Africa represents a natural and historical extension of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Mauritius is the only country in Africa to designate the Chinese New Year as a national public holiday. Successive Mauritian governments have consistently upheld national unity and harmony, implemented policies promoting cultural diversity, and maintained long-term political stability. Mauritius is a member of organizations such as the Non-Aligned Movement, the African Union, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the Southern African Development Community, the Indian Ocean Alliance, and the Indian Ocean Commission, serving as the headquarters for both the Indian Ocean Alliance and the Indian Ocean Commission. Mauritius adheres to a neutral, non-aligned, and comprehensive foreign policy, prioritizing diplomacy in service of economic development, advocating for friendly relations with all nations, actively participating in regional and South-South cooperation, and emphasizing relations with eastern and southern African countries, countries of Mauritian origin, and Indian Ocean coastal states. In recent years, Mauritius has actively played its role as a “major island nation” in the region, advocating for debt relief for developing countries and advancing African regional integration.

Zhou Qingsheng (2016), when discussing the linguistic issues in the Belt and Road Initiative, pointed out that the initiative requires the cultivation of a large number of “dual-competent” talents. The term “dual-competent talents” refers to individuals who can proficiently use foreign languages, have a deep understanding of foreign societies, cultures, and customs, and can engage in smooth cross-cultural communication [28]. Successful Chinese language education can cultivate a cohort of professionals proficient in regional and national languages and cultures, which is extremely important for the country’s future development and international exchanges. Xinhua School should promptly align with local educational systems and promote the legalization of Chinese language education.

5.2 The Multilingual and Multicultural Environment Provides Essential Support.

Education fosters national identity. Mauritius is a pivotal political, economic, and cultural hub in Africa. The country adheres to the British education system, with both primary and secondary education spanning six years. It provides free education at all levels, making it one of the developing nations with the highest education attainment rates among its population—95% of those under 30 years old are educated. Since 1997, Mauritius has implemented a nine-year compulsory education system, aiming to raise secondary school enrollment rates to 95%. Mauritius is a nation that places great emphasis on education.

Guo Xi (2020) proposed that enhancing national language proficiency requires, based on practical realities, prioritizing the development of think tanks dedicated to Chinese language education, promptly adjusting international Chinese education strategies, leveraging the bridging and radiating role of overseas Chinese language education within global Chinese education, and emphasizing the “Roots Preservation Project” for Chinese language education. [29]. Currently, Mauritius hosts approximately 100 overseas Chinese associations, among which eight are particularly active and influential: the Chinese Associations Federation, Renhe Guild Hall, Nanshun Guild Hall, Chinese Business and Economic Federation, Hualian Club, Hakka Guild Hall, New China Alumni Association, and the Mauritius-China Friendship Cultural Association. The Chinese nation cherishes its outstanding cultural traditions, and the Chinese language, as the carrier of Chinese culture, demonstrates remarkable vitality in Mauritius.

Chinese language education holds significance for national identity and strategic resource value. The advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative and the building of a community with a shared future for mankind both require language as a foundational element. The Belt and Road Initiative presents a favorable opportunity for the language market. Mauritius implements a multilingual cultural policy. The promotion of Chinese language education in Mauritius serves not only to leverage the growing economic benefits of Chinese and to promote Chinese national culture, but also because it is an integral part of Mauritius’s cultural heritage, contributing to the country’s historical development. The widespread acceptance of Chinese language education by the Chinese community and the ensuing surge in its popularity have become important symbols of the cultural revival of the “China Dream”.

5.3 The Economic and Trade Development Provides Economic Momentum

Mauritius is one of the most economically developed countries in Africa. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Mauritius, economic and technical cooperation as well as trade exchanges have continued to grow. The two governments have signed tax treaties and their protocols, as well as agreements on economic and technical cooperation, and established a Joint Committee for Economic, Technical and Trade Cooperation in 1985. Following its rapid economic growth in the 1980s, Mauritius has been dubbed the “Economic Tiger of Africa” and also referred to as “Africa’s Hong Kong”.

Mauritius established Africa’s first export processing zone in 1971, attracting a large number of investors from China (mainly Hong Kong and Taiwan), the United Kingdom, France, West Germany, India, South Africa, and other countries. Sino-Mauritian labor cooperation began in 1989. Since 1990, Mauritius has actively developed its offshore financial sector, designating Port Louis as a free port, with the service industry accounting for over 70% of the country’s economy. By October 2001, approximately 11,000 Chinese workers were employed in Mauritius, the majority being textile workers employed in around 60 textile and garment factories within the export processing zones. By 2003, the number of Chinese laborers in Mauritius reached 12,000. By the end of 2010, the total Chinese population in Mauritius stood at 34,000, accounting for 2.65% of the country's total population [30]. Foreign trade constitutes a vital component of Mauritius’s national

economy. The country primarily exports sugar and products from its export processing zones, while importing grains and other foodstuffs, cotton and wool raw materials, machinery, equipment, and petroleum products. According to statistics from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the total trade volume between China and Mauritius reached USD 914 million in 2021, representing a year-on-year increase of 25.8%. The stable Sino-Mauritian trade relationship provides an excellent environment for learning the Chinese language.

In October 2019, China and Mauritius signed the Free Trade Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of Mauritius (MCFTA), making Mauritius the first African country to enter into a free trade agreement with China. This agreement not only provides stronger protection for Chinese enterprises' investment activities in Mauritius but also enables them to expand their investments in Africa through the island nation. Key bilateral agreements between China and Mauritius are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Major bilateral agreements between China and Mauritius

time	content
April 1972	Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the Government of Mauritius and the Government of the People's Republic of China
August 1972	Agreement and Protocol between the Government of Mauritius and the Government of the People's Republic of China on Economic and Technical Cooperation
May 1983	Agreement between the Government of Mauritius and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Establishment of a Mixed Committee for Economic, Technical and Trade Cooperation
August 1994	Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Mauritius and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Tax Evasion on Income
May 1996	Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Mauritius and the Government of the People's Republic of China on Mutual Promotion and Protection of Investments
January 2005	Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Mauritius and the Government of the People's Republic of China on Bilateral Labor Cooperation
September 2006	Protocol to the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Mauritius and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Tax Evasion on Income
August 2013	"Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Mauritius and the Government of the People's Republic of China on Mutual Visa Exemption"
October 2019	Free Trade Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Mauritius and the Government of the People's Republic of China

The overarching goal is to develop the island into an open and globally competitive economy, fully integrating it into the world trade system through its trade policies. In accordance with its industrial policy, Mauritius offers differentiated preferential treatments to enterprises across various sectors and industries. The country has signed extensive multilateral, regional, and bilateral trade agreements, providing Chinese enterprises with access to preferential markets, exempting or reducing import tariffs, and strengthening intellectual property regulations. China and Mauritius engage in mutually respectful, supportive, and proactive economic and trade cooperation, setting an exemplary model of win-win economic and trade relations in Africa.

In 2021, the Shanghai Representative Office of the Mauritius Economic Development Authority established numerous hubs in key trade regions and cities across China. Shanghai and Beijing successively became Mauritius's second and third largest partners in China. China is a major source of foreign investment in Africa, leveraging Mauritius' financial services for cross-border investments and has consistently been a key partner of the Mauritius International Financial Centre (IFC) [31]. The favorable economic and trade environment between China and Mauritius has significantly boosted the development of Chinese language education in Mauritius. Both Chinese-funded and Mauritian-funded enterprises urgently require skilled local language professionals, making Chinese language learning particularly socially beneficial.

Xinhua School can leverage its advantage as a weekend tutoring institution to collaborate with local Chinese enterprises. Such partnerships not only enhance educational facilities, improve teacher compensation, and address various non-academic challenges stemming from funding constraints, but also attract and encourage more outstanding professionals to engage in Chinese language education, elevate the status of the Chinese language, and generate positive ripple effects. As a century-old Chinese school in Mauritius, Xinhua

School possesses extensive local networks that can serve as a driving force for cooperation with Chinese enterprises, thereby promoting the development of these companies' various operations in the region.

5.4 New Scientific and Technological Developments Provide Technical Support

The 21st century is the century of technology, which has made the “global village” a reality. Particularly since the pandemic, the exploration of a combined model integrating “online education” and “offline education” has provided valuable practical insights for building a “Chinese language education community”.

While Chinese language education remains characterized by its public welfare nature and emotional commitment, the trends toward commercialization and industrialization are becoming increasingly evident. The application of information technologies, represented by the internet, is gradually transforming traditional teaching philosophies and models in Chinese language education [32]. The pandemic accelerated the pace of transformation in this field. The internet has eliminated spatial and temporal barriers, making the acquisition of fundamental language knowledge more accessible, while more precise and systematic teaching resources have entered the market. Through market-driven resource allocation, several large-scale institutions with strong online teaching capabilities and adaptability to change have emerged as leaders. Chinese language schools should proactively unite and collaborate. Cross-regional, cross-city, and even international “Chinese language education communities” will generate significant economies of scale, reduce costs, and facilitate resource sharing.

The practical value of Chinese language education is increasingly prominent, with market supply-demand dynamics becoming the dominant factor. The integration of philanthropic commitment and market promotion represents a prevailing trend. The Belt and Road Initiative presents a significant opportunity for the language market. Establishing a “Chinese Language Education Community” by combining market-oriented language teaching operations with services for language development will serve as a model for the global sharing economy.

6. Conclusion

Founded in 1912, the Mauritius Xinhua School has now surpassed its centennial milestone. The century-long development of the Xinhua School serves as a microcosm of Chinese language education in Africa, witnessing the evolution of Chinese education in Mauritius and standing as a paradigmatic representative of such initiatives across the continent. Initially operating with native-language instruction, the school reached its peak during the 1930s and 1940s, fueled by global conflicts and the movement for national rejuvenation in China. From the 1950s to the 1970s, however, the school entered a period of decline as overseas Chinese shifted from returning to their ancestral roots to establishing new communities. Following the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Mauritius and the growing economic significance of the Chinese language, the school gradually revived after the 1970s. Confronted with challenges such as scarce educational resources, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the concept of a “community with a shared future for mankind”, coupled with a diverse linguistic and cultural environment alongside advancements in trade and technology, have made the establishment of a “Chinese language education community” an imperative path for the sustainable development of this century-old institution.

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Conflicts of Interest

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