Chinese culture and language take form in summer camp at Calexico

By ROMAN FLORES
Staff Writer
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CALEXICO — As a class of teenagers went out on its own to keep the Chinese "dama" (traditional Chinese board game) from being wiped out, the teens found the Chinese game of deathless was set to wipe itself out.

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try to keep its foreign, feathered contraptions in the air with its feet, the teens found the Chinese game of shuttlecock was not as easy as their instructor made it look.

“I can't even kick it once!” exclaimed 13-year-old Calexico resident Sofia Altamirano.

The children's game and Chinese national competitive sport was just one of the various aspects of Chinese culture the junior high and high school-aged students have experienced at the 2011 Confucius Institute Summer Camp here at San Diego State University-Imperial Valley campus.

“The Confucius Institute established its office in the Imperial Valley campus on March 20, 2010,” Miriam Castañon, international programs coordinator at SDSU-IV, said of the partnership program between the Chinese educational system (Han Ban) and SDSU.

“Since then we've been able to offer different activities including calligraphy, paper cutting, shuttlecock and also Chinese culture and language classes,” she said.

“The kids are doing so good,” Wendy Huang, Chinese culture and language instructor and associate professor through the Confucius Institute, said.

“Within a very short time they learn so much,” Huang said. “It's so amazing.”

With eight more students than last year's summer program, Castañon said the interest in the program is growing.

The students of the program agreed.

“My friend told me about the camp and I was interested to learn about the Chinese culture,” 15-year-old Tanya Kallen of Calexico said.

“We've been learning how to count in Chinese. How to say different words — mom, dad — just the basics,” 13-year-old Calexico resident Rafael Orozco said.

“(The activities) are pretty interesting because it's like I learn about something new,” Tanya said.

Castaño said the youngsters' summer camp — which ends next week — and the four Chinese language classes for adults that will be offered this fall at SDSU-IV are free. For more information on these programs contact her at castanon@mail.sdsu.edu or 760-768-5505.

Staff Writer Roman Flores can be reached at 760-337-3439 or rflores@ivpressonline.com

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This is a great addition to the cultural awareness of kids in the Imperial Valley, and especially with the large presence of Chinese in the Imperial and Mexicali Valleys. Thank you, Hui Hui.