

# “Why I am Back”: A Case Study of Charlie an African Chinese Language Teacher

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## **Abstract:**

With the development of China-Africa relations, more and more Africans are becoming interested in China and prefer to stay in China rather than return to their homeland after graduation. Charlie is working in the Confucius Institute in Africa. The purpose of the study is to determine the reasons for Charlie's choice of back to Ghana, Africa. Study data were collected through interview and documents. The study findings indicated Charlie's choice is driven by (a) his dream, (b) his experience with Chinese, (c) his perception of the job. These findings show that his choice is driven by his needs, namely, the five genetically driven needs: survival, love and belonging, freedom, fun, and self-worth and power, where the focus rests upon the aspects, love and belonging and self-worth and power.

**Keywords:** Choice, China-Africa relation, Ghana.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Africa and China educational cooperation has a long history and dates back to the 1950s. It is usually referred as a 'South-South development cooperation' [1]. The spread of Chinese as a foreign language in Africa began in the 1950s. In 1958, the first Chinese major commenced in Cairo, Egypt. The rapid development and spread of Chinese language education in Africa started with establishing Confucius Institutes. Since launching the first Confucius Institute in Nairobi, Kenya in 2005, there are 61 Confucius Institutes and 48 Confucius classrooms in 46 African countries till now.

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) set up in 2000 was an important platform and mechanism for the mutual trust and cooperation between China and Africa. In the educational sector, the Sino-African educational cooperation covers a wide range of programmes such as human resources cooperation, the Chinese language teaching, the granting of Chinese Government Scholarship (CSC), School construction projects, and higher education cooperation. In less than a decade, China has become the most popular study abroad destination. In 2018, the Chinese government pledged to offer 50,000 scholarships to African students from 2018 to 2021. As a result, China now has the largest number of African international students globally, more than traditional study abroad destinations like the US or UK.

With the rapid development of Confucius Institutes and Chinese language teaching worldwide, the issue of Chinese language teachers has become more and more of a concern. The native Chinese teachers and volunteers funded by the Chinese government can hardly meet all the needs of Confucius Institutes. “The development of Confucius Institutes in Africa and the training of African teachers of TCFL (Teaching Chinese as Foreign Language) is a systematic process. It can effectively solve the contradiction between the rapid growth of the number of students in Africa and the relative lack of actual teaching resources. This is also the need for accelerating Chinese language teaching in Africa” [2].

The Confucius Institute established its first Ghanaian campus at the University of Ghana (CIUG) in 2013, and second at the University of Cape Coast (CIUCC) in 2016, to promote Chinese language and culture learning among Ghanaians. According to local newspapers, the number of students enrolled in the two Confucius Institutes is approximately 15,000 per year. “There are 6,500 Ghanaian students receiving education in China. And as such, Ghana has the highest number of African students studying in China” as the Chinese Ambassador to Ghana, Wang mentioned in 2019. Even though around 6,000 people have studied in China over the past five years to learn Chinese and the salary for teaching Chinese in Ghana is as high, the two Confucius Institutes reported in the period 2016-2020 that only two Confucius Institutes reported that only six Ghanaian work as Chinese language teachers. Charlie is one of the six and he is working as a Chinese teacher in CIUCC.

To train and recruit Chinese language teachers more effectively, one needs to understand which factors influence people to choose this job. The study aims to analyze the reasons why Charlie chooses to teach Chinese in Ghana. In accordance with the ethics and principles articulated initially in the Belmont Report, and using “Charlie” as a pseudonym at his behest, I secured an interview with him.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

There is a vast overseas Chinese Language teacher shortage in many countries, especially in Africa[3][4]. According to the survey conducted by Xu [3], more than half of the Confucius Institute in Africa are unable to recruit qualified Overseas Chinese Language Teacher. "More local Chinese teachers should be trained...China needs to send more teachers" [4].

Referring to L2 teaching, Hirosh and Degani [5] state that multilingual people, when learning additional languages, can employ the skills, concepts, and learning strategies they acquired during their previous language learning experiences and draw on their knowledge of the languages they already know. Calafato[6] analyzed the non-native speaker teacher as proficient multilingual based on the research from 2009-2018 and believed that NNSTs (non-native speaker teachers) can be more effective because of their multi-competence.

The NNST, which is named officially “Overseas Chinese Language Teacher” always plays an essential role in Chinese language teaching. In response to the demand for teaching positions at foreign educational institutions, there are four programs for training NNSTs: (1) 63 universities in China offer MTCSOL to

train professionals abroad to teach Chinese as a second/foreign language and to spread Chinese culture in accordance with the new situation of Chinese language promotion. (2) Cooperation on Teacher Training between Chinese and Foreign Universities. It supports foreign universities to establish a teacher training program to train local and professional Chinese teachers. (3) Overseas Chinese Language Teacher Training Program in China. It encourage the overseas Chinese language teachers to enroll 4 weeks professional workshop in China every year. (4) Overseas Chinese Language Teachers On-premise Training Program by Experts. The Chinese and foreign experts will provide short-term courses for overseas Chinese language teachers.

The training and recruitment of Chinese language teachers is one beset with problems and difficulties, especially in the Africa. More than half of the Confucius Institutes in Africa are unable to recruit qualified Overseas Chinese Language Teachers. Although Chinese language education is developing rapidly, when compared with Europe, America and Southeast Asia, which have better Chinese language studies or Chinese language education traditions, then the level of awareness and acceptance of Chinese language is relatively low .

According to Glasser's choice theory [7] , our choices are driven by five genetically driven needs: survival, love and belonging, freedom, fun, and self-worth and power. Survival needs in order to sustain life include food, clothing, shelter, breathing, personal safety, and sex and having children. Love and belonging are the driving force to be connected with others: your friends, family, lover, colleague and pets. The need for freedom means you have choices, being independent, and capable of moving freely without restriction. The notion “fun” encompasses pleasure, happiness, relaxation and having something interesting to learn. Finally, self-worth and power here involves the desire to achieve, make something different, to be recognized and respected.

Choice Theory maintains that we are internally motivated (to try and fulfil our 'wants' and 'needs') and that our behaviour is 'total' and made up of four (interconnecting) 'components' of acting, thinking, feelings and physiology. Each one always accompanies the other three components. Acting and thinking are predominately voluntary; feelings and physiology are involuntary and can only be changed by changing how we act and think. Additionally, Glasser states that "all of our significant conscious behaviour - that is, all behaviours that have anything directly to do with satisfying basic needs, are chosen" [7] In the study, I opt for a choice theory framework to examine the factors, namely his needs, that drove Charlie to be an overseas Chinese language teacher.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

The study adopts a single case study to analyze the reasons for Charlie’s choice of teaching Chinese in Ghana. According to Patton [8], there are sixteen purposeful sampling strategies in a case study. Since the case study in this instance is information rich, yet conspicuous by the absence of outstanding features, namely successes or failures, the intensity case strategy was adopted for this study.

The twin methods of participant observation and in-depth interviews were adopted in the study. Participant observation was conducted throughout the year when the researchers are working in CIUCC, so that the recruitment, interview and usual work of Charlie were taken into account. Being a participant observer involves not only watching a scene but also participating in it and recording events and conversations as they occur.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Charlie and some of his students and co-workers by means of video and WeChat voice chat. In a semi-structured interview, there are no fixed answers to the questions, and the interviewee can answer the questions in their own words. Following this, the researcher and interviewees can talk openly. “Semi-structured interviews consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allow the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail” [9]. I taped all the video call and voice chat interviews, then transcribed them verbatim, which “protects against bias and provides a permanent record of what was and was not said”[10].

#### **IV. FINDINGS**

Three themes emerged from the data analysis in accordance with the research question: (1) Charlie’s dream (self-worth/power requirement). (2) Charlie’s experience with Chinese(freedom, survival, and fun requirement). (3) To be a teacher is good (love and belonging requirement).

##### **4.1 Charlie’s Dream**

Working as a Chinese teacher in Africa matches Charlie’s dream, and enables him to see that he is capable of helping others gain a better life. It meets his self- worth/power requirement.

As is the case with many boys around the world, Charlie dreamed of being a pilot when he was a child. Even though his upbringing in Ghana was sound, and the domestic financial circumstances stable, the dream job was still beyond the means of his family as his family represents those Ghanaian families which earn no more than \$9 per day. As Charlie is a Christian, he is one of the 71.2% of the Ghanaian population that is Christian. He was always happy to tell people about the “small but lovely church” where he was baptized. Thanks to the excellent weather in this tropical country, people often set up tents outdoors on weekends and gather for religious activities. Here he saw people happy, being supported and comforted and people communicating for each other. He developed the idea of becoming a Christian priest to “comfort and help others”.

When Charlie grew up, he once thought of joining the army to “defend (his) country” or working in the government:

In Ghana, a lot of people think working at the bank, governments, offices, government companies, government institutions, they will get good salaries, and it is stable... So most of them like to go into these sectors.

However, he realized that just being a soldier or a government employee does not help many people in his country. According to "Youth Employment Programs in Ghana: Options for Effective Policy Making and Implementation" a report produced by the World Bank, "Ghana is faced with 12% youth unemployment and more than 50% underemployment, both higher than overall unemployment rates in Sub-Saharan African countries." As Charlie explained :

As you know, here in Ghana, there's a lot of unemployment in Ghana. Like a lot of graduates but few jobs. But since the establishment of Chinese based companies. If they are able to speak Chinese, this most of these unemployment problems can be solved...The demand for translators and demand for people who can speak Chinese was very high. (But) Over these years, more than thousands and millions students from Ghana are studying in China, yes, and most of them don't want to come back... they don't go and study teaching Chinese... they choose to stay in China...it's very difficult to be able to get enough teachers to come back and teach.

Charlie had a "bigger dream". " (my dream) is to help a lot of people to understand Chinese language and Chinese culture so that they can be able to get a good job and both countries can grow both economically."

Although Charlie's ideal career is changing, his dream has never changed. Whether it was a child who wanted to fly into the blue sky, a priest who preached, or a man who put on a uniform to protect or work for his country, he has retained several attributes, namely to be a man who is positive, sharing, caring and helpful.

#### 4.2 Charlie's Experience with Chinese

Charlie has been fortunate because learning Chinese helped him enroll in the top university and ultimately earn a decent salary. Furthermore, it helped him "bridge the cultural bias and stuff" and find something worth sharing. It meets his needs of freedom, survival, and fun.

When Charlie studied in SHS, his "favourite subject is geography and when (he) applied for university", As this is one of the best universities in Ghana, the competition for admission is fierce and just meeting the general admission requirements is not enough if you want to apply for a popular degree course. So how can you improve your chances of being accepted to the top university? Luckily Charlie came up with a great idea: choose an unpopular major. It actually started in 2008 when University of Ghana began to the Chinese major degree course. Due to its late establishment and lack of publicity, the Chinese Section in the Modern Languages Department at University is not a popular major course in the University of Ghana and thus the competition for this degree course is low.

Even though, as he said, "I wasn't so much interested in studying Chinese. I was just interested in geography and sociology" , the choice of Chinese could enable his entry into the top university, so why not?

Charlie applied for geography, Chinese and sociology and planned to “just ...to study Chinese for one year”. In Ghana, all students entering the BA degree course at university could choose three subjects at Level 100 (first year), two subjects at Level 200 (second year) and Level 300 (third year) and either two or one subjects at Level 400 (last year ). “One year studying Chinese won’t be too bad.” Charlie entered the university and eventually he “fell in love with the Chinese language” and “fascinated by the story of Journey to the West and Jackie Chan's movies”. Later, he continued with Chinese and Sociology.

During Level 300, Charlie was given an opportunity to represent the University of Ghana in the Chinese Bridge (Chinese Proficiency) Competition for Foreign College Students. His excellent performance won him the scholarship to study in China. When he arrived in China, he found himself in a “tough situation” because “in the first academic year, scholarships are not awarded monthly”. Luck was on his side again.

During this time, it was really, really tough. But it was at that time, I met this Chinese family there. We became friends. And they always invited me to their home to eat, play with their kids, have fun. Like they really made me feel like even though I was far away from my home Ghana. I still have another home, here in China. They came to visit me on campus. Because they are not good at English, we had to speak Chinese. Everything chatted about and everything we did was using Chinese. I think I will never forget this experience.

When Charlie came to China, Chinese is no longer just a language or a major. It becomes a part of his life. Learning Chinese is no longer just a tool that helps him enjoy exciting stories and movies. It is a key to his new home, a home in a foreign country.

In 2018, the year before Charlie finished his Master degree, he heard that the CIUCC (Confucius Institute at University of Cape Coast in Ghana) tended to employ some overseas Chinese Language Teachers at \$1500 per month. The salary is quite high considering Ghana is a country with GDP per capita of around \$2000 according to the data from World Bank [11], and it “in line with (his) dream”. Charlie chose to apply for the post and was successful.

Like a lucky stone, the Chinese helped Charlie enroll at the top university, secure the chance to study abroad and finally obtain a teaching post. He is even more fortunate in that the friendships he has gained in China have given him further opportunities to communicate and learn more about Chinese culture than most international students. All of this has helped him “bridge the cultural bias and stuff”, and made him more willing to share his thoughts and ideas with a wider audience.

#### 4.3 to be a Teacher is Good

Charlie grew up in a well-educated family where “(his) parents were both teachers. And then yes, My elder brother, is also a teacher”. It did “influence (him) to become a teacher of Chinese language and culture”, and made “(him) feel teaching is a good job”, which would fulfil that certain requirement, love

and belonging.

For him, as a witness, it's a job that can make people feel happy. "I always admire how they're happy when they see their students performing well, their students getting to higher places in this society." And he do tangibly felt this joy during his teaching time: "I'm satisfied when my student performed, especially in HSK exams. When you teach them something, they able to understand it and be able to make sentences of their own."

Although studying in China and becoming proficient in Chinese have facilitated financial and employment security, being a teacher is more than that.

All my Chinese classmates had a great job. Some in big companies as ShinDa. Some are working within government. They are part of delegations that go to visit China. They do translations, some even work with Huawei... I also had many offers: I was working in a Chinese company during my Master degree and they paid me a lot. I had other options I could continue and do my PhD. (But) I choose come back and become a teacher: to start training people, training Ghanians to speak Chinese. I think it's very necessary for a lot of Ghanaian to study Chinese, not only because it is most widely spoken language in the world, but also because there's a lot of chances coming from China and we need job opportunities.

Mencius, the "second Sage", once said, "a manly man behaves according to the proper way, wait for (his) times. When his times do not come, he makes good himself alone. When his times come, then his governing accords to the proper way brings goodness to all people in the nations." For Charlie, the opportunity to be a teacher of Chinese is his "time". This is his way for him to bring "goodness" to other people.

On further investigation of the timetable Chinese outreach programme at CIUCC, it could be found that Charlie's lectures are usually held after 5:30pm or on weekends. He would give two more hours of lectures to students at the same level compared with other teachers. He explained that scheduling the classes in this manner would make it easier for those who are usually busy or have jobs. Moreover, scheduling more classes per week can speed up the learning process and allow them to learn Chinese sooner. " (I'm) more patient because we pass through the system and we know how it is, and we have the patience to take them through."

Charlie's classes were always amusing and reverberated with the sound of laughter. He would always encourage students to form sentences with the words they learned, form conversations with their sentences, and ultimately reach the goal of communication. Furthermore, he never hesitated to praise them. According to CIUCC records, many students quit the course mid-term as the outreach class is not compulsory. In some case, the "drop-out" rate is as high as 50%, but Charlie's classes never exceed 10% and he achieve a high rating in each student satisfaction survey, which makes him very proud.

## V. CONCLUSION

As this case study has established, Charlie chose to work as a Chinese teacher in Ghana because it fulfills all his needs.

Charlie feels that his dreams have changed several times during his life. Yet in reality, his dreams were essentially the same: to be a hero, not only for himself but also for others. Being a Chinese teacher can make his dream come true he can assist the vulnerable and unemployed to find work, improve their income and make their lives better, thus making the society and the country better. To be a Chinese teacher fulfills a dream he has always had and enables him to see that he possess the capability to help others forge a better life.

Without the initial decision to study Chinese, acquire his university place, and eventually come to love the Chinese language and China, then his life might have followed the same pattern as his classmates: the company or governmental route. “The other real home” in China has intensified his love of China and its culture, making him eager to convey to more the chance to experience the beauty he once felt. Working as a Chinese teacher not only allows him to make a good living with the salary (freedom need and survival need), but also allows him to share what he loves with others (fun need).

Growing up in a family of teachers, Charlie identifies more with the teaching profession than the average person. He is more patient and more satisfied with this job. A good salary and a decent job are attractive, but being a brings him the spiritual satisfaction, and allow him to interact with students who admire and appreciate him (love and belonging need).

From the intial list of “needs”, two most important needs are "the need to love and be loved" (Love & Belonging) and the (self worth/power) need to feel that we are "worthwhile to ourselves and others" ; and Charlie confirms this when states, “I’m happy I can help a lot of people understand Chinese language and Chinese culture so that they can get a good job”.

Despite the large number studying Chinese in Ghana, most students do not want to choose Chinese as their major degree course when they enter university, and even if they do, they are likely to drop it in their second year of university. When students pass the HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi) exam, they prefer to use Chinese only as an aid: to help them acquire a scholarship, to help them further to another degree course. It is hard for them to see the “fun” aspect in the learning process or teaching Chinese. However, learning Chinese is an means to an end: gaining a formal placement in China and enhanced employment opportunities on returning to Ghana. In short, fulfilling the needs of survival and want.

The subject matter of this case study reminds us that if government is serious about attracting more students on to degree courses in Chinese, and wishes to avoid the “brain- drain”, then far more attention has to focus upon the particular “needs”, love and belonging, self-worth and power. With this in mind, such a promotional course of action will encourage students to understand the wide-reaching advantages of



becoming a Teacher of Chinese and Chinese culture in Ghana.

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