

Learning Mandarin Chinese in Tanzania

A Study of Tanzanian University Students

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1 China–Tanzania Relations, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and the Confucius Institute (CI)¹

The question of when exactly Tanzania joined the BRI cannot readily be answered. According to most of the maps and information available online, Tanzania has been part of the BRI since 2018 (see, for example, greenfdc.org).² Other online sources suggest that Tanzania has been at least a pilot country “for China–Africa capacity cooperation” since as early as 2015³ (i.e., probably assessing the potential of the state to join the BRI). However, Chinese investment in Tanzania has a much longer history than the start of the BRI. Since 1964, Tanzania and China have had intact bilateral relations “and the two countries have undertaken extensive political, economic, military and cultural cooperation” (Jansson et al. 2009: 2, Shangwe 2017: 81). The first plant built in Tanzania by China with Chinese funding was

1 The authors would like to express their gratitude to all study participants. We would further like to thank our reviewers for their helpful comments. Furthermore, we are grateful to Prof. Dr. Chiara Barbieri for her advice on data processing and analysis.

2 Green Finance & Development Center. <https://greenfdc.org/belt-and-road-initiative-about/> (accessed 27 Mar. 2023).

3 See, for example, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/magazines/political-reforms/the-belt-and-road-initiative-and-china-tanzania-relations-2587670> (accessed 27 Mar. 2023).

the URAFIKI textile mill in 1968.⁴ Since then, more and more projects have been launched. Some of these projects were later assigned to the BRI, although they started before its official announcement. The agreement for the construction of the Bagamoyo port, for example, was already signed in 2013,⁵ i.e., five years before Tanzania officially joined the BRI.

Regarding cultural exchange programs between Tanzania and China, it seems that they were established much later than the decision to take up bilateral relations. For example, the first Confucius Institute in Tanzania was only opened in 2013 at the University of Dodoma, and the China Cultural Centre Tanzania (according to its website, the only Chinese cultural center in Eastern Africa) was inaugurated in December 2015.⁶ However, exchange between Tanzanian and Chinese universities has existed even longer than the bilateral economic and political relations: in 1962, the two countries signed a bilateral agreement on cultural cooperation in the fields of education and culture (cf. Makundi et al. 2017, Shangwe 2017). Jansson et al. (2009: 3) state the following: “In terms of educational assistance, it can be noted that around 600 Tanzanian students have studied in China since bilateral relations were established. In 2008 alone, more than 70 Tanzanian students were selected to pursue studies at Chinese universities.” In 2020, there were already more than 4,000 Tanzanian students in China (Kikoko 2020: 628).

A survey conducted by the Afrobarometer in 2014 showed that Tanzanians generally have a positive perception of China’s engagement in Tanzania. Taking a closer look at the questions asked, however, the survey reveals that this positive perception primarily concerns the economic engagement of China. In response to the question of which factor contributed to a positive image of China in Tanzania, most study participants referred to economic factors (China’s business investment [31%], the cost of Chinese products [22%]), but only 2% said that “an appreciation of the Chinese people, culture and language” was a factor.⁷ Although this survey was conducted almost ten years ago, it seems that not much has changed in Tanzanian society regarding the appreciation of Chinese culture. Some Tanzanians still have a negative attitude towards Chinese citizens or even report unpleasant experiences

4 <https://china.aiddata.org/projects/60765/> (accessed 11 Sept. 2023).

5 <https://thediplomat.com/2022/03/how-chinas-ambitious-belt-and-road-plans-for-east-africa-came-apart/> (accessed 11 Sept. 2023).

6 <https://ccctanzania.org/en/about/> (accessed 25 Oct. 2023).

7 Afrobarometer: “Chinese Engagement in Tanzania: Is It Considered Positive or Negative by Tanzanians?” Findings from the Round 6 survey in Tanzania in 2014. <https://www.afrobarometer.org/articles/chinese-engagement-tanzania-it-considered-positive-or-negative-tanzanians-2/> (accessed 25 Oct. 2023).

during interaction with them. This is especially interesting since Xi Jinping, the leader of China's ruling party, the CPC, has announced that "people-to-people and cultural exchanges with other countries" as well as the enhancement of China's cultural soft power⁸ is an important goal within the implementation of the BRI.

Here, the Confucius Institutes come into play. The CI program was initiated in 2004 by the Chinese state, overseen by Hanban, a unit of the Ministry of Education. Since the CI reform in 2020, CIs have been organized by a government-operated non-governmental organization (GONGO) that is funded and supervised by the Chinese Ministry of Education (Jichang 2022: 1–2). The aim of the CI program is the dissemination and promotion of the Chinese language (Mandarin) and culture. CIs are always based at a university; in order to set up a CI, there needs to be an agreement between a Chinese university and a university in the host country. CIs have a co-directorship (i.e., a Chinese director and a director from the host university) and are co-financed between China and the host country (a 50/50 financing model). In developing countries, however, the host country's part is taken over by CHINA AID, thus making the CI completely financed by the Chinese state.

With the announcement of the BRI in 2013 and the Chinese leadership's focus on fulfilling the Chinese Dream,⁹ the CI program was smoothly integrated as an important means of laying the foundations of what Xi Jinping calls people-to-people connectivity¹⁰ and "cultural exchange with other countries, giving prominence to Chinese culture while also drawing on other cultures" in order to improve "the capacity for engaging in international communication so as to tell China's stories well [...]"¹¹ (cf. Adeli and Ammann in this volume).

The aim of the present study was, thus, to look at the Tanzanian "recipients" of what we could call China's "language and culture capacity building program" with the goal of facilitating China's communication with the world. How do Tanzanian students learning Chinese perceive the situation of learning Chinese in Tanzania? What is their motivation to learn Chinese? Does learning Chinese help these Tanzanian students to better understand Chinese culture and to facilitate intercultural communication? That is, does the CI program meet its goal of engaging "in

8 http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf (accessed 11 Sept. 2023).

9 For a more extensive discussion of the Chinese Dream, see Adeli and Ammann in this volume, Section 3.

10 Cf. Adeli and Ammann (in this volume) section 1.2 for a more extensive discussion of people-to-people connectivity.

11 http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf (accessed 11 Sept. 2023).

international communication so as to tell China's stories well; present a true, multi-dimensional, and panoramic view of China; and enhance our country's cultural soft power"?¹² And how does this lead to "mutual benefit and win-win situation[s]"?¹³

The relation between Tanzania and China in the educational and cultural field has already been subject to several studies, each of which investigated different aspects of it. Xu et al. (2023) investigated the linguistic capital of speaking Chinese among 15 self-funded students from different African countries in China. The authors were interested in the motivation of the students to learn Chinese and in how this linguistic capital influences their identities and imagined futures. Bakari (2022) conducted a small study at two secondary schools in Dar es Salaam in order to investigate how four factors (Motivation and Drive, Experience, Teaching Strategy, Learning Capacity) may influence language learning. The author asked 139 students and teachers to rate the factors on a scale from 1 to 5 and concluded that all four factors are important. Makundi et al.'s (2017) case study examines how scholarships and the training of Tanzanians in China improved human capital in the fields of science, technology, and innovation in Tanzania. The study found that the experience in China was rated largely positive by the Tanzanian trainees, but that "efforts to transfer and apply acquired knowledge have been regularly impeded by structural barriers including cross-cultural communication problems, differences in attitude, and the fact that in several cases Tanzania does not have the capacity to absorb some of the advanced Chinese technologies taught in the courses" (Makundi et al. 2017: 11). Shangwe (2017) investigates the development of China's soft power in Tanzania, concluding that China's popularity in Tanzania is currently mainly based on the economic opportunities it presents. According to Shangwe (2017: 100), "Chinese soft power is still in its infancy" despite its long history, and China needs to invest more in its soft power in order to draw on its resources of culture and political values. Finally, there are a number of studies that investigate specific aspects of culture (and language in particular) in Tanzania-China relations, such as, for example, Mayer (2019), who examines intercultural communication in Chinese-owned organizations, or Sheridan (2018), who studies the greeting culture between Chinese migrants in Tanzania and its implications for the relation between unequally situated actors in the global economy.

12 http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf (accessed 11 Sept. 2023).

13 Xi Jinping, joint written interview with media from three Latin American countries (excerpt), May 2013 <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/0619/c40531-21891787.html> (accessed 15 Feb. 2023).

Xu et al.'s (2023) and Makundi et al.'s (2017) studies are especially interesting in the context of the present study, since these studies investigate the effectiveness of scholarships and the motivations of Chinese languages learners and trainees at different stages, i.e., while they were already in China or had already returned to Tanzania. The present study concentrates more on the first stage, that is, investigating the motivations and attitudes of Chinese language students in Tanzania. Thus, in the following sections, we first give an overview of the structure of institutions that offer Chinese language classes in Tanzania; in Section 2, we then introduce, describe, and draw conclusions from the study we conducted in Tanzania; and in Section 3, we finally put the present study into perspective and raise some issues and aspects that need further investigation.

2 Learning Chinese in Tanzania

The Chinese language in Tanzania has continued to grow and expand more rapidly since the establishment of the CI at the University of Dodoma, the CI at the University of Dar es Salaam, and the Confucius Classroom (CC) in Zanzibar. Before the establishment of the CI and the CC in Tanzania, there were no schools or institutions that provided Chinese language training for Tanzanians. Only those who went to China to study at a university had the opportunity to learn Chinese. Since the establishment of the CI in Tanzania, the number of Tanzanians learning Chinese has been increasing each year. At present, the number of Chinese language learners in Tanzania is estimated to have reached 20,000.¹⁴ There are Chinese teaching centers in various educational institutions that the CI has opened, and Chinese teachers from China are sent to those centers by the Chinese partner universities to teach Chinese language and culture. For Chinese classes in secondary schools, Tanzanian Chinese teachers are hired by the Tanzanian government.

2.1 Confucius Institute in Dar es Salaam

The University of Dar es Salaam is a public university located in the coastal city of Dar es Salaam. It is the oldest university in Tanzania. The Confucius Institute at the University of Dar es Salaam was officially established on October 9, 2013 under an agreement between the University of Dar es Salaam, the headquarters

14 http://english.scio.gov.cn/international/exchanges/2022-04/20/content_78175339.htm (accessed 11 Sept. 2023).

of the Confucius Institute (Hanban), and Zhejiang Normal University.¹⁵ As the website of the CI at the University of Dar es Salaam states, the CI was established “to meet Tanzania’s growing need of understanding Chinese language, culture, technology and skills and to increase mutual understanding among the peoples of China and Tanzania” and is an important center and link in the relations between Tanzania and China. Many Tanzanians come to the CI to learn not only the Chinese language but also about Chinese culture. In 2017, the CI at the University of Dar es Salaam was awarded the honorary title of “Global Advanced Confucius Institute”.¹⁶

Up until 2019, the CI at the University of Dar es Salaam had established 21 teaching centers in various schools (primary schools, secondary schools, colleges and universities) across the country. In most of these centers, the Chinese language is taught as an elective course, i.e., students from different majors can take a Chinese course as an optional course.

At the CI at the University of Dar es Salaam, the following courses involving Chinese language classes are offered: Bachelor of Arts with Education in Chinese and English, Diploma in Chinese, Elective Chinese Course, and Short Courses.¹⁷

Despite the great success in the establishment of Chinese teaching centers in schools, colleges, and universities, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the progress of Chinese language teaching and learning. As of 2020, many Chinese teachers had to leave and return to China because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Only a few Chinese teachers were left in Tanzania, and they continued to work with the local Chinese teachers. From 2022 to the present, the situation has been getting better, and some of the centers that were closed in 2020 have resumed Chinese language classes.

2.2 Other Language Schools for Adults

As mentioned earlier, Chinese language in Tanzania is taught at several universities, including the CI at the University of Dodoma, the CI at the University of Dar es Salaam (CI USDM), the Confucius Classroom at the Muslim University of Morogoro, and the Confucius Classroom at the State University of Zanzibar. Furthermore, the CI USDM has set up several centers at university level. A 2019

15 <https://www.udsm.ac.tz/web/index.php/institutes/ci/welcome-to-ci> (accessed 11 Sept. 2023).

16 <https://m.fx361.com/news/2022/0329/16492444.html> (accessed 30 Jul. 2023).

17 https://www.sohu.com/a/313017694_99911507 (accessed 11 Sept. 2023).

newspaper article in the Tanzanian newspaper *The Citizen* listed 10 locations¹⁸ where Chinese could be studied at university level. Four of these centers had to give up teaching Chinese, mainly due to a shortage of teachers caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The remaining six centers actively teaching Chinese are the Dar es Salaam University College of Education (DUCE), the Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy in Dar es Salaam, the Mkwawa University College of Education (MUCE) in Iringa, the Mbeya University of Science and Technology (MUST), the National College of Tourism in Dar es Salaam, and the St. Augustine University (SAUT) in Mwanza.

In the following, we will briefly present three Confucius Institutes and Classrooms as examples of their function as educational institutions and their history.

Confucius Institute at the University of Dodoma

The Confucius Institute at the University of Dodoma (CI UDOM) was officially launched on April 28, 2013. It was the first Confucius Institute to be established in Tanzania under the agreement between the University of Dodoma, Zhengzhou University of Aeronautics, the Chinese International Education Foundation, and the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation.¹⁹

Since its establishment, CI UDOM has won several awards, including the “Outstanding Contribution Award” issued by the Dodoma Provincial Government and Morogoro Provincial Government and the “Excellent Party Group and Advanced Unit of Public Diplomacy” title awarded by the Chinese embassy in Tanzania. In 2014, the Confucius Institute at the University of Dodoma was awarded the “Global Advanced Confucius Institute” title.²⁰

Chinese language teaching at the University of Dodoma is incorporated into the credit teaching management system of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. In 2020, CI UDOM became an independent academic unit, and now it is offering a Bachelor of Arts degree in Chinese Language. The Chinese language is also taught as an elective course for students that are not majoring in Chinese.²¹

18 <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/supplement/confucius-institute-celebrates-mile-stone-reached-through-chinese-language-teaching-2677554> (accessed 25 Sept. 2023).

19 https://www.udom.ac.tz/academic_unit/welcome_note?id=VFZSUIBRPT0= (accessed 12 Sept. 2023).

20 <http://www.hneae.com/article/642.html> (accessed 12 Sept. 2023).

21 https://www.udom.ac.tz/academic_unit/welcome_note?id=VFZSUIBRPT0= (accessed 12 Sept. 2023).

As an extension of their services, CI UDOM has opened several teaching centers, including Morogoro Muslim University (which is now developed into a Confucius Classroom), Dodoma Secondary School, Viwandani Secondary School, and the College of Business and Economics, to name a few.²²

Confucius Classroom (CC) at the State University of Zanzibar

The CC was established in 2011 as a collaboration between China Radio International and the Zanzibar Journalism and Mass Media College (ZJMMC). At that time, it was known as the “China Radio International Confucius Classroom.” The official opening ceremony of the CC was held on April 2, 2011 at the ZJMMC.²³ This CC was the first to be established in Tanzania, and the ZJMMC was the first institution organizing classes and teaching Chinese to Tanzanians.²⁴ The CC was renamed the Confucius Classroom at the State University of Zanzibar (CC at SUZA) in 2020 as a result of the merge of the ZJMMC and the State University of Zanzibar (SUZA). Since its establishment, the CC at SUZA has been offering courses in the Chinese language as well as cultural courses and activities. The agreement to conduct the Chinese proficiency test (HSK) at the CC at SUZA, however, was only signed in June 2023.²⁵

Confucius Classroom at the Muslim University of Morogoro

As already mentioned above, the CI at the University of Dodoma is responsible for organizing Chinese language classes at both the University of Dodoma and the Muslim University of Morogoro (MUM). Thus, at the MUM, the CI UDOM established a teaching center. In 2015, this teaching center even started offering a bachelor’s degree in Languages and Interpretation.²⁶ The center officially became a Confucius Classroom in July 2019. By the end of 2019, there were a total of 1,500 students that were learning Chinese, and about 70 of them received scholarships from the Confucius Institute to study in China. In 2022, the CC at the MUM only counted

22 <https://m.fx361.com/news/2022/0329/16492444.html> (accessed 12 Sept. 2023).

23 <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/hwjy/2011/04-06/2954110.shtml> (accessed 12 Sept. 2023).

24 <http://swahili.cri.cn/141/2011/04/02/1s104113.htm> (accessed 12 Sept. 2023).

25 <https://www.suza.ac.tz/the-first-board-meeting-of-confucius-classroom-at-the-state-university-of-zanzibar-cc-at-suza-held-on-5th-june-2023-at-the-conference-room-of-south-administrative-building-zhejiang-normal-universi/> (accessed 12 Sept. 2023).

26 <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/supplement/confucius-institute-celebrates-milestone-reached-through-chinese-language-teaching-2677554> (accessed 12 Oct. 2023).

380 students.²⁷ Unfortunately, it is not clear what caused the drop in the number of students (supposedly, an effect of the pandemic and the accompanying shortage of Chinese teachers).

2.3 Chinese in Public Secondary Schools

Chinese is also taught at the secondary school level in both public and private secondary schools. In 2016, six pilot secondary schools were selected to offer Chinese language classes.²⁸ Since then, the number of secondary schools that offer Chinese language courses has grown significantly. By 2019, there were sixteen secondary schools that offered Chinese language classes and took part in the Chinese national examination.²⁹ Currently, there are more than 20 secondary schools that offer Chinese language classes in Tanzania. There are also new subject combinations that have been introduced in high school. Two of these subject combinations are language subject combinations, namely, KFC (Kiswahili, French, and Chinese) and KEC (Kiswahili, English, and Chinese). The two combinations are expected to fuel the preparation and production of more competent language experts.³⁰

The government of Tanzania has continuously emphasized the importance of foreign language education in its education and training policy.³¹ Regarding Chinese language teaching, the Tanzanian government published a “Chinese Language Syllabus for Ordinary and Secondary Education”³² in 2015 in order to complement the objectives of the Education and Training Policy 2014 and strives to prepare a Chinese curriculum for various levels of education in the country, from the primary school to the college/ university level. The Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) is currently working on the review and development of the Chinese language curriculum for primary school, secondary school (both Ordinary

27 <https://m.fx361.com/news/2022/0329/16492444.html> (accessed 12 Oct. 2023).

28 https://www.bbc.com/swahili/medianuai/2016/01/160104_chinese_schools_tanzania (accessed 15 Sept. 2023).

29 <https://www.eatv.tv/news/current-affairs/tanzania-kufundisha-kichina-shuleni-na-vyuoni> (accessed 12 Oct. 2023).

30 <https://nukta.co.tz/read/kfc-au-kec:-kuna-maana-gani-serikali-kuanzisha-%E2%80%9Ccombination%E2%80%9D-mpya-kidato-cha-tano.html> (accessed 12 Oct. 2023).

31 Tanzania Education and Training Policy, 2014. Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

32 [https://www.tie.go.tz/uploads/files/SYLLABUS%20FOR%20CHINESSE%20LANGUAGE%20\(O%27LEVEL\).pdf](https://www.tie.go.tz/uploads/files/SYLLABUS%20FOR%20CHINESSE%20LANGUAGE%20(O%27LEVEL).pdf) (accessed 11 Sept. 2023).

Level and Advanced Level), and Teaching Colleges. These new ordinary and advanced secondary school curricula stipulate that the Chinese language will be taught as an elective course at the ordinary secondary school level,³³ and for advanced secondary school, it will be a compulsory course.³⁴

3 Study in Tanzania

*“Language is important for the development
of any country in the world.”*
(Study Participant)

As described in the previous sections, systematic teaching of Mandarin Chinese does not have a long history in Tanzania. While other foreign cultural promotion and language teaching organizations have been around for decades (the Alliance Française, for example, since 1961 and the Goethe Institut since 1962), the CI/CC was only established in 2011 in Zanzibar and in 2013 in mainland Tanzania. However, in terms of popularity amongst Tanzanians, Chinese seems to have already overtaken all other foreign languages taught in the country (except English) (Mutembei, p.c.). Based on these observations, the following questions arise: why is Chinese so popular in Tanzania? What is the motivation of Tanzanians to learn Chinese? And does learning Chinese also help the students in the interaction with Chinese speakers?

In order to answer these questions, we designed a sociolinguistic questionnaire including questions about motivation, learning habits of language and culture, and mutual (cultural) understanding between Chinese speakers in Tanzania and Tanzanians.

In order to assess the functionality of the questionnaire, we ran a short test phase with a version in English in the summer of 2022, where about 30 participants of different classes filled out the questionnaire. Although we generally got good results, some participants had difficulties understanding the questions due to insufficient command of the English language. Therefore, we translated the questionnaire into Swahili. Additionally, we set up an online version of the questionnaire using an app. This way, the questionnaire could easily be shared with potential participants.

33 Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2023). Chinese Language Syllabus for Ordinary Secondary Education Form I–IV. Tanzania Institute of Education.

34 Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2023). Chinese Language Syllabus for Advanced Secondary Education Form V–VI. Tanzania Institute of Education.

The online questionnaire was distributed by Chinese teachers in various student chat groups. The paper version was filled out by students before or after their Chinese language classes. The data were collected between September 2022 and June 2023. They were collected at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), the Confucius Institute of Dar es Salaam (CI), Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy in Dar es Salaam, the Dar es Salaam University College of Education (DUCE), and the Mkwawa University College of Education (MUCE) in Iringa. In total, 40 % of responses were filled in on the app and 60 % on paper.

3.1 Short Description of Study

The questionnaire contained 21 questions. The first six questions gathered some personal information, such as gender, age group, and languages spoken by the study participants (please refer to the appendix to see the exact questions of the questionnaire). Questions 7–20 dealt with the language acquisition of each study participant as well as with their motivation, their personal experiences, and potential influences on their cultural understanding and attitude. Question 21 was an open question, leaving the participant space to comment on anything related to the topic of the questionnaire. In the following section, we discuss the answers to each question in more detail.

3.2 Description and Analysis of Questionnaire Results

Gender and Age Group

In total, we received 117 completed questionnaires. Out of these, only one questionnaire had to be excluded because (as the IP address showed) one participant filled out the online questionnaire twice, giving identical responses. Regarding the gender of the participants, we got 64 males (55 %) and 52 females (45 %) (see Figure 1).

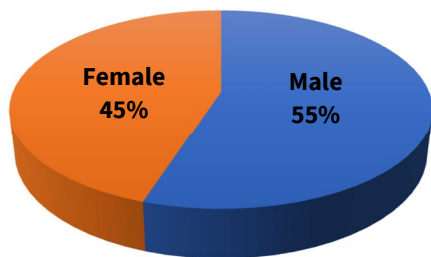


Fig. 1 Gender distribution amongst study participants

86% of the study participants were between 18 and 25 years old, the remaining 14% being between 26 and 35 years old.

Other Languages Spoken

Questions 4 and 5 asked for the languages spoken by the participants. 78% of the participants stated that Swahili was their mother tongue (Question 4). However, this number has to be treated with caution, because it is not clear if Swahili is really the mother tongue or, rather, the language the participants use the most in everyday life. Regarding proficiency in other languages, 81% stated that they speak English, while only 47% stated that they actually speak Chinese. It seems as if the remaining 53% still consider their Chinese proficiency as not being sufficient to state that they actually speak the language, although only 24% said that they were learning Chinese at a beginner's level. 16% of the participants speak Swahili as a foreign language, while all other foreign languages listed in Figure 2 are only spoken by one or two individuals.

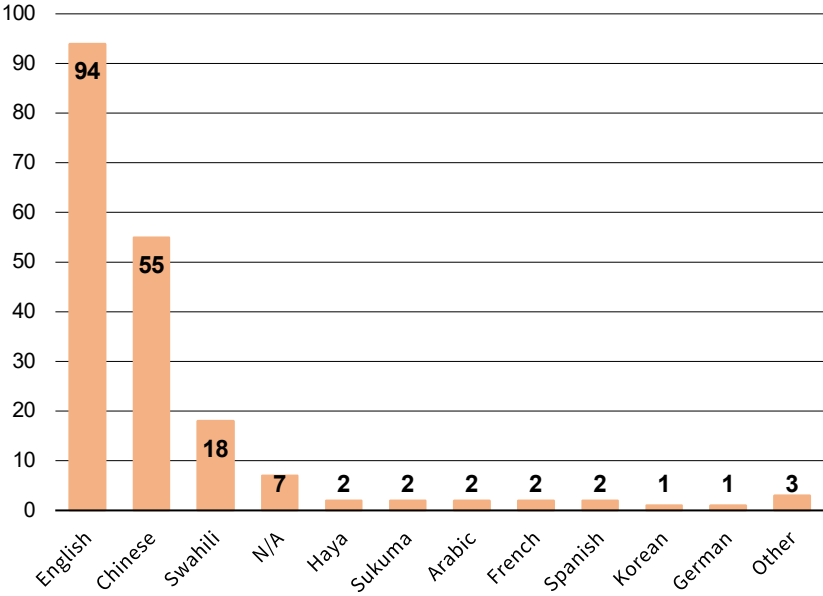


Fig. 2 Other languages spoken by study participants

Motivation to Learn Chinese

Question 7 asked for the motivation of the Tanzanian students to learn Chinese. The question gave eight possible answers as well as space for an open answer (other). Multiple answers were possible. Figure 3 presents the participants' replies. Each bar contains the total number of times the respective answer was chosen by participants.

As Figure 3 shows, the most frequently chosen motivation to learn Chinese, selected by more than half of the participants, is the desire to go to China for a period of time (53%), followed by the potential need for a future job (44%). A general interest in Chinese culture and the desire to make new foreign friends were chosen by 33% and 31%, respectively.

The results for this question show that the motivation for many study participants lies in a potential future benefit, i.e., learning Chinese is seen as an investment in one's future rather than being of practical need in the present. This is supported by the relatively low numbers of participants saying they need Chinese for their everyday life or at work (22% and 18%, respectively).

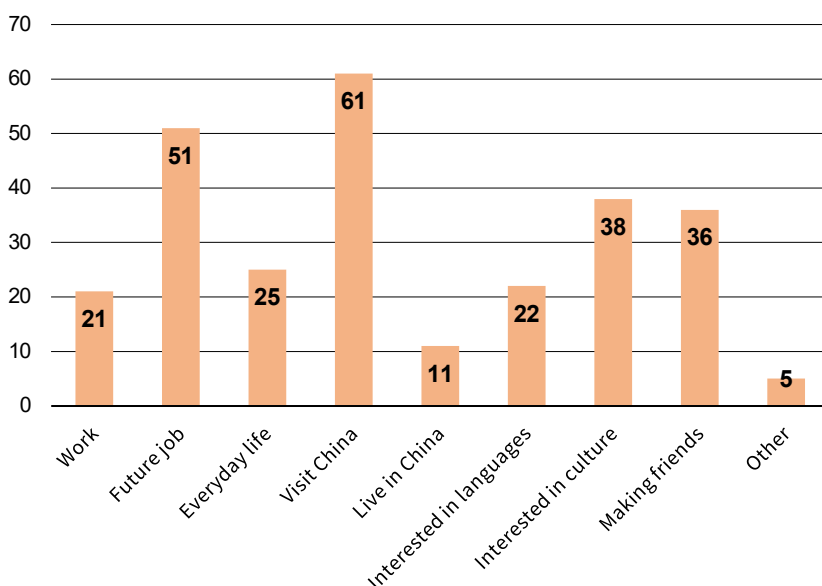


Fig. 3 Motivation of study participants to learn Chinese

Duration and Means of Learning Chinese

Regarding the duration of learning Chinese, there are three almost equally sized groups of beginners (1–3 months, 15 %) and intermediate students (6–9 and 9–12 months; 15 % and 13 %, respectively). There are also two almost equally sized groups of near-beginners and students who have learned Chinese for more than one year (most of these students have been learning for between two and three years—one individual even for six years). Only 2 % of the students said that they had been learning for less than a month.

With respect to the means of learning Chinese, 29 % of the participants used an app or other online tools to learn Chinese in addition to the Chinese classes.

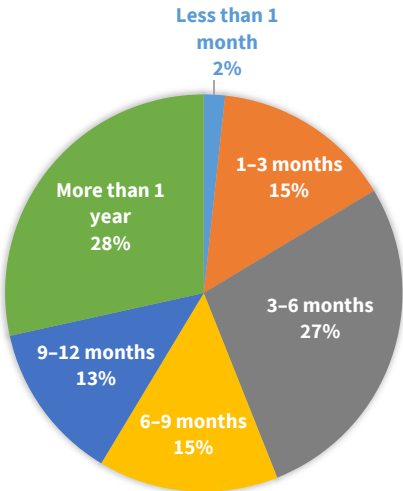


Fig. 4 Duration of study participants' learning of Chinese

Participation in Classes on Chinese Culture and Other Activities at the CI

Questions 12 and 13 aimed to elicit information about whether the participants acquired their knowledge about and understanding of Chinese culture primarily through the Chinese language classes or whether they also attended other classes or activities that focus on Chinese culture.

Figure 5 shows that 57 % of the participants already attended a class on some aspect of Chinese culture, and Figure 6 shows that 64 % joined other activities organized by the CI.

In the questionnaire, we also asked the participants to kindly indicate what the topics of these classes were. This question was not answered as carefully as the one before: only 43 out of the 67 participants saying they attended classes

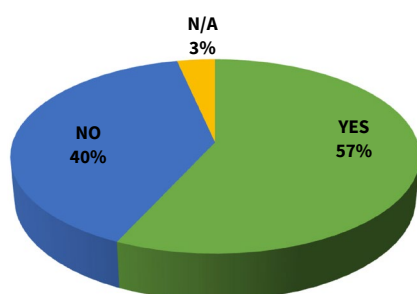


Fig. 5 Attendance of classes on Chinese culture

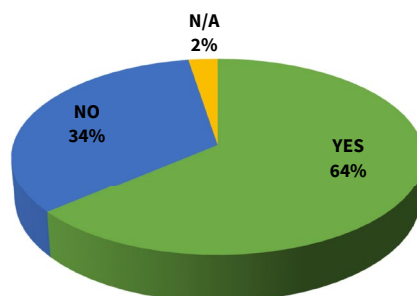


Fig. 6 Attendance of activities organized by the CI

also specified the topic of the class here. The respondents still listed a variety of topics, such as calligraphy, Chinese songs / singing competitions, paper cutting, kung fu, food / cuisine, movies, and Chinese traditional festivals; one participant even mentioned Longquan Celadon.³⁵

At the CIs and CCs, classes on culture are usually organized in the form of “Chinese clubs,” each club teaching one or more aspects of culture. Some of the classes were also online training courses organized by universities in China.

Question 13 reveals the learners’ general interest in attending various activities organized by the Confucius Institute. The results show that 64% of the students actively participate in the activities and events offered by the CI and CC. Events and activities include the Chinese New Year celebration (Spring Festival), Chinese Bridge competitions,³⁶ Chinese singing competitions, Chinese clubs, essay writing competitions, calligraphy, speech competitions, kung fu, school opening ceremonies, Chinese Embassy awards, HSK tests, drawing, and summer camp activities. Some of the topics and classes overlap between Questions 12 and 13, which is obviously the case because the CI is teaching classes on cultural issues and, therefore, the participants couldn’t decide where to name them.

Finally, it should be noted that participation in competitions seems to be quite popular amongst the students: 27 out of 116 participants have already participated

³⁵ Longquan Celadon is a specific kind of green Chinese ceramic.

³⁶ Chinese Bridge is an international Chinese proficiency competition for foreign students promoted by the Center for Language Education and Cooperation (formerly Hanban). Students learning Chinese from all over the world go to China every year to participate in these competitions. The first prizes are full scholarship to study for a degree program in China (cf. e.g. http://za.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/znlj/Education/200405/t20040520_8069854.htm, accessed 13 Oct. 2023).

in the (pre-)Chinese Bridge competitions,³⁷ and at least 10 students have participated in other competitions like essay writing, singing, speaking, and calligraphy.

Interaction with Chinese Speakers

Questions 14 to 16 aimed to investigate the interaction of the study participants with Chinese speakers (outside of the classroom) and language use during interaction. As Figure 7 shows, the respondents to this study interact with Chinese speakers with varying frequency. 34% of the speakers (40 individuals) state that they have daily interactions with Chinese speakers, followed by almost equal numbers of speakers who say that they have contact once a week and never (23% and 22%, respectively). 17% state that they interact with Chinese speakers once a month (8 individuals) or even less (12 individuals). In summary, the results indicate that 40% of the people surveyed have little or no interactions with Chinese speakers and 58% of respondents have frequent interactions with Chinese speakers.

Figure 8 shows which language the study participants use when they meet with Chinese speakers: the majority of participants use Chinese and/or English (84 and 77 participants, respectively), and only 25 state that they use Swahili. Note that this question was designed as a multiple-choice question. While 84 seems a large number of participants who use Chinese when interacting with Chinese speakers, 55 of them said they also used English, out of which another 15 also use Swahili. This suggests that, most likely, Chinese learners and Chinese speakers code-switch quite frequently when they interact.

Question 16 asked about the kind of interaction the participants have with Chinese speakers, i.e., work-related, private (meeting friends), while shopping (at the market, for example), or other kind of contact. This question was also designed as a multiple choice. Figure 9 indicates that most of the interactions are private (57 participants, i.e., 51%). Only 16 participants state that their contacts are work-related, and 20 participants interact with Chinese speakers while shopping. A large number (41 participants) said that they meet Chinese speakers in other contexts including, for example, at restaurants, online/on social media, or at events.

Regarding the topic of interaction with Chinese speakers, we would like to point out that a number of participants may have misread Question 14: while the

37 Chinese Bridge competitions involve giving speeches in Chinese, singing Chinese songs, or other talent shows, such as kung fu. Additionally, there are other events, such as singing competitions, competitions in calligraphy or writing, etc., which are organized separately.

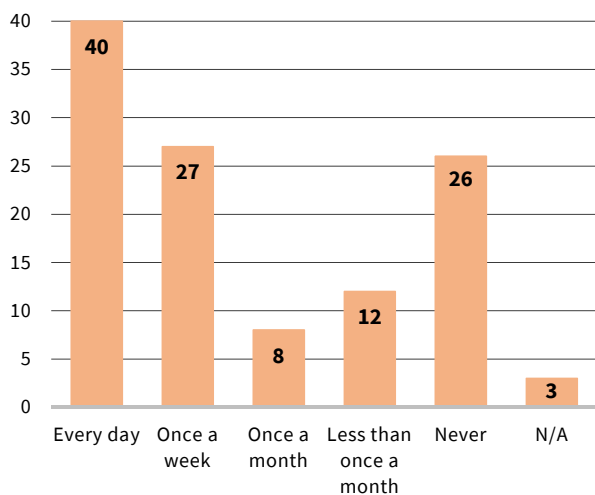


Fig. 7 Study participants' interaction with Chinese speakers outside the classroom

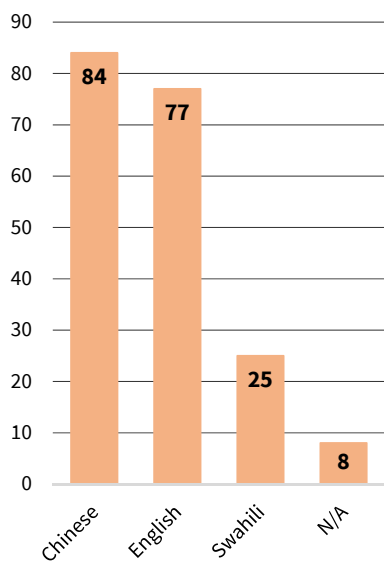


Fig. 8 Language used when interacting with Chinese speakers

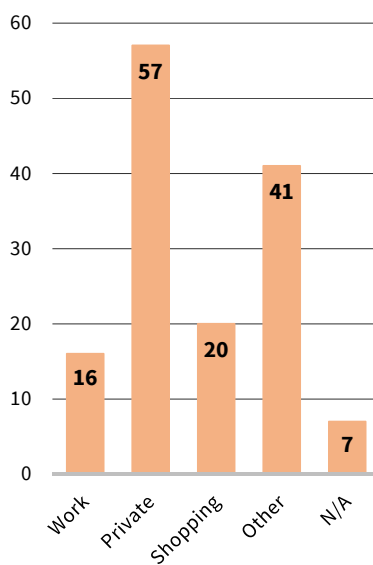


Fig. 9 Kind of interaction the study participants have with Chinese speakers

question explicitly asked for interaction with Chinese speakers *outside* of the classroom, a quite high number still stated that they interacted with Chinese speakers once a week. This suspicion is strengthened by the fact that many participants used the section “other” of Question 16 to state “in class” (17 individuals), and another 10 individuals said that they used Chinese with their fellow students or at the university and CI. In total, these are 23% that have contact with Chinese speakers in and around their Chinese classes. Certainly, these 27 participants do not exactly correspond to the 27 participants who stated that they have contact once a week; nevertheless, the figures point in this direction.

Preconceptions, Attitude, and Cultural Understanding

The last four questions of the questionnaire aimed to get an impression of whether and how learning Chinese helped the study participants to reduce their prejudices against Chinese speakers. Questions 17 and 18 asked specifically about what the study participants thought about Chinese speakers before and after starting to learn Chinese.

The two graphs show that before starting to learn Chinese, the answers of the study participants were a little bit more evenly distributed over all possibilities. Still, 43% thought that the Chinese were friendly people, and 66% thought of the Chinese as technologically developed people.

After starting to learn Chinese, the replies of the study participants concentrate mainly around four possible answers: even more participants think that the Chinese are friendly people (72%), while the number of participants thinking that the Chinese are technologically developed dropped to 55%. A reasonable percentage of the participants also think that the Chinese are “generous, kind and loving people” (34%) and very civilized people (28%).

In general, it is noticeable that, even before starting to learn Chinese, only a few participants thought negatively about the Chinese. Answers like “Chinese speakers are hard to do business with” or “Chinese speakers come to Africa to take the natural resources and exploit the people” were chosen only by small percentages of participants.

This general positivity is also reflected in Question 19. Here, the participants had to state whether their general attitude towards Chinese speakers had changed due to learning the language and Chinese culture as well as their contact with Chinese speakers. The majority of the participants said that it had not changed because it had always been positive (73%). Only 22% percent of the participants stated that their attitude changed, with 19% changing from bad to good and only 3% vice versa. Another 3% said that their attitude had been negative before starting to learn Chinese and is still bad.

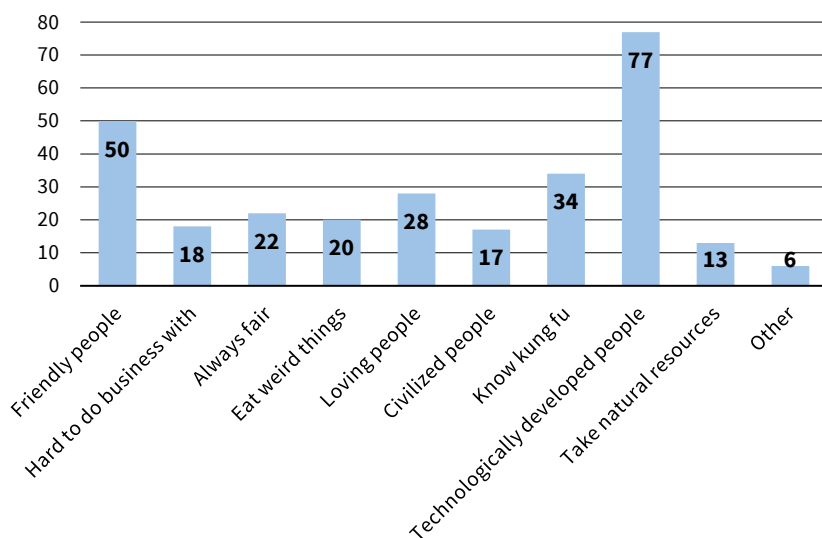


Fig. 10 Thoughts of study participants about Chinese speakers before starting to learn Chinese

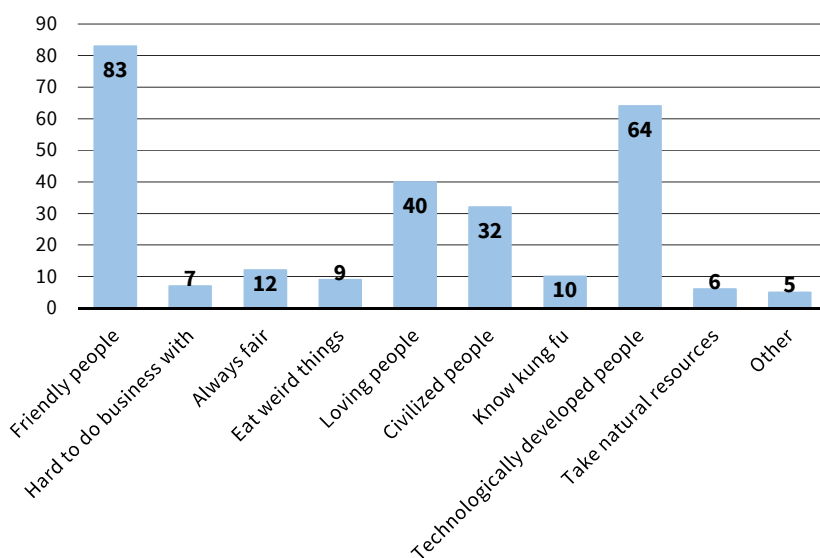


Fig. 11 Thoughts of study participants about Chinese speakers after starting to learn Chinese

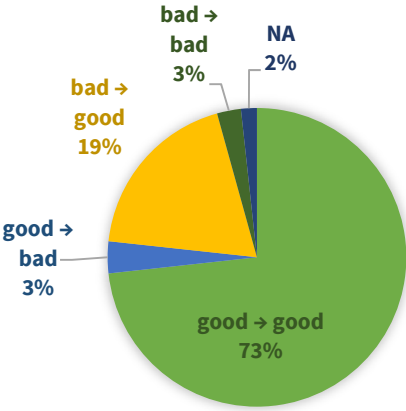


Fig. 12 Attitude of participants towards Chinese speakers before and after learning Chinese

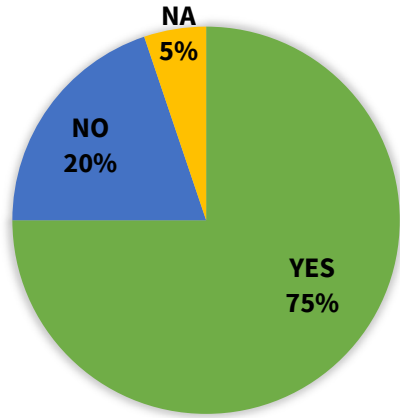


Fig. 13 Increase in cultural understanding

Question 20 finally explicitly asked if the participants had the impression that, through learning Chinese, they developed a better understanding of some of the behaviors of Chinese speakers in Tanzania. Three quarters of the participants answered this question in the affirmative, as Figure 13 shows.

To our surprise, the comment section (Question 21) was heavily used by the study participants, with 91% leaving a comment. Contentwise, the comments were mainly about the Chinese language, people, and culture in general; the teaching and learning environment; self-reflection in relation to learning Chinese; and the benefits of learning language in general. For a more detailed categorization and discussion of the comments, see Section 3.3.

Finally, we would like to point out that no correlations between any factors asked for in the questionnaire could be found.

3.3 Conclusion Drawn from Study Results

Although the present study is small in terms of participants and institutions covered, there are still some trends and hints we can observe in the answers of the participants.

Generally, it seems that the participants perceive the Chinese language as one that is difficult and that takes a lot of time and dedication to learn. We see this in the replies to Question 5 (other languages spoken), where only 47% stated that they speak Chinese, while only 24% said that they were learning Chinese

at a beginner's level. In addition, we received some statements from participants saying that learning Chinese is hard (or the like), for example, "Chinese is a difficult language; alternative ways of teaching it have to be employed." Most participants, however, do not directly comment on whether it is hard or not, but rather say that Chinese is a "good" language (or the like) and that more teachers and training are needed, e.g., "Chinese is a beautiful language that everyone likes to learn, so we would like to ask the Chinese to continue to bring more teachers so that Chinese can continue to spread and people can learn it properly."

The study further showed that, apart from English, which has still the status of an "unofficial second state language," hardly any participant speaks another foreign language (such as Spanish, French, etc.). Only 6 individuals (5%) speak one or more foreign languages other than English. This is also in line with the fact that few participants are learning Chinese simply because they are interested in learning other languages (19% of the participants, one of the options chosen in the multiple choice). This means that the majority of the participants chose to learn Chinese specifically (and decided against investing time and money in learning French, Arabic, Turkish, etc.). This further matches the motivation of the participants for learning Chinese. As already mentioned in Section 2.2, most of the participants stated that they think they will need Chinese in the future, i.e., either because they want to go to China for a period of time (53%) or they think they potentially need Chinese for a future job (44%). Only few participants stated that they currently need Chinese, either at work (18%) or in their everyday life (22%). This suggests that, for the majority of study participants, learning Chinese is an investment in their personal future, i.e., it might bring the benefit of finding a job or being able to travel to China. This observation matches with the results of Xu et al.'s (2023) study amongst African students in China, as they conclude that "the students appeared to have internalized neoliberal discourses in the wider socio-political context ascribing to 'the enterprising self'" (du Gay 1996), where they perceive the linguistic capital of Chinese as integral to future employability and gaining prestige.

This result is not surprising, since the CI is known for advertising potential scholarships and regularly organizes competitions (open to the public) where students can sometimes even win scholarships.

The study further suggests that, for the majority of participants, learning the Chinese language is connected to a general interest in Chinese culture, since 57% are also taking classes on culture. Furthermore, 64% stated that they also participate in other activities and classes organized by the CI, such as competitions and festivities. This suggests that, once students decide to attend a Chinese language course, they are also generally interested in learning more about Chinese culture and are more likely to invest time and money in further classes.

Question 15, on the choice of language during interaction with Chinese speakers, showed that these interactions may provide chances for learners to practice their language skills. 72% of the participants use Chinese in their interactions with Chinese speakers. This does not mean that these participants only use Chinese in the interaction, as we have seen in the discussion of Figure 8 above. 57% of the participants said that they use more than one language when interacting with Chinese speakers. 36% stated that they use only one language (either Chinese, English, or Swahili). 21% of all participants use Chinese only. Of the three languages, Swahili is the least used language in interactions with Chinese speakers (25 participants), and only two participants stated that they use only Swahili in the interaction with Chinese speakers (both of them Chinese beginners).

The answers given to the questions dealing with preconceptions and attitude (17–20) suggest that, most likely, the majority of students who decided to start learning Chinese generally already have a positive attitude towards Chinese speakers and the Chinese culture.

Finally, the comment section of the questionnaire showed that the study participants have strong opinions about the usage and function of the Chinese language in Tanzania. Overall, the comments are very positive. They reflect on potentials and opportunities that arise through the usage of the Chinese language for them as well as for the state of Tanzania, and some even give recommendations to “the Chinese,” the CI, or the Tanzanian government.

- 1) “Chinese is one of the fastest growing languages. It is growing in different countries, especially in African countries, this is due to the great need of people to know this language. And another reason for people to learn Chinese is the opportunities available to those who learn this language.”
- 2) “Chinese speakers are great people who like to do business with other people, so we should keep learning Chinese in order to stay connected to the business opportunities that they can bring.”
- 3) “I would like to give an advice to Chinese speakers to be diligent in spreading and promoting the Chinese language in the world so that it can become one of the international languages in all economic, political, social and cultural aspects.”
- 4) “With the aim of increasing Chinese speakers in Tanzania, Chinese institutions should provide funding for people to go to China to learn Chinese in order to increase Chinese teachers in Tanzania, and students should learn more practically to develop a greater understanding of the Chinese language.”
- 5) “They have done very well, but they should continue to spread Chinese so that those who do not know it get the opportunity to learn it and also Chinese speakers should learn Swahili.”

Some participants even seem to almost “glorify” the Chinese language and people, seeing “the Chinese” as obviously superior (i.e., bringing money, job opportunities, scholarships, good behavior, etc.). This leads to the downright grotesque situation of the participants demanding things from “the Chinese” or the CI (as can be seen, e.g., in 4) above or in 10) and 11) below).

- 6) “I love Chinese people.”
- 7) “I wish the Chinese language would be a universal language and have more speakers.”
- 8) “Keep teaching Chinese language in Tanzania, we love it.”
- 9) “Chinese is a very good language, it should be given priority like Kiswahili in Tanzania.”
- 10) “I would like the Chinese to provide us with better ways/ facilities to learn Chinese, for example using a computer.”
- 11) “We ask for scholarships for those who do the best.”
- 12) “Chinese speakers are great people who like to do business with other people, so we should keep learning Chinese in order to stay connected to the business opportunities that they can bring.”
- 13) “Learning the Chinese language requires time, patience and dedication. Along with this, if you manage to live with the Chinese, you can be a changed person in terms of how you work, because the Chinese are very careful in their work. Thank you.”

Others, however, are more critical or even share their concerns about the Chinese presence in the country or negative experiences they had.

- 14) “The Chinese are discriminating, exploitative, cunning (that is, the Chinese can be very tricky—for example, you can agree on something and suddenly change on the next day, they can sign a contract and go on to not fulfil all the terms of the contract), they do not value our education.”
- 15) “Some Chinese can easily get angry.”
- 16) “Even though the Chinese are good people, there are still some Chinese who are thieves to the extent that they have decided to focus on the issues of online money theft, fraud and even other bad behaviors that are not good to emulate in our society. I would suggest that they stop doing it because it continues to tarnish the good image of the good Chinese people in Tanzania.”

Regarding these mainly positive opinions of study participants, we need to keep in mind that certainly and naturally, the participants were “biased.” All of them

chose to learn Chinese voluntarily, pay for their classes, and were actually sitting at the CI/CC when filling in the questionnaire (at least, the ones who filled it in on paper), before or after their class. While this is certainly a reason leading to overly positive results, there is still a noticeable trend of being extremely uncritical towards the whole situation and setting of learning Chinese in Tanzania.

4 Reflections and Outlook

“When I see the Chinese can speak Kiswahili it makes me very happy and when they see us speaking Chinese it gives them comfort. Therefore, knowing their language has made it very easy to be friends with the Chinese.”
(Study Participant)

The study has clearly shown that, overall, Chinese language learners in Tanzania have a positive attitude towards Chinese speakers. Especially the comments show in an interesting way that the participants seem to readily adapt the Chinese culture and values (such as being punctual, hard-working, etc.) as well as rules enacted by the Chinese teachers / staff or superiors at work. The following example (as well as Example 13 above) indicated this well: “I have learned that Chinese people do not like to be mistreated and lied to, in order to live well with them you have to be honest and understanding as well.” As already mentioned above in Section 2.3, however, Chinese language students are a clearly positively biased group and not representative of the entire Tanzanian population. The study participants chose to learn Chinese and, therefore, most likely already had a positive attitude and expectation before starting to learn the language. They are additionally likely to spend time in the “Chinese-friendly” environment of the CI/CC.

This is supported by an Afrobarometer survey conducted in 2019–2021 in 34 African countries, showing that “seven in 10 Africans (69 %) say English is the most important international language for young people to learn. Only 3 % prefer Chinese” (Sanny and Selormey 2021: 2).

With China being the most important source for incoming investment into Tanzania since 2016,³⁸ it can be expected that the settlement of Chinese companies in Tanzania will increase and, with it, the need for more Tanzanians with a good proficiency in Chinese.

The results of the questionnaire further show that the study participants reflect upon themselves learning Chinese and have clear ideas about improvements to

38 <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-investment-climate-statements/tanzania/> (accessed 26 Oct. 2023).

the teaching and learning environment (e.g., computer- / online-based learning, expansion of study program/lessons, provision of stipends, etc.). In order to be able to improve the offers for studying Chinese and to get more students, the decision-makers of the CI program and the government of Tanzania would be well advised to include students' ideas and opinions in the revision of the programs they offer. "Doing research is good but it should not end only in magazines, something should be done to promote Chinese language [...]" However, it is also striking that, apparently, only very few participants see themselves in an active role when it comes to helping to shape the learning environment. This is certainly due to structural reasons at the institutions (and potentially even at the level of the Tanzanian government) but also to the general perception of the Chinese state and its representatives as being economically and politically superior and more powerful. This leads to the participants mainly demanding things, such as:

"Chinese speakers should continue to prepare a good environment for teaching and spreading their culture in other countries through organizing various events/activities (i.e. cultural events, concerts)" or

"I have benefited from Chinese, so Chinese speakers should continue to bring their programs so that others can benefit as I have benefited" or

"They should provide many scholarship opportunities and should design various ways to attract more people to learn Chinese language and culture."

Taking the above-mentioned (Section 1) quote of Xi Jinping into consideration (along with numerous similar statements by Xi in his speeches), it is clear that agency³⁹ and participation of local actors is not the primary intention of the establishment of Chinese language and culture classes in Tanzania. At higher levels, however, there seems to be room for agency and the possibility to change structures towards more mutuality. For example, the CIUDSM requires all Chinese staff coming to Tanzania to learn Swahili (Prof. Aldin Mutembei, video posted on the CGTN Africa YouTube channel⁴⁰) and uses locally produced coursebooks in

39 "Agency is the ability of the individual to influence structure, more precisely as the ability of actors to implement their will to act within their context and to shape their context (Giddens 1979: 55). It is hence the exercise of power to enable transformation (Giddens 1979: 55), and therefore it constitutes or changes structures" (Adeli and Ammann in this volume). For more discussion of cultural agency in connection with people-to-people connectivity, see Adeli and Ammann in this volume, section 1.2.

40 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRzsCELalaE> (accessed 29 Oct. 2023).

Swahili to teach Chinese. Such important advances towards more symmetrical relations and ownership depend, however, on the commitment of decision-makers.

The data generally seem to suggest that at least the CIs and CCs fulfil their role in strengthening people-to-people connectivity and cultural exchange as well as building up their own soft power and shaping the representation of China in Tanzania. However, scholars such as, for example, Bodomo critically note that the relation between the African continent and China is asymmetrical, not only in respect to their economic and financial power but also on the level of culture and cultural diplomacy (cf. Bodomo 2009; Bodomo et al., Chapter 7 of this volume, and the interview with Bodomo, Chapter 8).

Since this study only includes 116 participants from five institutions, mainly in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, it is quite unlikely that the results and trends can be readily transferred to other African countries. Other countries have different cultures, histories, and experiences so that people may react completely differently to the Chinese presence and the claim to cultural superiority. Chinese investment, however, seems to be generally welcomed by all African states and their citizens (cf. e.g. Afrobarometer “How popular is China in Africa? Survey sheds light on what ordinary people think”⁴¹).

Due to its aforementioned restricted scope, this study can only be seen as a pilot study. More research is needed on the motivation of students to learn Chinese and effects that the expansion of the population’s linguistic competence in Chinese has. Furthermore, research should ideally help to reveal new paths that lead to more mutuality and symmetry in cultural exchange in general and in Tanzania–China relations specifically. Therefore, we also need to investigate Chinese citizens who are learning Swahili in Tanzania (or who have learned Swahili already before coming to Tanzania).

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41 <https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/how-popular-is-china-in-africa-new-survey-sheds-light-on-what-ordinary-people-think/> (accessed 26 Oct. 2023).

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Appendix

Questionnaire (English version) used in the present study

Questionnaire No: _____

1. Your gender:

2. Your nationality:

3. Your age group:
 18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56-65 older than 65

4. Your native language:

5. Which other languages do you speak?

6. If your native language is not Swahili, indicate your level of proficiency in Swahili:
 near mother tongue
 fluent
 good proficiency
 medium
 other

7. What is your motivation to learn Chinese? (multiple answers possible)
 I need Chinese for my work.
 I think I will need Chinese for my future job.
 I need Chinese in my everyday-life (for example, while shopping)
 I want to go to China for a period of time (internship, study at the university, etc.).
 I want to live in China.
 I am just in general interested in learning languages.
 I am interested in the Chinese culture.
 I want to make foreign friends.
 other _____

8. How long have you been learning Chinese?
 less than one month 6-9 months
 1-3 months 9-12 months
 3-6 months other _____

9. How have you been learning Chinese?
 taking classes at the Confucius Institute
 taking classes at a university
 taking classes at a private school
 using an app (for example Duolingo)
 taking private classes
 other _____

10. How many courses of Chinese have you taken?

11. What is your level in Chinese?
 near native proficiency
 fluent
 good proficiency
 medium
 beginner

12. Do you also take any kind of classes on Chinese culture?
 no yes
if yes: please name some of the topics of the classes and state, in which institution you take them.

13. Do you join activities in the Confucius Institute?
 no yes
if yes: please name some of the activities.

14. How often do you interact with Chinese speakers outside the class room?
 every day
 once a week
 once a month
 less than once a month
 never

15. Which language do you use when interacting with Chinese speakers?
 Chinese English Swahili other: _____

16. What kind of interaction do you have with Chinese speakers?
 work-related private (friendship) while shopping
 other _____

17. What did you think about Chinese speakers and their behaviour before learning Chinese?
(multiple answers possible)
 Chinese speakers are very friendly people.
 Chinese speakers are hard to do business with.
 Chinese speakers are very social and always fair.
 Chinese speakers eat weird things, such as tadpoles.
 Chinese speakers are generous, kind and loving people.
 Chinese speakers come to Africa to take the natural resources and exploit the people.
 Chinese speakers are very civilized people.
 All Chinese speakers can do martial arts (kung fu).
 Chinese speakers eat snakes and are dirty.
 Chinese speakers are technologically developed people.
 other _____

18. What do you think about Chinese speakers today? (multiple answers possible)

- Chinese speakers are very friendly people.
- Chinese speakers are hard to do business with.
- Chinese speakers are very social and always fair.
- Chinese speakers eat weird things, such as tadpoles.
- Chinese speakers are generous, kind and loving people.
- Chinese speakers come to Africa to take the natural resources and exploit the people.
- Chinese speakers are very civilized people.
- All Chinese speakers can do martial arts (kung fu).
- Chinese speakers eat snakes and are dirty.
- Chinese speakers are technologically developed people.
- other _____

19. Do you think your attitude towards Chinese speakers / the Chinese culture has changed since you started learning Chinese?

- No, it has always been positive and it still is positive.
- No, it has always been negative and it still is negative.
- Yes, it has been negative and now it is positive.
- Yes, it has been positive and now it is negative.

20. Do you have the impression that through learning Chinese you developed a better understanding for some of the behaviours of Chinese speakers in Tanzania?

- no yes

if yes: please indicate, what kind of behaviours you are thinking of.

21. Anything else you want to tell us related to the topic of this questionnaire?

Thank you for your help and participation!