



Reaching out to diaspora Chinese in East Africa: Barriers and Bridges

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Abstract

The influx of Chinese in East Africa presents churches with an opportunity to engage in cross-cultural evangelism right in their own neighborhoods. East African churches are well equipped to engage in evangelism and discipleship, yet Chinese immigrants in these urban areas are largely overlooked. This qualitative study seeks to understand the barriers and cultural bridges that East African church leaders identify regarding outreach to their Chinese neighbors. While language and cultural distance cause barriers, church leaders say they can bridge the distance with some extra cultural knowledge and the help of mediators. We conclude that church leaders' understanding of reaching Chinese people is a good start—though incomplete—and can be informed with more exposure to cross-cultural strategies and issues related to contextualizing Christianity within Chinese culture.

Keywords

Chinese diaspora, diaspora missiology, Chinese in Kenya

Introduction

“Good morning to you, brothers and sisters in China! My name is Oladu Oladeji. I am a Nigerian and a resident in Abujah. We need you: brothers and sisters in China to come and help us reach Chinese people in Nigeria. There are so many and we believe that the Chinese nation in Nigeria will praise Jesus. We need your help. Please come to help us!” This eager call to action was from a video clip brought to me by a friend who had just visited MANI 2011 (the Movement for African National

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Initiatives) in Abuja, Nigeria. Several African church pastors at the conference sent the same Macedonian call to reach the unreached and foreigners in Africa, especially the diaspora Chinese.

At this point, two million Chinese have emigrated to Africa. And Beijing's long-term goal is to see 300 million Chinese people emigrate to Africa (Serge and Beuret, 2009). The Academy for Cultural Diplomacy (n.d.) explained, "A wave of migrants principally composed of Chinese businessmen, alongside their relatives, could be expected to come." Pruitt (2012) records that the influx is due, in large part, to Africa's abundant supply of the natural resources that China needs to fuel its economy and development: "oil, minerals, water, timber, ore, platinum, cobalt, chromium, diamonds, copper, clay, zinc, silver and land! These are found in practically every country in Africa in abundant supply" (para. 2). Additionally, in return for the raw materials it needs, China invests heavily in Africa by constructing highways, roads, railways, bridges, dams, and buildings, all across Africa. This has provided incentive for Chinese people to immigrate to Africa at the rate of 75,000 per year (Pruitt, 2012: para 3). This influx includes a diverse workforce of engineers, construction workers, miners, doctors, nurses, chefs, restaurant workers, housekeepers, security guards, teachers, and others. Chinese businesspeople are finding opportunities to start their own restaurants, medicinal services, retail or wholesale shops, and manufactories.

As Wan (2003) pointed out, the flow of *huaren* (Overseas Chinese) presents an opportunity for churches in other nations to evangelize the Chinese, and also presents an opportunity for Chinese Christians to evangelize their new neighbors as they settle abroad. Unfortunately, many African churches face barriers in reaching diaspora Chinese who are unconnected to a church. I have been working with Kenya Baptist Theological College (KBTC), teaching mission theology and Bible classes to African church pastors and leaders who are mainly from Baptist denominations in different areas of Kenya, but I seldom hear leaders express interest in reaching diaspora Chinese in Africa. I visited several African churches in Nairobi, Kenya, where more than 8,000 diaspora Chinese have settled, in order to understand the outreach efforts of these churches. The KBTC alumni and current students I interviewed all expressed a passion to reach diaspora Chinese; however, I rarely saw Chinese people present in their congregations on Sunday.

Much research has been done on reaching Chinese in diaspora (Pohl, 2003), or ministry to migrants in general (Muck, 2003). Several studies have focused on heralding the gospel in the Chinese context (Anderson, 1976; Chan, 2014; Chao, 1987; Chul-Ha, 1983; Lam, 1983; Ruokanen, 2009; Tan, 2008; Tano, 1983; Wu, 2012; Yeo, 1998; Yung, 2014; Zhang, 1992). However, little research has been done to discover how African churches are faring in their efforts to reach diaspora Chinese, and East African attitudes about such efforts are also unknown. To supplement this deficiency, I designed a grounded theory study to understand the perceptions of African church pastors and leaders concerning missional outreach to diaspora Chinese. I have discussed the findings in this article, with the hopes of helping mission organizations to identify methods for reaching the diaspora Chinese in Africa. Additionally, the findings of this study may also assist churches and seminaries as

Table 1. Demographic data of study participants.

Name	Gender	Church denomination	Church location	Church size	Position in church	Years of service
Adeline	F	Non-Baptist	Nairobi	90	Bible teacher	7
Isaiah	M	Baptist	Nairobi	2000+	Youth pastor and missions pastor	13
Samuel	M	Baptist	Thika	35	Church pastor	18
Francis	M	Baptist	Karajee	102	Bible teacher and education director	20
Helen	F	Baptist	Busia	38	Church secretary	2
Wycliffe	M	Baptist	Webuye	30	Children's and youth pastor	6
Mutabaruka*	M	Non-Baptist	Rwanda	2265	Church pastor	16
Kennedy	M	Baptist	Kakamega	317	Senior pastor	20
Benson	M	Baptist	Thika	55	Church pastor	8
Tut**	M	Baptist	Kakuma	51	Church pastor	8
Peter	M	Baptist	Nyeri	52	Assistant pastor	3
Edward	M	Baptist	Suba Island	38	Church pastor	10

Note. *= A bishop over 11 churches. ** From South Sudan, currently has a ministry at Kakuma refugee camp.

they develop strategies in response to the reality of diaspora Chinese in their own locations.

Researching Kenyan attitudes about reaching diaspora Chinese

This study's central research question was: *What are African church leaders' perceptions of missional outreach to diaspora Chinese?* In order to understand this issue, I purposefully selected twelve East African church leaders (see Table 1) to participate in a research study on their attitudes and experiences in reaching out to diaspora Chinese. All twelve participants in this study had outreach experience through their church. Some engaged in evangelistic activities on a monthly basis, some every other month, some quarterly, some twice a year, some occasionally; but all twelve had engaged in outreach at least once a year. They all started outreach from their own community, targeting the local people. Three of them also went outside of their town area; some traveling to neighboring countries. One intentionally targets Sudanese and Ethiopians; One even invited two Chinese to his church and they became church members because he had visited and assisted them in the hospital. Most of them indicated that they do outreach out of a love for Christ (Luke 10:27) and out of obedience to the great commission (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 1:8). Several also mentioned they wanted to care for and show love to

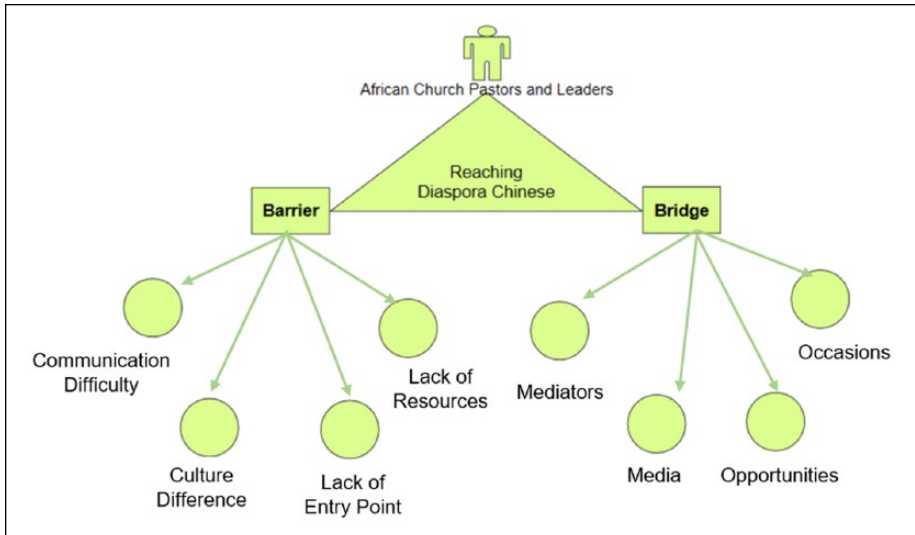


Figure 1. Factors affecting African churches' efforts to reach diaspora Chinese.

needy people, especially poor widows, orphans, and HIV patients. Ultimately, they want unbelievers to have the Good News of salvation.

I asked the participants the following sorts of questions:

1. What do African church leaders perceive to be their biblical responsibility vis-à-vis missional engagement?
2. What attitude do African church leaders have, in general, toward mission work among Chinese immigrants?
3. What feelings or reactions do African church leaders have while they interact with Chinese?
4. What do they perceive to be impediments to missional engagement in reaching Chinese (e.g., language barrier, cultural differences)?
5. What do they perceive to be bridges to missional engagement in reaching Chinese (e.g., language, jobs, money, evangelical conferences)?

Research findings

The data revealed perceptions of African church leaders concerning missional outreach to diaspora Chinese in Africa. I determined that two major themes with eight contributing factors affect their attitudes and experiences in relating to diaspora Chinese (see Figure 1).

All twelve participants described cultural identifications (or stereotypes) they have ascribed to Chinese culture. In cultural identity theory, these identifications are the way that members of a majority culture and dominant culture negotiate their

own identity and manage the identity of the other (Collier, 2005: 240). Some of these cultural identifications were very positive like: “friendly,” “entertaining,” “love to share resource,” “happy to help others,” “humble,” “ambitious,” “industrious,” “intelligent,” “creative,” “hard working,” “a lot of knowledge,” “rich people,” and “excellent in construction.” Some of these identifications were negative: “do not trust others,” “very superstitious,” “poor quality,” “bully others with Kungfu,” “arrogant,” “atheists,” “church persecution,” “eat frogs and dogs,” and “fake.” And some identifications were neutral: “busy schedule,” “China product,” “Great wall,” “China KungFu,” and “Nihao.” Except for one participant who only shared negative impressions about the Chinese, all others shared a mixture of neutral points and either positive or negative points. Overall, they were either positive, or at least very neutral, about Chinese people.

While church leaders are not particularly negative about Chinese immigrants in Africa, most have had very little contact with them. From their outreach experience we have seen that only one participant has invited two Chinese people to a church meeting. Even though these Diaspora Chinese are their neighbors, they are not included in the churches’ outreach target group. The study has revealed barriers that affect African churches’ missional outreach to Chinese immigrants.

Barriers

Participants identified four factors that create a barrier to reaching out to Chinese immigrants: 1) communication difficulties; 2) cultural distance; 3) lack of an entry point; and 4) lack of resources.

Communication difficulties. All twelve participants admitted that they have communication difficulties with their Chinese neighbors because of language. As Ben said,

I think the first thing is the language. That is the first thing, because if I can be able to talk with them, I can be able to handle other issues, but if I cannot talk with them it is difficult even to share the issues. So the other thing is that, so I can be able to reach them, I need to have or to be close with them to make a friend.

The reality is that none of participants can speak Chinese, and most Chinese in Kenya do not know Swahili, the language that East Africans use as a language of wider communication. The participants indicated that they prefer to talk with their own folks in their own language. Wally admitted that he never talked with any Chinese people: “Even there were some constructing the road in our community, the high way, and I just saw them working, but, because of like language barrier, because most of time when they communicate, they communicate in Chinese [language] with other Chinese [people].”

While communication, even “small talk” is difficult when communicators do not share fluency in a language, discussing spiritual issues is even more difficult. Samuel said, “The language barrier is major issue especially in the church.” Ken commented,

It became so difficult for one to understand what we were really putting forward in English and Kiswahili because a normal church is always used to English and Kiswahili. It is very difficult for a Chinese, now at least to get the concept of the Christian teaching.

Cultural distance. Culture has some “extrinsic markers” (Kim, 2005: 390) such as the use of greetings, the treatment of children, and religious rituals; and culture also has “intrinsic markers” such as conceptualizations of relationships, values, and religious beliefs. Many intrinsic East African cultural expressions such as sociality and values are actually similar to Chinese cultural expressions. As one church leader, Addy, expressed, “Their culture is almost our culture. They are friendly.” However, partial comprehension of the common elements, not to mention the different intrinsic markers of culture can present a barrier between Africans and Chinese.

Ten of twelve participants perceived cultural distance to be a barrier between the African church and diaspora Chinese. First of all, they are uncertain what Chinese culture is like. Addy said,

I will still repeat the story of the road construction. The Chinese were so many there [her home town in Nairobi] and the people from Kenya understand their culture is this: the food issue! There they say they eat dogs and such things . . . if they see a Chinese, they used to say: “they have finished all the dogs in the area when they were making the roads!” So I think it is good to understand such things.

East Africans typically do not eat dog meat, whereas some Chinese do; but eating dogs is not a widespread Chinese predilection. Nonetheless, Chinese immigrants do have a different food culture than East Africans, which widens the cultural gap. Perhaps Addy was using “eating dogs” as synecdoche for the vast array of exotic or unfamiliar foods in Chinese culture. And perhaps “unfamiliar foods” serves as an even more basic synecdoche for cultural distance in general. Different diets seem to symbolize all that is different between China and Africa.

Because most Chinese in Kenya are not familiar with African culture, participants experience anxiety and fear about crossing cultures. This causes African church leaders and diaspora Chinese to isolate themselves respectively. Ben said, “Sometimes we fear the color . . . we say this is a white man.” Ed also expressed this fear and insular tendency:

They do not understand our cultures; to interact with them maybe is a bit, is a bit challenging because they do not understand our culture and also we do not understand maybe very deep about their culture, so that is also another factor that brings a lot of challenges for us because, we ask, how can I greet you, how can I approach, because you do not know how they do it in their country and maybe they do not understand it here in our country, only if you can say “hi,” if you can say “*jambo*,” “*habari*,” just few words and maybe so, interaction becomes so difficult.

Above, Ben seems to be projecting his own preference for cultural homogeneity onto Chinese people, when he assumes monolithically that Chinese would not want to engage in cross-cultural interactions for fear or anxiety of the foreign Other.

Izzy is the missions pastor of a church with more than 2000 members in Nairobi, Kenya, where most Chinese immigrants have settled. However, he has never been able to get his own church to engage with any Chinese because of the cultural barrier. He stated,

Personally I do not have discrimination on any race, and I believe even [name of church] does not discriminate. We have never had an opportunity to engage with them and so . . . in our biggest time of service, that is evangelism and missions, we haven't engaged them . . . I only know Chinese from movies and in television; that is how I got to know the Chinese people, and recently it is because of their great works in construction here in Kenya, road construction, general construction work, I have seen them. But I haven't had opportunity to engage with them, talk with them. Actually the first Chinese I have had good communication with is you in my entire life, so I am yet to know who the Chinese people are like, personally away from TV and the movies I am yet to know who they are, their culture, everything about them I am yet to know.

Many Chinese people work near him and those in his church. As his Bible and theology teacher, however, I am the only Chinese person he has ever had close contact with, as was true with all the other participants. Unfamiliarity with the co-culture and uneasiness with its differences cause barriers between African church leaders and diaspora Chinese unbelievers.

Lack of entry point. All participants know there is a large number of Chinese immigrants in Africa, especially Kenya's capital city Nairobi. However, they admitted that they have seldom had opportunity to interact with these Chinese people, let alone have deep conversations with them, because Chinese have completely different occupations than most Africans. Chinese came to Africa to work on construction or run specific businesses, which isolates them from most Africans who are not doing the same jobs. There is a Chinese saying, "Different occupations form different worlds." So for African church pastors and leaders, it looks like they are in different world from the Chinese.

Because they inhabit two separate social worlds, church leaders shared that they lack an entry point to start a relationship with Chinese immigrants. Izzy said that there is not one Chinese member in his church in Estate, Nairobi. We may know why this happens from the conversation between my participant Izzy (I), the church missions pastor, and me (W).

- W Do you have some Chinese in your church?
 I No, not even few; we do not have Chinese people in our church.
 W So you have not met them?
 I I would say within the Estate, within the area, meeting Chinese would be very rare,
 W Very rare?
 I You may go a year without meeting a Chinese.
 W So do you know many Chinese come to Kenya?
 I Yes,
 W So you meet them in other places?

- I Yes, we meet in other places like areas where they are doing some construction, that is when personally I have come across Chinese, but even then because I have little interest in construction work, engaging them has been difficult for me.

Many Chinese are anxious to complete their work project as quickly as possible in order to resettle with their families back in China; so they may not be invested in making long-term relationships in Africa work. Also, for safety reasons, after the work day, many Chinese stay in secure compounds. These ethnic enclaves are possible because there is ethnolinguistic vitality or “institutional completeness” among Chinese in urban areas. This can facilitate the immigrant tendency to diverge from the majority culture, which actually makes it difficult for Africans to find an entry point.

Even when Chinese operate outside their ethnic enclaves, it is difficult for Africans to encounter them at off-duty times and weekends. As Mutabaruka said, “They work hard; for example, some of them work as construction and they work in afternoon and evening, so to meet them I see it is a problem.”

In addition to the separation caused by differing workspaces and occupations, the socio-economic divide creates a lack of an entry point. Tut shared,

You know that most of [the] Chinese are very rich in Kenya, most of them; they are the ones who construct most of the roads; they are the ones who construct most of the tall buildings. Those are Chinese things, they were brought just to help people in infrastructure. Because of this work that they do, they earn a lot of money, that they became so rich that even there is a big gap between the pastors and the Chinese because they see the Chinese as rich people who might not even listen to them, because sometimes some of them are very poor pastors, economically they do not have money even the appearance is not equal one with the Chinese, so those are hindrance. They are hindrance because, you are a simple man and you want to approach somebody with a car, somebody who has a lot of money, so it is a hindrance, it becomes a hindrance, people fear, that one become a hindrance also, yes it becomes a hindrance.

This barrier actually seems to be more insurmountable than the language or cultural divide. While African evangelists may attempt to bridge the language barrier by learning some Chinese or by getting an interpreter, and while they can learn to adjust to cultural differences, they can do little to increase their own socio-economic status in order to adopt a lifestyle commensurate with richer Chinese businesspeople.

Lack of resources. The socio-economic gap leads to a related barrier—lack of financial resources for outreach. Because of Kenya’s economic situation, most of the churches do not have funds to pay a salary to the pastors, let alone spend money on outreach. Wally indicated the shortage of financial resources is a major factor because the cost of phone communication and transportation make it difficult for them to do outreach where Chinese immigrants stay:

It requires finance, so a church has to be well off in terms of finance . . . First, many of our churches do not pay we[us] pastor[s], so we find that financially we are very low, even

getting airtime [cell phone service] is an issue. Two, movement from one station to the other is difficult, especially if it means we have to go footing [walk]. Even getting a motor bike down in our community is a difficult thing because of the nature of the congregation, like, let's say my church, many of the people in my church are people who are so needy, so they cannot keep the provision for either standing for airtime, or standing for transportation, and even if I have a vehicle, they cannot [pay for] fuel, so it means it is a barrier.

In addition to finances, a shortage of evangelical materials such as evangelical tracts and bilingual Bibles also became a barrier to their outreach. Wally continued:

It is the materials, things that can bring people closer to the Lord, and reference materials to these people that are being converted, many of the people normally say "Now you have already given the Word. Do you have any materials, special materials and especially Bibles?" So we find that we have become so stuck . . . So they go very slow to understand the ways of God, the ways of our Lord Jesus Christ, towards giving the needy of what is required to the Word, yes, that is the biggest challenge.

In summary, East African church leaders described four barriers to their efforts to reaching the diaspora Chinese: communication difficulties, culture differences, lack of entry point, and lack of resources. However, the study revealed that church leaders have identified a bridge that can connect African churches and diaspora Chinese, positively impacting African missional outreach to Chinese in Africa.

Bridges

African church leaders also identified a number of bridges that may facilitate outreach among diaspora Chinese. I have categorized these bridging possibilities as: (1) mediators; (2) media; (3) intercultural occasions; and (4) evangelistic opportunities.

Mediators. Six of the twelve participants shared that mediators between African churches and diaspora Chinese unbelievers may contribute to the establishment of a bridge. As Wally said, "[We should] have a link, someone of the same . . . tribe or a fellow Chinese who may introduce me to them so that I can now even talk to them." Ben's African driver friend acted as a mediator, as he stated, "My friend is working with them, the Chinese. He is a driver. Yes, it is the driver who takes them to work, so we talk with them [Chinese] through him."

A mediator who knows Chinese language and Chinese culture and speaks English would be more helpful. KBTC recently admitted a Chinese student David who came to Kenya from China 23 years ago. His coming to KBTC helps to pass a barrier and sets up a bridge, as Fran said,

It is only this semester that we have had a student from China or Chinese for that matter [missional outreach to diaspora Chinese]. This is a big thing for me personally. David is a good friend of mine, we are talking a lot and we are sharing a lot of information about the church he is in, and he is getting to understand the church I am in. We are working very closely so that is very important. If we were to have more Chinese in this school, that would

be very wonderful, it would be very good. It would help Kenyan Christians to get to understand more of the Chinese so that we can interact with those whom we are going to evangelize to because, for one, the Chinese tongue when it comes to English, at times it is a bit challenging to Kenyans to hear clearly. So if we can get used to hearing Chinese speak their English, it will help us even to work with other Chinese. It will help us in language barriers. Yes, we can hear better and understand what someone is doing. You have also been a great help to me when it comes to understanding.

Here, Wally has astutely noted that cultural distance is not only created by language proficiency, but also by language use, and language preference (Zane and Mak, 2003: 41).

With the help of mediators, some participants have worked out a plan of reaching out to Chinese immigrants. Ben said, "I was with him [the driver] two weeks ago before I came here, so we talked and arranged the day I will visit them at their work place." Fran said,

Right now with my friend David in class, he speaks English very well, and I think we do not have a barrier, I intend to learn more and to see how we can work even more to reach the Chinese we have. Not long ago we were discussing with him [outreach to the Chinese], today he was telling me and my friends in class that, now he feels he can go for evangelism if we can support him. We can go with him, and I told him I am ready; we can go out.

Media. Four African church leaders suggested that media materials will contribute to the bridge connecting African churches and diaspora Chinese. African evangelists can distribute evangelical pamphlets in Chinese to diaspora Chinese with the help of a Chinese mediator. Tut suggests a small radio with Christian programs or a Walkman in the Chinese language can be used in evangelizing Chinese in Africa. He said,

In the context of Chinese not everybody, in the context of Chinese, some small radio, some that have some preaching. Somebody is preaching then you listen, those things are very good in evangelism, you can just give to the Chinese and tell him to go and hear, then after that he respond to you what he got there, so, those are good also to be offered. So that if I meet a Chinese, I will build a relationship and then I tell him, I have something here I want you to listen to, then I give him, then he listens, in Chinese or in English what language he wants; those things should be in English and also, Chinese, so they are good or maybe Swahili, because some of them have been here for long time they know Kiswahili and so, if you give them so it would be very good.

Intercultural occasions. Seven participants expressed opportunistic occasions are very important to access the diaspora Chinese here. First, Chinese work places are good occasions to meet Chinese. Addy mentioned the Chinese food market could be a suitable place, if African Christians would purchase food from the vendors. Wally believed the Chinese construction sites can also serve as opportunistic spaces to meet Chinese and share the gospel with them:

[As] I know most of them . . . mostly, they deal with construction. Things like, technicians, they are mostly technicians on that line; when I go to them, maybe, I may be having something, that need to be like in connection to electricity, so I may approach in that line of bringing that

closeness and the experience he has, so when we go on interacting, it will be easy for me now to start now sharing with them the gospel and also have a good way of reaching to them.

Pete believes that an African pastor can reach Chinese at their work place if he can find a job at the Chinese company:

The pastor who is now the worker, who is working in the company, can be in the position to interact with him, including Chinese who are also working with them, they are workmates now. They can be able to interact, to speak maybe a common language; it is going to bring them together and . . . the pastor will be in a position to introduce Christ.

Hospitals where Chinese receive care and prisons where Chinese are incarcerated can be occasions for Africans to minister to Chinese immigrants. Ken led two Chinese to Christ who also became church members because of his hospital visit. Also, evangelistic conferences with a Chinese pastor as keynote speaker could be a viable bridge.

Evangelistic opportunities. The influx of so many Chinese to Kenya's front door is an opportunity for evangelistic outreach. The African church leaders are seeking opportunities to have deep spiritual contact with Chinese. Fran said he is ready to share the gospel with Chinese only if the opportunities come:

I am ready to evangelize to them, so what I need or what we need, as Christians, those of us who are Kenyans, is to be given an opportunity, if an opportunity arises, we can do that, I know some of us have a few pamphlets like three written in Chinese, I remember I went to David and was asking him to help me understand what is written in that pamphlet, a gospel, and evangelism pamphlet and David is helping me with that. So yes, I think when opportunity arises we are going to do that work yes.

Wally shared that the training at KBTC with Chinese teachers and students can enable East Africans to seize this opportunity:

The education at [name omitted] is very helpful . . . We have that opportunity of interaction, among like different professors, like the whites from America, and also some of the Chinese professors who have come to teach here, so when we go on interacting, we now come up with a good relationship. Whereby we have to interact and learn more about the word of God. Yes.

In summary, with four factors including mediators, media, intercultural occasions, and evangelistic opportunities, a bridge connecting African churches and diaspora Chinese can be established. African churches could effectively minister to diaspora Chinese unbelievers in East Africa.

Analysis and recommendations

Language creates a barrier, so does unfamiliarity with Chinese culture. Cultural identifications that East Africans imagine about Chinese culture further reinforce

that barrier. Since African Christians are part of the out-group in the Chinese diaspora co-culture, they feel that they lack an entry point into the Chinese community. On top of all this, they believe their shortage of resources hinders them from a level of socializing that is on par with Chinese businessmen in the country. Yet African church leaders indicated that cultural mediators, media, intercultural opportunities, and evangelistic occasions can bridge the Chinese–Africa cultural divide. If East African church leaders wish to engage Chinese in diaspora, they should become more familiar with the art of crossing cultures, to use Craig Storti’s (2001) term, as well as with Chinese contextual theology. Below, we discuss some of what this training could cover.

Understand features of intercultural communication

While African church leaders are used to crossing multiple *African* ethno-linguistic boundaries, they seem to be unaware of how significantly African evangelicalism differs from Chinese philosophies and religious expressions. Their assumption that simply translating tracts into Chinese, using interpreters, or holding evangelistic campaigns for Chinese would remove barriers is a bit simplistic. Likewise, while the participants recognized socio-economic hurdles, their unfamiliarity with intercultural communication strategies may keep them from recognizing how difficult these hurdles are to overcome. For instance, participants did not focus on (but may have tacitly recognized) the need for empathy, flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity when crossing culture.

To take another example from the field of intercultural communication, power dynamics are a reality in East Africa, yet church leaders barely touched on ways to bridge the power distance between wealthy Chinese businesspeople, and church members and leaders from East Africa. Issues of power distance and uncertainty avoidance seriously affect the cross-cultural communication process. Gudykunst (2005: 309) has suggested that cultures where power distance and uncertainty avoidance are the highest (such as East Asia) can be quite rigid about maintaining in-group boundaries, and can be highly reticent to trust members of the out-group. So bridging the divide can present a chronic challenge.

Additionally, “face” is important in both Chinese and African cultures, but “Facework” is done differently in these two contexts. Since the majority of “cultural incidents” (Storti, 2001: 61) involve losing face, African church leaders would be more effective if they became familiar with ways to restore and save face in Chinese culture. For example, while education is seen as valuable in East Africa, it is a principal way of upgrading face in Chinese culture, and is the primary means for gaining a hearing as an “expert” on religious issues. This will present an obstacle for African church leaders who are less educated than the Chinese they are trying to reach. Additionally, gift-giving and the disclosure of one’s need can be face threatening acts (Brown and Levinson, 1978) in Chinese culture. Africans may ask a wealthier “patron” for financial assistance without losing face, since the asymmetrical relationship would be seen as a strong tie. But in Chinese culture, one loses face by being in need or indebted to another. This is why peers will fight over the privilege of paying the bill at a restaurant in China—a ritual that may be

less common in East Africa. More significantly, both Chinese and East Africans use avoidance when a relationship is broken. But Chinese restore face publicly (albeit while employing very indirect speech), whereas East Africans may feel more comfortable avoiding the conflict entirely. In short, the fewer occasions where Africans violate Chinese expectancies, and the fewer face-threatening acts they initiate, the more successful they will be in creating relationships with their Chinese counterparts.

Leverage the level of anxiety

Participants were essentially expressing anxiety about bridging the cultural gap, because they have a low level of familiarity with Chinese culture. In some sense, this anxiety is helpful in cross-cultural interactions, as it keeps culture-crossers mindful that they are not experts on the Other's culture. That is, anxiety keeps us from being over confident, or from wholly trusting our stereotypes. In fact, Gudykunst (2005: 287) has suggested, it is precisely when we begin to think we are experts on the culture that is foreign to us that we begin to be reductionist—we explain every cultural incident through a simplistic, monolithic cultural attribution like “Chinese just come here to work and then move back home.” Being mindful of such reductionism can keep us from another cross-cultural misstep: essentialism, or the tendency to project one behavior on all members of an ethnic group (Nehrbass, 2016: 153). That is, if African church leaders can be mindful of their unfamiliarity with Chinese culture, they may be less likely to think “all Chinese think or act” a certain way.

While anxiety about cultural distance can keep us mindful, theorists suggest we need to keep anxiety between a minimum and maximum threshold. When anxiety is too low, we endorse stereotypes and reductionism. When the anxiety is too high, we disengage from the cross-cultural process (Gudykunst, 2005: 294–295).

So cross-cultural training would need to introduce African church leaders to basic Chinese cultural expectancies (or norms) and “cultural scripts,” since familiarity with these scripts can reduce anxiety (Gudykunst, 2005: 300) and help establish rapport. Such scripts include: norms for “small talk,” purchasing items in the Chinese market, what to expect when attending church, and so forth.

Additionally, Uncertainty Reduction Theory suggests that ethnic minorities (the Chinese in this context) experience more in-group cohesion, or homophily, whereas the majority group is not as keenly aware of the in-group–out-group distinction, and can more readily embrace heterophily. Therefore, East Africans would more likely be in a position to initiate the role of cultural mediator.

Utilize Chinese partnerships and mediators

The shift away from Western paternalistic missionary models can serve as an example for African churches. Instead of directly controlling or carrying out the outreach to Chinese in diaspora, missional efforts must make use of Chinese mediators, who will be able to come from a new perspective. Chinese serve as the best bridge for the

language and cultural barriers presented. They can also serve as excellent trainers for African evangelists who wish to cross this cultural bridge.

African churches need to win trust from Chinese in order to build good relationships. Relationships are a very important value within both Africans and Chinese cultures, and can extend to all kinds of interpersonal connections. As a Chinese proverb says, “If you have a relationship, nothing matters. If you do not have a relationship, everything matters.” According to Wen (1999), relationship is an important characteristic of Chinese theology. Since Chinese culture mostly focuses on relationships, Chinese theology therefore emphasizes a relationship with God. Relationship is embedded with the character of God and His relationships with all things He has created. So Wen (1999) has called Chinese spirituality a Theology of Relationship. Therefore, to reach the diaspora Chinese in Africa, establishing relationships with them is the first and most important step. Chinese mediators (including Chinese missionaries in Africa) can help establish initial contacts between Africans and unbelieving Chinese people. Through relationships, the bridge connecting African churches and diaspora Chinese can be supported so that African evangelists can go to the Chinese, share God’s Word with them, invite them into a relationship with God, and start Bible fellowship and church services at their living compounds or work places, rather than simply welcoming them to African churches.

It is also important for African Bible colleges to recruit more Chinese professors and Chinese students, and to offer introductory training in Chinese and African language and culture. Additionally, there are many diaspora Chinese believers who can assist in training the African churches and work alongside these church leaders to reach the diaspora Chinese in Africa. Through this process, all missional efforts can train new diaspora believers to join the cause of disciple making among the diaspora Chinese, and even go beyond to other unreached Africans through diaspora Christians.

Conclusion

African churches are well situated to reach out to the million Chinese in their midst. While this study focused on the barriers and bridges that African leaders identify in such outreach efforts, research should also be done to understand diaspora Chinese attitudes about reaching their own co-culture. Because of significant cultural distance between the two cultures, successful outreach to diaspora Chinese needs to involve a partnership between African and diaspora Chinese churches.

While a number of missiological works have touted the importance of diaspora ministry, more research is needed on the successes and failures of such efforts. How have missionaries bridged language and cultural divides in the past? And how does the feedback of church leaders from both the majority culture and immigrant communities shape our discussion of diaspora missiology?

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