Freedom or Bread? The False Dilemma of the Assessment of the Impact of the Chinese Investment on Citizenship at Work in sub-Saharan African Economies

Colloque international du CRIMT, HEC Montréal (Canada), du 21 au 23 Mai 2015.
Armel Brice Adanhounme
Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières (UQTR)
Plan

- The problem: The China in Africa (CiA) controversy
- The question: Freedom or bread? The chicken and eggs story
- The critique: The normative construction of a false dilemma
- The argument: Rationale for an indigenous perspective through a deconstruction of the CiA
- A solution: An institutional reconstruction of the CiA through an indigenous perspective
Chinese FDI in Africa

- China FDI flows to the African continent is estimated at around US$37 billion from US$20b in 2012
- China’s FDI has grown at about 53% a year since 2001, compared to 14% for the US
- Less than 1% of the US FDI investment goes to Africa, by contrast, China invests 3.4% of its worldwide FDI stock in Africa
- Since China surpassed the US in 2009 to become the continent's biggest trading partner, the gap has only grown.
- For instance in 2013, the US has about $85billion in bilateral with Africa, China reported more than the double with $210$billion

(Sources: UNCTAD Reports, 2014; World Bank Reports 2014; US State Department 2014)
The CiA: Areas of investment

- Promoting sustainable development of trade
- Investment and financing cooperation
- Cooperation in agriculture and food security
- Supporting African infrastructure construction
- Skills development and capacity building

- To improve socio-economic rights in win-win partnership. New paradigm of development as an alternative to the West (assistance without no strings attached)
- To downplay civil and political rights. New imperialism. (Violation of workers rights)
- Chinese are good investors but bad employers (2011 Human Rights Report on China in Zambia)
The CiA: An deterministic approach of a proxy construction

- Africans are just victims who do not known their rights and cannot defend themselves!!!
- An normative rhetoric of the center disengaged with the concerns of the periphery
- Employment relations reduced to economic investments
- The optimists (China for socio-economic rights) vs. the pessimists (China against the civil and political rights) for Africans. Win-win partnership vs. imperialism
- What about a construction from the local to the global, from the victims’ perspectives?
While FDI can be valuable for development in SSA (Barthel et al. 2011), the enterprise and country absorptive capacities, the institutions and the economy matter (Paus & Gallagher 2008; Narula & Driffield 2012).

There is no “free lunch generated by FDI spillovers to host countries”, and positive effect will depend on African countries awareness, motivation, and capabilities framework (Eden 2009).

FDI cannot be growth-enhancing as suggested by the conventional view that associates spillovers with FDI. In fact, Chinese FDI delivers few linkages and almost no spillovers (Morrissey 2010).
Standing up on one’s own feet

“‘To constitute a proper legacy’” (Mbembe 2010)
“‘To restore African communities to their broader world historical context’” (Burawoy 2009)
“‘Writing Africa’” (Mudimbe 1991)
Through deconstruction to reveal the ideological biases behind the normative construction
Fields of research include: political economy of postcolonialism, social anthropology of management, and legal pluralism
The argument: An indigenous perspective

- Not mere victims of hegemonic actors
- They have their own story to construct and tell
- Beyond the bread and freedom divide
- First, context matters – role of local institutions.
- Second, power matters – roles of local actors and their resources
- Third, informality matters – others sources of normativity
- The indigenous perspective from local to global
Deconstructing the China in Africa story

- Three lines of resistance drawn from below
- Deconstruction (Derrida, 1976)
- Context. An African ethnology as opposed to a western modernist reference
- Power. A postcolonial analysis of power in lieu of liberal hegemony
- Law. Informality as legitimate source of legality
An institutional reconstruction of the CiA

- An institutional approach outside a construction that pits China against Africa and vice-versa.
- The stake: to reconcile capital and labor in SSA societies.
- The socio-legal African and Chinese corporate contexts and strategies through ethnographic inquiries.
- The power resources and capacities of collective actors at three levels. An enabling and constraining institutional order that does not repeat the colonial drift.
- Informal sources of law that allow mobilisation, resistance. Indocility and insubordination.