

Zhexun (Fred) MO

Personal Information

PhD Candidate in Economics
Paris School of Economics
Date of Birth: 24/04/1994
Citizenship: Chinese

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RESEARCH FIELDS

PRIMARY Political Economics, Development Economics, Economic History

SECONDARY Behavioral Economics, Experimental Economics, Public Economics

EDUCATION

- 2019 - Present Ph.D., in *Economics*, **Paris School of Economics**
Supervisor: Denis Cogneau
- 2017 - 2019 M.A., in *Analysis & Policy in Economics*, **Paris School of Economics**
Summa Cum Laude (Ranked 1st during the First Year)
- 2015 - 2017 B.A., in *Economics*, **National University of Singapore**
Honors Degree with Distinction
- 2013 - 2015 B.A., in *Social Sciences*, **Sciences Po Paris**
Cum Laude

RESEARCH WORK

Working Papers

“Rationally Coercive Rulers & Reactive Agents: Evidence from Head Tax and Blood Tax Levy in French West Africa ” (with Denis Cogneau)

The coercive-ness of imperial empires in colonial Africa (or a lack thereof) is still an unsettled debate. In this paper, we further delve into the political economy of colonialism in former French West Africa, via the lens of the two most important administrative missions at the time: head tax collection and military conscription. We engaged in voluminous digitization efforts and constructed an original panel dataset on both conscription and head tax figures in French West Africa from 1919 till 1949. Overall, we find that the French colonial state could be described as “rationally coercive”. On the one hand, the colonial officials achieved high coercive capacity in both conscription and head tax levy, with astoundingly high compliance rates across both space and time. On the other hand, they also took into account the extractive capacity of the indigenous. In years of drought, they decreased head tax rates as well as the conscription target for a given district, while in years with better weather, they adjusted the quotas upwards. Furthermore, African locals were not “docile” agents under colonial ruling, either. The aforementioned increase in head tax rates sparked more tax-related conflicts against the colonial state. In addition, African males also exploited conscription as an insurance device. Head tax spikes motivated young males to join the army for longer duration, and contemporaneous drought incidence also propelled more locals to seek shelter amidst the French colonial army.

“The Libertarian that Demands Redistribution: An Online Experiment on Redistributive Preferences in Contemporary China” (with [Nora Yuqian Chen](#) and [Yuchen Huang](#))

What are the determinants of redistributive preferences where capitalism meets post-socialism? To examine the sources of conflicting preference combinations of tolerating the income gap and demanding redistributive policies in transitional economies as suggested in previous research, we conduct an online experiment with a nationally representative sample of 2,500 Chinese citizens. We find that Chinese citizens exhibit strong support for real-stake inequality-reducing policies and the government’s duty to regulate income distribution. Surprisingly, priming the “unmeritocratic component” of the income generating process in either becoming rich or staying poor makes them significantly less supportive of redistributive policies targeted explicitly at taxing the rich and government duties in regulating the income gap. This effect is mainly driven by those who self-reported to have relatively low economic pressure. We conjecture that such “libertarian” fairness views, and the strong demand for government intervention to “redistribute,” could both originate from extreme poverty aversion and wealth aspiration. Wealth aspiration drives a desire for property ownership, making it more likely to justify any means in acquiring property; meanwhile, poverty aversion calls for strong government intervention in lifting the poor up. We argue that such a mechanism could be most saliently exemplified in a post-socialist economic regime with sustained high growth rates and high social mobility.

Research in Progress

“Long-term Legacies of Colonial Military Forced Labor in Mali” (with [Ismaël Yacoubou Djima](#) and [Marion Richard](#))

“The Political Economy of Colonial & Post-colonial Road Investments in West Africa” (with [Bilal Choho](#))

“Multi-dimensionality of Fairness Preferences in Contemporary China” (with [Nora Yuqian Chen](#) and [Yuchen Huang](#))

“Evolution of Effective Tax Rates in Post-reform China (1990-2020)” (with [Nora Yuqian Chen](#) and [Yuchen Huang](#))

SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES

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| 2022 (scheduled) | Midwest Political Science Conference (Chicago); Casual Friday Development Seminar (PSE); Economic History Seminar (PSE) |
| 2021 | Workshop on African Economic History (Cambridge-LSE); Applied Economics Lunch Seminar (PSE); Casual Friday Development Seminar (PSE); Economic History Seminar (PSE) |
| 2020 | Economic History Seminar (PSE) |

REFeree EXPERIENCE

Journal of Development Economics

GRANTS & FELLOWSHIPS

Grants

2022	£15,000 Research Grant by STEG - Colonial Forced Labor in Mali
2022	€5,000 Research Grant by PSE - Development Group - Colonial Forced Labor in Mali
2022	€3,800 Research Grant by EUR - PgSE - Colonial Forced Labor in Mali
2022	€2,200 Research Grant by EUR - PgSE - Redistribution in China
2022	€5,000 Research Grant by CEPREMAP - Redistribution in China
2022	€5,000 Research Grant by CEPREMAP - Colonial Forced Labor in Mali
2021	€1,000 Research Grant by EUR - PgSE - Redistribution in China
2021	€6,000 Research Grant by PSE - Economic History Group - Redistribution in China
2020	€3,000 Research Grant by CEPREMAP - Colonial Forced Labor in Burkina Faso

Fellowships

2019 - 22	Full Doctoral Fellowship PgSE
2015 - 17	ERASMUS European Union International Mobility Fellowship

TEACHING & PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

East Asia Coordinator April'22 - Present	World Inequality Lab Paris School of Economics , Paris, France
Lecturer Sep'19 - Dec'20	Quantitative Methods applied to Development Economics Undergraduate Program at Sciences Po Paris, Le Havre, France
Lecturer Sep'19 - Dec'20	Linear Algebra and Advanced Calculus Undergraduate Program at Sciences Po Paris, Le Havre, France
Research Assistant June'18 - Sep'18	Randomized Controlled Trial in D.R. Congo Paris School of Economics , Paris, France <i>Supervisors:</i> Karen Macours and Sylvie Lambert
Research Assistant June'17 - Sep'17	Online Auction Price Referencing for Traded Goods National University of Singapore , Singapore <i>Supervisor:</i> Davin Chor
Teaching Assistant Jan'17 - May'17	Programming Tools for Economics with <i>STATA</i> National University of Singapore , Singapore <i>Supervisor:</i> Nina Guyon

LANGUAGES & SKILLS

Languages:	Chinese (native)	French (fluent)	English (fluent)	Spanish (beginner)
Skills:	STATA & R	QGIS	Python (beginner)	L ^A T _E X

Last updated March 14, 2022