

Notes on Cultural Flows and Globalization: When China Meets Africa. By Olivier J. Tchouaffe; jolit77@hotmail.com; Southwestern University

This paper tackles the flow of Chinese media in Africa, particularly, Cameroon, beginning in the 1970s and the 1980s, inaugurating a historical cultural flow between the East and the South away from the dominant media flow North-South dating from Western colonization of the continent. It charges that China stands today as a major cultural and economic powerhouse in Africa displacing former colonial powers as number one economic partner¹. Most importantly, these activities are taking place outside of traditional institutionalized monetary systems such as the IMF and the World Bank. China's heavy presence in Africa evokes profound sentiment of fear about Chinese global expansionism and re-colonization of the continent, putting into relief, questions of democracy and free trade.

This central question is compounded with issues of piracy. China's global expansionism renders necessary to rethink the rhetoric around issues of free-trade, piracy and intellectual property which are necessary to comprehend how new technologies of communication are leveling the political and economical playing field creating new social actors taking advantages of this new environment to promote cultural democracy and cosmopolitanism. Chinese presence in Africa, therefore, are introducing a model of concurrence challenging Western old monopoly and dominance on the continent, in the process, challenging nation-states born out of that colonial legacy. This concurrence, therefore, is creating conditions for a progressive democracy by providing opportunities

¹ China has always been involved in Africa's economy spending; at least \$817 million in the 1970s to \$ 70 Billion today and this figure is expected to double by 2010 making China the first exporter in the continent.¹ China spends half of aid to development in Africa. There is also between five hundreds thousands to one million Chinese immigrants living in Africa. It also means that there are three times more Chinese than French in Africa. See Le Monde: http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2008/05/19/l-afrique-est-ruinee-la-chine-est-preneuse_1046856_3212_1.html. It is believed that 800.000 Chinese live in Africa including 10, 000 Chinese currently live in Cameroon. The Chinese outnumber the French (110.000). They are followed by the Lebanese community (250.000). China is not simply invested in extractive resources such as oil. China is Africa number one client. For example, China controlled the textile Market in Cameroon overcoming decades of French monopoly with CICAM. There are, moreover, nine hundreds Chinese corporations operating in Africa. It is also important to note that China supports the presence of some African countries in the UN security council with permanent seats.

for strategic assimilation, tactical syncretism, economic opportunities through re-skilling, increase productivities and performances. These new forms of agencies are challenging old regimes of property which are at the foundation of globalization inequalities. These processes, therefore, are questioning old meaning of tradition through the ongoing and active negotiation of cultural difference beyond the containment of traditional power and subjectivities such as racism and xenophobia in the process negotiating new forms of modernities. Thus, this author claims that these processes are taking place within Africa's own concept of modernization. It claims that cultural studies can bring a more complex understanding of these international dynamics and its ongoing transformations.

It is necessary to point out these global exchanges are taking places among widespread piracy. This piracy is taking place within the context of illegal use of video, records often by online file-sharing communities, internet bootleggers and movie theater pirates. This author does not condone piracy but argues that it might be better approach in the context of Africa as a form of philosophy of business rather than an expertise because it is important to begin to understand how the mass availability of goods are not only affecting ordinary human consciousness transforming the acquisition of goods into a social competition for status and social recognition. Most importantly, these forms of branding are also introducing new forms of political and economical speech to embrace what Christine Harold calls a "distributed public" which she defines as interconnected and active agents who strategically navigate the vast resources of commercial culture and make them their own (2007,165). Thus, it is important to develop a new critique of globalization, technology and mass consumption because this alliance is transforming traditional norms of social and familial relationships in ways that are unprecedented. It introduces a rhetoric of branding which in turns seeps into the country political and economic life.² Thus, it is a priority to understand how the market is re-organized by

² It is important to note that according to Ha-Joon Chang, countries like the Netherlands and Switzerland have maintained free trade since the late 18th century. However, these were countries that were already on the frontier of technological development by the 18th centuries and therefore did not need much protection. Also, it should be noted that the Netherlands deployed an impressive range of interventionist measures up till the 17th century in order to build up its maritime and commercial supremacy. Moreover, Switzerland did not have a patent law until 1907, flying directly against the emphasis that today's orthodoxy puts on the protection of intellectual property rights (see below). More interestingly, the Netherlands abolished its 1817 patent law in 1869 on the ground that patents are politically-created monopolies inconsistent with its free-

many economic agents, small-time entrepreneurs, street-vendors, real-estate owners, consumers creating a chain of interests maintaining this new political and economic order.

Moreover, more study of pirate supply chains are essential to witness the reorganization of the economic and political playing field, starting from, the reception of these products and how they are consumed. In this sense, pirated artifacts can present a useful data to video company and records industry to track down these new costumers and study how they are consuming these products and what can be learn from them. Beyond, opening new markets, it can create condition for resilience, innovations and adaptation. Question of intellectual property and piracy must be understood within an accelerated and saturated form of global exchanges where questions of history, class are no longer central. It is important here to understand how ordinary Cameroonians and Chinese are becoming co-producers of artifacts. There is a social pressure for people to be productive, to be successful. There is a culture of know-how which is becoming a social problem, a new rapport to technology which is becoming social because the degrees of consumption must also equal the know-how. Thus, there is a form of technological determinism that put to work the consumers in a ways that it has to work to acquire the goods in order to keep up with the Jones³. There is a way that the consumers are being put to work in order to gain goods for social recognition. The biggest fear becomes social alienation. Thus, people have to work to get what they want, in the process, becoming co-producers of a new political and economic order.

market principles – a position that seems to elude most of today’s free-market economists – and did not introduce another patent law until 1912.

³ Finding good pirated artifacts are not easy. Finding the rights contacts can take time and a lot of work. Some people involved in piracy consider themselves as “creators” whose products are even better than the originals. Some people prefers “original” products which is made by the Chinese rather than the one from the second hand market that the local people called “White men is dead” because those second hand products are usually collected from the dead. At least, that is what the local legend pretends.