

Zhexun MO

Personal Information

Ph.D. Candidate in Economics
Paris School of Economics
Date of Birth: 24/04/1994

Contact Information

Email: fredzhexun.mo@psemail.eu
Website: <https://sites.google.com/view/zhexunmo>
Office: R5-01, 48 Boulevard Jourdan, 75014 Paris

REFERENCES

Thomas Piketty

Professor, Paris School of Economics
Co-director, World Inequality Lab
Mobile: +33 6 82 45 91 19
thomas.piketty@psemail.eu

Denis Cogneau

Professor, Paris School of Economics
Directeur d'Etudes, EHESS
Mobile: +33 6 85 67 68 10
denis.cogneau@psemail.eu

Li Yang

Researcher, ZEW
Research Fellow, World Inequality Lab
Mobile: +33 7 69 88 99 25
li.yang@zew.de

Oliver Vanden Eynde

Professor, Paris School of Economics
Research Fellow, CNRS
Mobile: +33 1 80 52 17 22
o.vandeneynde@psemail.eu

EDUCATION

2019 - 2024 (<i>expected</i>)	Ph.D., in <i>Economics</i> , Paris School of Economics
2017 - 2019	M.A., in <i>Economics</i> , Paris School of Economics <i>Summa Cum Laude</i>
2015 - 2017	B.A., in <i>Economics</i> , National University of Singapore <i>Honors Degree with Distinction</i>
2013 - 2015	B.A., in <i>Social Sciences</i> , Sciences Po Paris <i>Cum Laude</i>

RESEARCH FIELDS

PRIMARY Political Economics, Economic History, Development Economics

SECONDARY Macroeconomics, Public Economics, Behavioral Economics

RESEARCH

Wealth and Income Inequalities in Asia

“The Making of China in the 20th Century: National Wealth Accumulation from 1911 to 2020” (with [Li Yang](#) and [Qing Wang](#))

“Long-term Income Inequality in Japan (1981-2020): A Distributional National Accounts Approach” (with [Li Yang](#), [Chiaki Moriguchi](#), [Junji Ueda](#), [Kentaro Asai](#) and [Sehyun Hong](#))

“Long-term Income Inequality in South Korea (1981-2020): Drawing the Line Between Survey and Tax Data” (with [Li Yang](#), [Sehyun Hong](#) and [Nak Nyeon Kim](#))

“Measuring Intergenerational Mobility in South Korea (2002-2022)” (with [Li Yang](#), [Unai Oyón Lerga](#) and [Sehyun Hong](#))

“Consumption and Income Inequalities of the Bottom Billion in Asia” (with [Li Yang](#), [Sehyun Hong](#), [Nitin Bharti](#) and [Thanasak Jenmana](#))

Inequality Perceptions, Fairness and Preferences for Redistribution in China

“Non-Meritocrats or Conformist Meritocrats? A Redistribution Experiment in China and France” (with [Margot Belguise](#) and [Yuchen Huang](#))

Recent empirical evidence contends that meritocratic ideals are mainly a Western phenomenon. Intriguingly, the Chinese populace appears to not differentiate between merit- and luck-based inequalities, despite its rich historical legacy of meritocratic institutions. We propose that this phenomenon might be due to the Chinese public’s greater adherence towards the status quo. In order to test this hypothesis, we run an incentivized redistribution experiment with elite university students in China and France, by varying the initial split of payoffs between two real-life workers to redistribute from. We show that Chinese respondents consistently and significantly choose more non-redistribution (playing the status quo) across both highly unequal and relatively equal status quo scenarios than our French respondents. Additionally, we also show that the Chinese sample does differentiate between merit- and luck-based inequalities, and does not redistribute less than the French absent status quo conformity. Ultimately, we contend that such a phenomenon is indicative of low political agency rather than apathy, inattention, or libertarian beliefs among the Chinese. Notably, our findings show that Chinese individuals’ conformity to the status quo is particularly pronounced among those from families of working-class and farming backgrounds, while it is conspicuously absent among individuals whose families have closer ties to the private sector.

“Not My Money to Touch: Experimental Evidence on Redistributive Preferences under Market Transition in China” (with [Nora Yuqian Chen](#) and [Yuchen Huang](#))

This paper explores the factors that influence redistributive preferences in the context of sustained economic expansion, focusing on luck and growth. Using an online survey experiment with a nationally representative sample from China, we find that priming getting rich via relatively less meritocratic, yet representative ways under market transition in post-reform China reduces redistributive support, specifically for policies that aim to take from the rich and the belief in the government's duty to redistribute, indicating the presence of a set of fairness views in China that could deviate from meritocratic ideals. Heterogeneous treatment effects analyses reveal that such non-meritocratic fairness views are a general phenomenon and self-interest in the form of subjective economic pressure only serves as a secondary concern. While people feel that the rich are more deserving and demand less redistribution after being primed with stories of getting rich via transition premium regardless of subjective economic pressure, only those under less economic pressure exhibit decreased support for policies that aim to help the poor. Priming China's growth story does not result in statistically significant changes in redistributive support. Additionally, we rule out the influence of three relevant confounders: low tax salience, preference falsification under authoritarianism, and misperceptions about relative income positions and intergenerational occupational mobility. We argue that such potentially non-meritocratic fairness views are particularly salient in societies that break away from a centrally-planned economic system in the past, and transition towards a high-growth market economy, where economic fortunes are abundant and random.

“Meritocracy as a WEIRD Phenomenon: Fairness Reasoning and Redistributive Preferences across the World” (with Yuchen Huang)

Past studies on demand for redistribution often assume a meritocratic norm in redistributive preferences, where people favor increased wealth redistribution in societies attributing income disparities to luck rather than effort. Our analysis of international survey data highlights that these preferences are mainly, if not only, found in Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) countries, especially Anglo-Saxon and Protestant European nations. Within WEIRD countries, there is a strong negative correlation between the demand for redistribution and the belief that effort determines income inequality. Surprisingly, many non-WEIRD countries exhibit the opposite trend, where a higher belief on the role of effort leads to greater demands for redistribution. This phenomenon cannot be explained completely by trust in government, religiosity, or kinship intensity. Moreover, our research shows that not all uncontrollable sources of income inequality are seen as equally unfair. While disparities tied to family wealth and political privilege universally trigger calls for redistribution, gender, racial, and religious hierarchies are often considered fair and don't warrant redistribution in non-WEIRD countries.

French Colonialism, Forced Labor and Inequalities in Africa

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

“Soldiers versus Laborers: Legacies of Colonial Military Forced Labor in Mali”
(with [Ismaël Yacoubou Djima](#) and [Marion Richard](#))

We study coercive military conscription and the associated forced labor regime instituted by the French colonial authorities in colonial Mali between 1927 and 1950. Due to endemic labor scarcity, the colonial authorities resorted to activating military reservists as forced laborers for public infrastructure construction. By digitizing more than 180,000 hand-written individual conscript files as well as colonial-time district conscription tables, we find that historically speaking, the activation of military forced labor was strongly correlated with local population density and specific demands of different public infrastructure projects in colonial Mali. To study the long-term effect of this coercive military recruitment, we exploit a colonial-time lottery system where conscripts were randomly assigned to regular army service versus the military reservist at the locality level. We employ a Difference-in-Differences empirical framework to analyze the differential effects of this lottery depending on district-level forced labor activation rates. We find that greater exposure to military service and forced labor has led to significantly worse human capital outcomes over the long run. This suggests a potential inter-generational transmission of rejection toward educational institutions associated with French colonialism.

REFEREE EXPERIENCE

Journal of Development Economics

SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES

- 2024 CSAE - Oxford (March); Uppsala Economic History Seminar (May); SEEDEC - NHH (June)
- 2023 Atelier Simiand - Economic History Workshop (PSE × 2); World Inequality Lab Internal Research Seminar; Applied Economics Lunch Seminar; Internal Seminar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; Quantifying the Long-Run History of Africa Conference (Manchester)
- 2022 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)

GRANTS & FELLOWSHIPS

Grants

- 2023 €12,000 Research Grant by WIL - Long-run Inequalities in Asia
- 2023 ¥900,000 Joint Research Grant by Hitotsubashi University - Long-run Income Inequalities in Japan
- 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
Teaching Assistant Sept'22 - Present	Introduction to Economic History: Capital, Inequality, Growth Paris School of Economics , Paris, France <i>Supervisor:</i> Thomas Piketty
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^AT_EX

Last updated March 26, 2024