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Passive agents? Bureaucratic agency in Africa-China negotiations:
A case study of Benin.

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ABSTRACT.

This paper is a cross-disciplinary study of the bureaucratic politics of negotiation by small states engaged in asymmetrical relations with larger states. It studies the negotiating tactics and manoeuvres of bureaucratic actors of a small francophone African state, Benin, when negotiating infrastructure contracts with China. It considers the period from 2003 to 2014, when China outpaced France (Benin's former colonial metropole and traditionally its main trade partner) to become Benin's largest trade partner.¹ This paper challenges the assumption that West African francophone countries' dependency on aid and foreign investment necessarily limits their capacity to bargain effectively and exert influence in negotiations with China, as well as the assumption that African bureaucracies are ineffective and passive in their relationship with China. This paper has three specific objectives: (1) it establishes the extent to which the government of Benin has been able to exert influence before, during and after infrastructure negotiations with the Chinese government; (2) it explains this variation by exploring the role of bureaucracies and civil servants, domestic party politics and the political executive, and how they impact negotiating strategies and tactics; (3) it distils new insights into the conditions under which small states exert influence during asymmetric negotiations. In so doing, this study re-evaluates the role of small states in international negotiations, and analyses how negotiation varies within a country and across bureaucracies. By joining up theories of bureaucratic institutionalism with empirical evidence that weaker actors can influence negotiations depending on the structure of their bureaucracies and the roles that sub-levels of bureaucracies play during these negotiations, this paper will show how these parameters impact the negotiation outcome. In so doing, this paper aims to contribute to a small but growing literature on African agency in Africa-China relations.

STATE OF THE ART.

Scholarship and commentary on Chinese engagement in Africa has largely concentrated on China's interest in resource-rich nations like Zambia, Angola, Mozambique, DRC, emphasising, even in these cases, the stark asymmetry of the relationship.² Less developed in this analysis is the position of small African states that are less resource-endowed yet are also intensifying their relationship with China through ties of trade, investment and aid.³

The existing literature on China-Africa relations has investigated how the government, public corporations, the private sector, and individual businessmen of China have been penetrating African markets, expanding development cooperation, investment and trade relations with African countries. Little recognition is given to the role of African strategies and adaptation to China. Most African actors are treated as passive and lacking agency. The literature also tends to overemphasise the asymmetry of Africa-China relations, depicting cooperation agreements as being discussed mostly between top-level officials, usually presidential cabinets in African countries.⁴

1. See figure 1 (annex) (source: UNCTAD Stats).

2. ALDEN, Christopher (2007) *China in Africa*, Zed Books, London, UK; ALDEN, Chris; LARGE, Daniel; SOARES DE OLIVEIRA, Ricardo (2008), *China returns to Africa: a rising power and a continent embrace*, Columbia University Press; BRAUTIGAM, Deborah (2009), 'The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa', Oxford, Oxford University Press.

3. BRAUTIGAM, Deborah (2011), 'Chinese development aid in Africa: what, where, why and how much?' in *Rising China: Global Challenges and Opportunities*, Jane Golley and Ligang Song, eds., Canberra: Australia National University Press, 2011, pp. 203-223.

4. DITTGEN, Romain, (2011), *New Development Cycle through long term-investment? China and the Belinga Project in Gabon*, *Echo Geo*, n°17, June-August 2011, pp. 1-18.

A few studies have emerged which, contrastingly, have investigated “Africa-China” relations through privileging a bottom-up approach that investigates the impressions that the Chinese presence in African countries has made upon Africa’s civil society and populations.⁵ This literature has been progressively reinstating African agency in its conception of negotiations between African states and their Chinese counterpart.⁶

Despite the pioneering character of these studies, very few have addressed the precise role bureaucrats play in negotiating agreement with China, or how tactical and institution-structural variants across bureaucracies affect outcomes (viz. contracts signed between the African government and their Chinese counterpart). Yet, the effect and influence of small states’ bureaucracies on negotiation merits scholarly attention and appreciation.

Recent literature on African agency in aid reception has proven that agency varies across countries, depending on the capacity to establish a national aid strategy and induce traditional donors to comply with their priorities; Rwanda and Ethiopia, for example, being more successful than Zambia in establishing a strategy.⁷ Yet, this literature does not usually take up the variation of agency across governmental actors within African states.

From a theoretical perspective, the literature on bureaucratic politics in international relations has confined itself mostly to case studies of the bureaucracies of large states like the United States and to rising great powers.⁸ This literature has addressed the organisational process of bureaucratic politics as it touches the role of the Executive and high-level administrative departments, but less as to minorities.⁹ In doing so, it has discovered the fragmented and institutionally driven nature of bureaucratic foreign policy making and implementation, providing empirical insights into how the administrative structures of government affect foreign relations.¹⁰

Through a case study of Benin, this paper addresses these shortfalls particularly by vindicating the key role bureaucrats play at several scales and timings of the negotiations (before, during and after)

5. VAN BRACHT, Gérard (2012), ‘A survey of Zambian views on Chinese people and their involvement in Zambia’, *African East-Asian Affairs*, Issue 1, August 2012.

6. MOHAN, Giles, LAMPERT, Ben (2012), ‘Negotiating China: reinserting African agency into China-Africa relations’, *African Affairs* 112/446, p.92-110; ZEITZ, Alexandra (2015), ‘A new politics of aid? The changing international political economy of development assistance: the Ghanaian case’, GEG Working Paper 2015/104, Oxford University.

7. FRASER Alastair, WHITFIELD Lindsay (2008), ‘The Politics of Aid: African strategies for dealing with donors’, GEG Working Paper 2008/42, Oxford University ; PRIZZON, Annalisa, ROGERSON, Andrew (2013), ‘The age of choice: Ethiopia in the new aid landscape’, Research report, Overseas Development Institute.

8. See HILL, Christopher, (2003) *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy*, Basing-stoke : Palgrave ; ALLISON Graham, « The Cuban missile crisis » in Steve Smith, Amela Hadfield, Tim Dunne (eds.), (2008) *Foreign Policy : Theories, Actors, Cases*, Oxford, Oxford University Press ; ART, Robert, « Bureaucratic politics and American foreign policy : a critique », in *Policy Sciences*, 1973, n°4, pp. 468-469. However, a few studies investigate bureaucratic politics in emerging and developing countries, e.g. John SIKO (2014), *Inside South Africa’s foreign policy: diplomacy in Africa from Smuts to Mbeki*, IB Tauris editions.

9. NEUSTADT, Richard, *Presidential Power : the politics of leadership*, (1960), New York, Wiley ; DYSON, Stephen Benedict, « Personality and foreign policy ; Tony Blair’s Iraq decisions », *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 1986, vol.2, n°3, pp.289-306 – for a theoretical contribution on the role of minorities in bureaucratic politics, see KAARBO, Juliet (1998), ‘Power politics in foreign policy: the influence of bureaucratic minorities’, *European Journal of International Relations*, vol.4 (1), p.67-97.

10. ALDEN, Christopher, AMMON Aran (2011), « Bureaucracies and foreign policy » in *Foreign Policy Analysis : new approaches*, Routledge.

and the large effects their coordination has on outcomes and on the significant detail of the infrastructure projects' contracts.

METHODOLOGY.

The methodology used for the purpose of this research largely consists of empirical field work conducted between June and December 2015 and requiring access to negotiation materials, draft terms of reference, draft contracts and final contracts in infrastructure projects; i.e. road, energy and ICT infrastructure projects of over US\$90 million to be undertaken by Chinese contractors in Benin. It included 30 semi-structured interviews with the principal actors in the Beninese bureaucracies involved in the process of negotiating various infrastructure projects; viz., government actors, especially low-, middle- and high-ranking civil servants; most of them located in Cotonou, the economic capital of Benin. By focusing on the civil servants, this paper highlights processes often ignored or unobserved in Africa-China relations, and the role of political actors who are acting in the shadow of the negotiation process. Focusing on these actors also allows one to trace the evolution and transformation of Benin-China relations, and how these relations have varied depending on which head of state/president was in charge.

Main arguments

The main findings from this empirical fieldwork can be summarized as follows:

- The increasing relationship with China has been largely interconnected with the decreasing involvement of traditional donors in crucial sectors for the Beninese government's general economic and social policy, i.e. infrastructure development financing.
- The bureaucratic capacities of the Beninese government, i.e. how they structure and organise themselves, largely affects the outcome of the negotiation, and presents more advantages for some sectoral ministries that work jointly with semi-regulatory bodies, who negotiate better with their Chinese counterparts. In these configurations relations with China are less conflictual.
- Intervention of the highly influential executive branch, i.e. the Presidency, has a major impact on the variability of the outcome: where the executive branch, often promoting the relationship, is less involved, or circumvented, the outcome is more beneficial for Benin. Where the executive branch is more permissive (generally for diplomatic reasons), the bureaucrats are more particular regarding technical prerequisites and function as agents preserving national law and regulations.

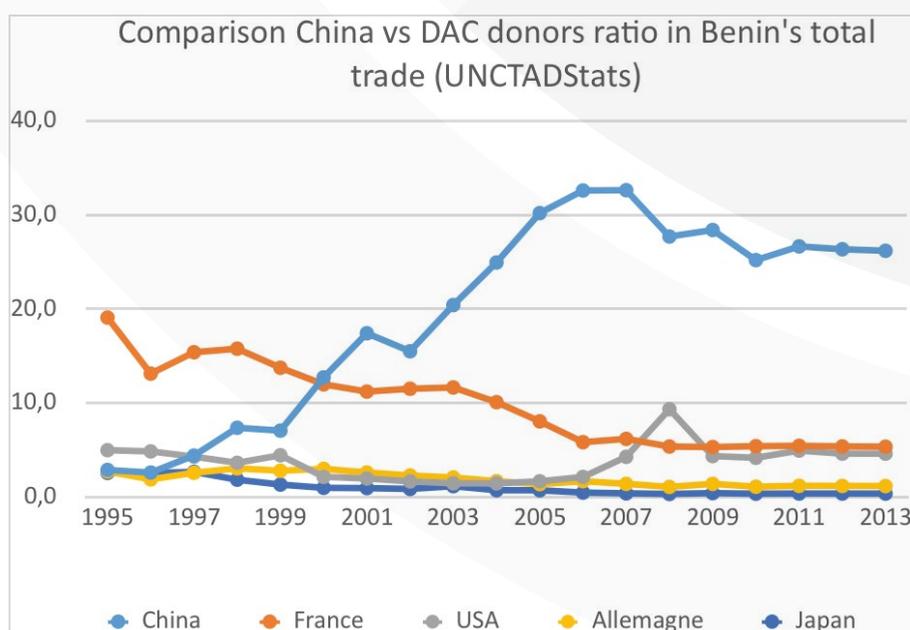
This paper asserts that despite the large asymmetries in Benin-China relations, and the gross favouritism of Chinese contractors by the executive branch, Beninese functionaries do not remain passive, but exercise agency, i.e. they exercise variable control over the process and outcome of negotiations with China, in accordance with their country's national regulations, by several means both structural and tactical.

Although not a "strategy" in the sense of a methodical plan to achieve a goal over a long period of

time, these bureaucrats set up stratagems, tactics and manoeuvres in order to influence the outcome of negotiations. Although the outcomes are more or less successful, due to the interference of an executive branch motivated by political reasons, the agency exerted by these actors can have an influence on future decision-making processes by the executive branch.

A RETROSPECTIVE ON BENIN-CHINA RELATIONS.

As a francophone less developed country (LDC) and a small African state, Benin exemplifies the pattern of Chinese interests in Africa. At first sight Benin does not appear to be a credible strategic partner for China, with relatively small GDP growth of 4% in 2014 and an economy heavily dependent on the agricultural sector (see Annex 1). And yet, the relationship with China is growing: China became Benin largest trade partner in 2011, and 95% of its cotton fibres are exported to Asian markets, with China as the main destination. Imports from China are also displacing the traditional relationship with France. From 1985 to 2005 imports from France represented 26.3% of total Beninese trade; in 2009 they only accounted for 7.6%;¹¹ whereas China's share of Benin's total imports grew enormously – from 5.1% to 40.2% in the same period.¹²



1.1 Disruptive political relations

Official relations between China and Benin officially commenced in 1964, but Chinese presence in Benin can be traced back to the late 1950s, when Chinese SMEs were operating in the cotton sector in Lokossa.¹³ At the political level, following Benin's independence from France in 1960, Benin

11. France, the United States, Germany and Japan are Benin's largest ODA providers (DCD-DAC, 2013).

12. AGENCE FRANÇAISE DE DÉVELOPPEMENT, (2013) 'L'Afrique et les grands émergents', collection A savoir, no. 19 and UNCTADStats database, 2014.

13. "40 years of cooperation – achievements of China in Benin", Diplomat, n°2, special edition, December 2012 (French version – local access).

progressively established diplomatic relations with all countries including the People Republic of China. However, the influence of France, the former colonial metropole, on Beninese diplomatic relations remained strong. As France supported Taiwan, this heavily influenced its diplomatic position on most of its former colonies. Benin (then Dahomey) voted in favour of Taiwan's recognition at the United Nations on October 25th 1971 (Resolution n° 2758).¹⁴ Following this episode, China suspended its relations with Benin. Relations were re-established after the revolutionary coup organized by Mathieu Kerekou on 26th October 1972, who established under the name of the People's Republic of Benin (PRB) an authoritarian regime based on Marxist-Leninist ideology. Following re-establishment of diplomatic relations with China in 1973, relations with Taiwan were suspended. Mathieu Kerekou was the first Beninese President to make an official visit to China – which was catalysed by China's offering Benin to construct the Stade de l'Amitié [Friendship Stadium], Benin's first multisports complex in 1982 (see Annex 2).

Despite the similarity of ideology between the PRC and the PRB, relations between China and Benin were not mainly based on ideology. Even so, the economic and business component of the relations increased during that period at a slow pace. The low level of interaction mainly resulted from the high political instability in Benin in the period from 1960 to 1989, which witnessed 6 Putsches, 7 national constitutions, and 11 Presidents, and amongst which regimes six were led by the military and only five by civilians.¹⁵

The regime change and establishment of a stable democratic transition in February 1990 had few impact on Benin-China bilateral relations. The then-president Nicéphore Soglo did not reinstate relations with Taiwan, and then-foreign minister Theodore Holo paid an official visit to China in 1991, followed by Soglo in May 1992.¹⁶ However, Benin changed its foreign policy priorities. By resolving to break with the former Socialist ideology, Soglo chose to give priority to its relations with the European Union and the United States. From the Chinese perspective, the policy of non-intervention was kept, as they did not condition their partnership on the ideology of the President in charge; however, the election of President Yayi Boni brought a profound change to the former dynamics of the relationship.

1.2 Diplomatic offensive in Benin-China relations under Yayi Boni

Before standing for the Presidency, Yayi Boni had fulfilled the position of Governor of the West African Development Bank from 1994 to 2006. According to former and current diplomats at the Beninese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), who participated in negotiations led by President Boni with China, he is someone who is personally impressed by the “Chinese economic model and rise”. He was the main promoter of China's entry into the West African Development Bank, and turned away an offer of capital subscription by Taiwan. According to the interviewees, Boni's personal friendly relations with the former Head of the China Development Bank also played a key

14. Resolution n°2758 received 76 affirmative votes and 35 votes against the resolution, among which were Benin (ex-Dahomey) and 25 other African countries – see United Nations General Assembly documents - <http://www.un.org/en/ga/>

15. TOPANOU, Victor (2013), Introduction à la sociologie politique du Bénin, Editions l'Harmattan.

16. “40 years of cooperation – achievements of China in Benin”, Diplomat, n°2, special edition, December 2012 (French version – local access).

role in the strengthening of Benin-China relations when he was elected President of Benin in 2006. Following Boni's electoral victory, won with a campaign focussed on economic growth for the Beninese economy, China was reinstated as Benin's key partner, stress being laid on economic relations rather than ideological matters. Benin had turned the page on its Socialist era under the first Presidency of Mathieu Kerekou.

Under the leadership of Boni, who has deeply involved himself in Beninese foreign relations, the Benin-China relationship was intensified, as manifested in several dimensions:

1. The President made five official state visits to China between 2006 and 2014,¹⁷ in comparison with just two official visits to France during the same period.
2. A legal framework was officially adopted recognising the People's Republic of China as the sole representative of the Chinese nation and populace.¹⁸
3. An increase of China-funded projects largely in infrastructure and agriculture resulted in an increase Chinese workers in Benin in 2013 from 230 to approximately 700.¹⁹

The President is often considered by his ministers and cabinet as "first diplomat" in Benin-China relations (see Annex 3). And his former career as a banker has given him better negotiating skills than his predecessors. According to interviewees, President Boni uses specific yet sensitive language in negotiations; e.g. the "mistake" of Beninese diplomacy regarding Taiwan; promises to "win-over" regional pro-Taiwanese neighbours like Burkina Faso; proposing to make Benin a showcase of China's involvement in African LDCs. Moreover, he personally receives Chinese state-owned enterprise (SOE) delegations at the Presidential palace and officially promises to award more infrastructure projects to these enterprises upon the speedy execution of current projects (see Annex 3).²⁰

Under Boni, Benin also became one of the countries whose debt, amounting to 20,000,000 CFA francs (US\$328,000), was progressively retired in 2005 and 2009.²¹ Moreover, China is, besides the European Union, the only trade partner whose products, used for the bids won by Chinese contractors, are exceptionally tax-exempt.²²

1.3 Comparative advantages of China from a Beninese perspective

The Chinese Credit loan system is considered as the best option for Beninese infrastructure finance by the Beninese executive branch, especially in the current context where the usual funders have decided to decrease or abandon the financing of infrastructure projects. The Beninese National Strategy plans clearly articulate infrastructure development, especially road transportation, as a key

17. Including official meetings on the sidelines of the Forum on Africa-China relations (FOCAC) high-level summits.

18. Decret n°2011-599 of 12 September 2011 - "40 years of cooperation – achievements of China in Benin", Diplomat, n°2, special edition, December 2012 (French version – local access).

19. "40 years of cooperation – achievements of China in Benin", Diplomat, n°2, special edition, December 2012 (French version – local access).

20. "Boni Yayi décidé à réaliser les barrages d'Adjaralla et de Kétou Dogo-Bis », La Nation, 19 June 2015, <http://lanationbenin.info/> (accessed on 21 June 2015).

21. "40 years of cooperation – achievements of China in Benin", Diplomat, n°2, special edition, December 2012 (French version – local access).

22. HOUNDEFFO, Sèdèhou Carlos G. (2013), "Fiscalité des entreprises et des particuliers", Editions Juriscom, p.231.

element of the country's development.²³ However, funders like the European Union and France, especially the French Development Bank, who were active in this sector before 2006, have progressively disengaged, citing their low profitability and the high level of corruption of the Beninese government during the execution of the projects. According to interviewees, the infrastructure development sector is more and more considered less competitive by these traditional actors.

In this context, China is viewed by the Beninese Executive branch as more “demand-driven” in the sense that its cooperation and bilateral relations are largely focussed on Beninese priorities, viz. infrastructure, and Chinese cooperation is considered less procedurally challenging. In interviews conducted for this study, the lower procedural hurdles are recurrently cited as entailing fewer feasibility studies, allowing projects to be executed expeditiously. In return, Benin offers China very preferential tax exemptions and contractor preferences in roadway, agricultural and administrative infrastructure projects. Most Beninese road infrastructure projects are executed by Chinese contractors, especially Chinese SOEs; e.g. China Railways, SynoHydro, Anhui Foreign Economic Group, Shanxi Coking Coal Group Co. Ltd., Zhejiang Teams International Economic & Technical Cooperation, etc.

The modus operandi of China's involvement in Benin is very similar to cooperation in other African countries (Alves, 2012), and may be summarised in three pillars:

1. Non-reimbursable subventions and technical assistance.
2. Donations: technical materials and infrastructure (China donated Benin its first multi-sports complex following the reestablishment of diplomatic relations).
3. Zero-interest loans: often subject to debt cancellation, reimbursement is spread out over 25 years
4. Concessional loans (interest in this case is never higher than 2%).

The Beninese government also offers China flexible dispositions by adopting a parallel track in its relations, waiving its participation in the donors' harmonisation process.²⁴ China's aid to Benin is, by the standards of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC), very low and mostly consists of technical assistance.²⁵

China is also not required by the Beninese government or its executive branch to adhere to DAC requirements for donors regarding technical assistance projects. It does not participate in DAC coordination meetings, with the exception of the high-level political meetings amongst ambassadors, in which the Chinese ambassador in Benin has been participating since 2012.

Despite its lack of strategic mineral resources, Benin is considered from the Chinese perspective as a

23. Benin Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP/SCRIP 2011) ; Orientations Stratégiques de Développement du Bénin (2006 – 2011) – le Bénin émergent » - both documents are accessible on <http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/benin/documents/> (accessed on 17 July 2015).

24. Benin Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP/SCRIP 2011).

25. “40 years of cooperation – achievements of China in Benin”, *Diplomat*, n°2, special edition , December 2012 (French version – local access).

strategic hub in Africa-China relations, especially for economic reasons: its consumption market for Chinese goods, its roads for transporting Chinese merchandise and as China has developed few airline routes within Africa – it uses Cotonou harbour to expand into West Africa and especially into neighbouring Nigeria with 174,5 million inhabitants (World Bank Database, 2014). In this regard, Benin acts a “warehouse state” for Chinese contractors’ infrastructure projects in Nigeria and the sub-region.²⁶ Moreover, by focussing cooperation on development issues, including infrastructure, transportation networks, the manufacturing and agricultural industries, and debt relief in Benin,²⁷ China has been dampening criticism of the priority of natural resources extraction and mining in Sino-Africa relations.²⁸

1.4 China’s extensive involvement in Beninese infrastructure projects

China’s involvement in infrastructure projects in Benin may be categorised in three types:

Type 1 - Infrastructure projects with Chinese financing, both concessional and non-concessional loans. These generally take the form of “loans vs. infrastructure” projects allocated to Chinese companies (which is a loan prerequisite). The Beninese State also provides finance. Most of the contracts involve road infrastructure projects and do not require any competition or preliminary open or restricted call for tenders. Examples of these projects are the Godomey traffic interchange in Cotonou, and the Akassato-Bohicon road rehabilitation works.

Type 2 - Infrastructure projects executed by Chinese contractors with finance provided to Benin by development banks. In this case, the call for tenders is either open or restricted to not only Chinese companies. Most of them involve road and ICT infrastructure projects. In the case of Benin, Chinese companies will participate in calls for tenders for projects with big financial stakes, i.e. no less than US\$50 million dollars. Examples of this type are the Godomey-Pahou road reconstruction, as part of the Inter-State National Road (RNIE n° 1) in West Africa (financed by the World Bank); the N’Dali-Nikki-Chicandou road (financed by the African Development Bank); and Fifadji bridge (financed by the West African Development Bank).

Type 3 - Infrastructure projects executed by Chinese contractors with public financing by the Beninese National Treasury. In this case, too, the call for tenders is either open or restricted to not just Chinese companies. Most of these are also road infrastructure projects. Examples include the Segbana-Samia road layout works, and the construction of the Bodjécali-Madécali-Iloua and Kilibo-Nigerian border merchandise transit corridors between Nigeria and other countries of the region.

TRACING THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS.

This section discusses the role played by the Benin administrative apparatus in carrying on all aspects of negotiations incidental to the Benin-China relationship.

26. For a study on Benin as a “warehouse state” see IGUE, John (1992), *L’Etat entrepôt au Bénin, commerce informel ou solution à la crise?*, Editions Karthala.

27. INFORMATION OFFICE OF THE STATE COUNCIL (2014), *China’s Foreign Aid*, Beijing, July 2014.

28. SUN, Yu (2014), « Africa in China’s New Foreign Aid White Paper », *Africa in Focus* (BROOKINGS), 16 July 2014 (accessed on 05 January 2016).

2.1 From preliminary executive discussions to bureaucratic interactions

The negotiation process involved in Benin-China relations may be analytically divided into three successive phases:

1. Preliminary discussions between Beninese and Chinese officials: These generally take place following official state visits in Cotonou, Beijing, or on the sidelines of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) meetings. When President Boni occupied the rotating presidency of the African Union (AU) from 2012 to 2013, he opened high-level AU meetings to Chinese participation, which allowed for bilateral discussions on the sidelines of AU general conferences. Most loans and infrastructure projects are discussed in these preliminary settings. The role of the executive branch is crucial in this phase. The Beninese Constitution of 1991 established a “presidential regime” in which the Executive branch has wide decisional powers, with influence across all legislative and judicial institutions.²⁹ Hence, President Boni and his predecessors largely control foreign affairs, and the intensification of Benin-China relations has been largely a Presidential project, with the Foreign Minister in an advisory and implementing role.

2. Official pledges made by Chinese officials and roadmaps announced at multilateral or cross-regional meetings like FOCAC: Priority projects are selected by the Beninese government and its bureaucracies, especially the Ministries of Development and of Economy. At this level, Chinese contractors engage in an internal competitive process by approaching the different Beninese ministries, and undertake to finance their priority projects by jointly applying for funding from China EXIM Bank or China Development Bank. This competitive process is largely driven by the Chinese national “going-out” strategy which makes Chinese SOEs more or less prepared for foreign direct investment in a context where they are less and less competitive in the Chinese domestic market.³⁰ The process may also be inverted: Beninese ministries, on orders from the executive, directly approach the Chinese embassy to request financing for their priority projects. In doing so, the sectoral and technical ministries set their own foreign agenda circumventing MoFA, which is traditionally the focal actor in Benin-China relations and nominally in charge of coordinating Benin-China relations and projects locally.

3. The decision on finances: The question is settled whether the project is to be executed with Chinese concessional or non-concessional loans, development bank loans, or public funding by the Beninese government. The terms of the contracts are discussed, negotiated and revised between the bureaucrats of the sectoral ministry under which the project falls and their Chinese counterparts, viz. SOE contractors’ representatives, delegations from the Chinese embassy. It is at this stage that the bureaucrats intervene in the process.

2.2 Identifying the Actors: who negotiates in the bureaucracies?

As with many African and Asian developing countries, Benin has undergone a slimming down of

29. TOPANOU, Victor (2013), Introduction à la sociologie politique du Bénin, Editions l’Harmattan.

30. WANG Duanyong, ZHAO Pei, “Mismatching structures: a new explanation for the ‘unsatisfactory’ labor conditions in Chinese mining companies in the Democratic Republic of Congo”, paper presented at the South-South Labor Conference, Cornell University, 9-11 October 2015.

public bureaucracy and downsizing of government in the framework of structural adjustment programmes led by the International Monetary Fund in the early 1990s, as a means to make bureaucratic action more effective.³¹ These programmes have not encountered the expected success. Benin still has a massive and choked bureaucracy and faces various dysfunctions: quality of expertise varies across ministries and at the intra-ministerial level; corruption is also endemic and affects the efficiency of delivery.³² Traditionally, inter-ministerial coordination is a prerequisite to the signing of contracts with China, and requires the presence of MoFA. However, as the “speed” factor is a key issue in Benin-China and overall Africa-China relations, especially under Boni,³³ the result is the circumvention of MoFA in order to accelerate project execution. This is not without tensions between the various sectoral ministries and MoFA, as the latter is often asked to intervene when conflicts arise between these ministries and Chinese companies in the implementation phase.

Negotiating requires both MoFA diplomats and technical staff from sectoral ministries. For instance, in the case of administrative infrastructure, the bureaucrats from the Beninese Ministry of Urbanism and Habitat consist of civil servants that are initially trained as civil engineers and architects, whereas the bureaucrats from the Beninese Ministry of Public Works consist of public works engineers. This configuration is not without issues, as the two categories of bureaucrats do not always adjust their priorities; technicians being more particular and demanding in respect of technical prerequisites and domestic regulations, whereas diplomats are more permissive and request more tolerance from the sectoral ministries towards the Chinese partners, at the urging of the executive branch.

COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES AND VARIATIONS IN BUREAUCRATIC AGENCY.

Although the fast-track process and low-cost operation of Chinese companies in infrastructure projects is often mentioned by the interviewees as China’s main competitive advantage, China is nevertheless under scrutiny for several reasons. The following case studies will highlight the role bureaucrats play in the negotiation process; when they intervene (in phase 3 of the process); and the stratagems and tactics they use to influence the outcome to their advantage.

3.1 Recurrent issues of content

Recurrent problems of content raised with Chinese contractors in infrastructure projects in Benin revolve around three issues:

1. Failure to employ local workers: According to interviewees, even the levelling staff are said to be coming from China. There is the use of low quality materials, and the lack of respect of local Beninese standards and legal requirements.
2. Incompatibilities between Chinese and local staffs: Non-use of French as working language; the refusal of Chinese workers to monitor the progress of the works.

31. AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (2003), Benin Structural Adjustment Programs I, II, III – Programme Performance Evaluation Report (PPER).

32. TOPANOU, Victor (2013), Introduction à la sociologie politique du Bénin, Editions l’Harmattan.

33. In comparison, under former president Mathieu Kérékou, negotiation were made through an inter-bureaucratic coordination among several ministries in order to study details of the clauses and match between the clauses and national law. This inter-coordination, which requires a longer process is less feasible nowadays, according to the interviewees, because of the « speed » requirements by President Boni.

3. Occasional violence episodes against local workers.

Civil society actors, amongst which are labour unions such as the official union of government employees at the Ministry of Public Works (SYNTRA-TTP),³⁴ also frequently accuse the executive branch of favouritism, unfair competition, connivance with China's dumping strategies in Benin, and contributing to national unemployment and the fail rate of local businesses in the roadworks sector, as companies like China Railways Suisiju Group Corporation (CRSSG) very often win the contracts.³⁵ Moreover, according to them, Chinese contractors sometimes win without even taking part in the official calls for tenders.³⁶

In all three types of infrastructure projects, tensions around a number of legal and practical elements flare up.

Type 1: Chinese-financed infrastructure projects engage Beninese state finances and expenses, as they include a reimbursable loan from China, whether concessional or non-concessional; clauses of soil attribution; tax exemption on primary commodities and goods, such as natural resources and oil, pharmaceutical goods, equipment (tractors, office equipment, etc.); and provision of electricity and water necessary to the execution of the works.

According to civil society organisations and public works labour unions, these projects do not comply with national regulatory rules: there is a lack of standards control, absence of call for tenders, connivance between the Chinese Bureau of Standards and Chinese contractors, as both are state-owned enterprises, which creates conflicts of interest.³⁷ The unions also consider that Chinese contractors and the Beninese State, especially the Cabinet, do not respect Article 148 of the Beninese Constitution.³⁸ Discontent also arises concerning the principles of equity, reciprocity ('win-win'), and national dignity. SYNTRA-TTP conclude that, since Beninese contractors have not participated as equals in these tenders, local employment is driven down, technical norms are flouted, and national dignity is affronted, as even incidents of violence are reported on the construction sites. Hence, all such contracts are void as violating the law of Benin.

The one-sided control, according to the union, also creates overestimation of material needs, products and furniture for the project by the Chinese contractor, all of it tax-exempt according to Beninese law, allowing them to build reserves of stock (confirming the theory of Benin as the "warehouse state" in West Africa).³⁹ These reserves then enable them to scoop subsequent calls for tenders by lowball bidding, including even those financed by multilateral development banks (Type

34. Syndicat des Travailleurs de l'Administration des Transports et des Travaux Publics (SYNTRA-TTP).

35. China Railways n°5 Engineering Group Co Ltd (CREG 5) successively won the road projects N'Dali-Nikki-Chicandou ; Bodjécali – Madécali-Illoua Nigeria border and Godomey-Pahou.

36. Press Conference of SYNTRA-TTP on scheming procedures in market attribution of the Ministry of Public Works, SYNTRA TTP, Cotonou, 13 August 2014.

37. Press Conference of SYNTRA-TTP at the National Assembly, 08 October 2013.

38. Article 148 stipulates that "The Republic of Benin may conclude cooperation or association agreements with third states on the basis of the principles of equity, mutual respect and sovereignty, reciprocal advantages and national dignity", National Constitution of Benin, 1991.

39. IGUE, John (1992), *L'Etat entrepôt au Bénin, commerce informel ou solution à la crise?*, Editions Karthala.

2) and projects financed with Beninese public funds (Type 3).

Type 2: When contracts enjoy multilateral financing, discontent arises about recurrent practices of Chinese contractors. According to civil society organisations, several Chinese enterprises (all of them SOEs) participate in the same call for tender. This is illegal under the National Code of Public Tenders of Benin, which provides that a common legal and moral entity (the Chinese state) cannot bid in the same call for tender. This practice is frequent in Type 2 projects.

Type 3: With projects financed upon the national budget and won by Chinese contractors, tensions arise concerning favouritism for Chinese contractors by the Beninese executive. Although a call for tender is published, prompting many local and international companies to prepare bids, and in so doing, to incur expenses, the Cabinet decide to award the contract to a Chinese company without its even buying the official Call for Tenders file. This happened in the Bodjécali-Madécali-Illou-Nigeria border road project. The competitors were never even informed of the award of the project to the Chinese.

Where Chinese contractors are favoured for various political and technical reasons, large asymmetries arise in negotiations and negatively impact outcomes. Despite the latter, the bureaucracies of several ministries succeed in shaping the outcome using a number of stratagems.

3.2 Bureaucratic agency in asymmetrical negotiations

To shed light on how bureaucracies exert agency in the negotiation process and on outcomes in Benin-China relations, this paper will focus on three specific cases – in road infrastructure, administrative infrastructure, and ICT infrastructure.

Case study 1 : The Akassato-Bohicon road infrastructure project

Project characteristics

The Akassato-Bohicon project is a road works, led by the Ministry of Public Works, interconnecting two Departments in Benin, Atlantique and Zou. Its objective is to provide a link between Allada, Séhoué, Zogbodomey and Bohicon, all localities whose economy is based on agriculture, manufactures, business, and livestock farming. Within the Bohicon district, transformation industries of wood and cotton also prosper. Traffic on this road is particularly heavy because of high volume and road deterioration partly due to the quality of the soil. However, this road is of particular strategic importance, as it is one of the most “economic” roads of Benin, enabling circulation of goods to other countries of the region. ECOWAS has incorporated this interconnection as part of its regional integration programme of West Africa. Overall, road infrastructure projects are strategic for the Beninese economy, which is lacking in strategic resources: – they are a source of economic revenue, and facilitate mobility of goods and persons. Road works also provide potential political gains for the incumbent regime in terms of electoral politics. In the case of the Akassato-Bohicon project, legislative elections were due in one year.

Technical characteristics

The total length of the road is estimated at 103,655,612 km, including 2x2 lanes. Its speed varies

between 60 km/hour and 80 km/hour depending on the number of lanes. The road plan also includes 200 intersections and 3 bridges of a total of 466 metres and 100 culverts.

Financial characteristics

The Akassato-Bohicon project is a Type 1 project of a total estimated cost of 107 billion CFA francs (US\$175,480,000). Divided in three portions (lots), the project was largely financed through zero-interest loans of US\$ 19,919, 899 provided by the Chinese government (Lots 1 and 2) and concessional loans (1% interest rate) of US\$122,591,259 by the EXIM Bank of China (Lot 3). Selection of company and execution of project was done in China and assigned to China Geo-Engineering Corporation (CGC) and Xinxing Group. The Beninese government initially rejected a grant offered by the European Union for the construction of the road.

Negotiation process and controversial clauses

The road project was first discussed at the diplomatic level by the Beninese executive branch and its Chinese counterpart on the sidelines of the FOCAC meeting in 2009 in Sharm-el-sheikh, Egypt. At this meeting, both parties agreed that the zero-interest loan would be provided, and that it would be dedicated to the financing of road infrastructure projects jointly to be decided by Benin and China in November 2010. Most of the tensions arose around Lot 3 of the project over several controversial clauses: the refusal by the Chinese company to appoint an independent control bureau and a threat to withdraw the loan if a Chinese bureau is not appointed. The Chinese also charged the Beninese government with a loan of 6.09 billion CFA francs (US\$9,987,699) to pay the bureau appointed by China to do the feasibility study, when a Beninese firm (ETRICO Ingenieurs Conseils) had already been appointed and had estimated the total costs of the construction at 52 billion CFA francs (US\$85,280,000) by contrast with the 107 billion CFA francs (US\$175,480,000) estimated by Xinxing corporation. Despite the existence of national legal requirements, very few local materials and workers were employed on the project. It was also affected by delays, strikes by local workers over their working conditions, and complaints about poor quality.

Bureaucratic agency

Within the Ministry of Public Works, the Directorate of Roads and the General Directorate of Public Works consist of bureaucrats, mostly civil engineers, who work under the Minister's Cabinet. Being subordinates, they form a minority within the Government whose power is essentially concentrated within the Cabinet. However, they are the most active civil servants in the SYNTRA-TTP⁴⁰ union; the official labour union whose legal status is independent from the Ministry; and their actions confirm Putnam's assessment that a minority of bureaucrats can influence the two-level games played by leaders in international negotiations.⁴¹ To understand the conditions in which minorities influence outcomes in bureaucratic organisations, it is necessary to analyse their strategies. In the case of SYNTRA-TTP, one of its leaders, Jacques Ayadji, who occupies the n° 2 position within the union,⁴² is a public figure

40. Syndicat des Travailleurs de l'Administration des Transports et des Travaux Publics (SYNTRA-TTP).

41. PUTNAM, Robert D. (1988), "Diplomacy and Domestic politics: the logics of two-level games", International Organization, vol.42, n°3, Summer, pp.427-460.

42. In September 2015, Jacques Ayadji has been elected as secretary general of SYNTRA-TTP – "Syntra-TTP: Jacques Ayadji élu secrétaire general", Le Matin Libre, 03 septembre 2015.

and charismatic civil engineer who also used to be in charge of the Directorate of Roads in the Ministry of Public Works. The process by which these bureaucratic insiders bargain with other actors reveals more particularly the bureaucratic politics that are in play.

The bureaucratic politics and agency revolve around three kinds of stratagems and tactics: (1) benefits-and-costs stratagems, (2) informational tactics, and (3) procedural manoeuvres. By using SYNTRA-TTP, as a platform for their contestation, these functionaries become “reactive bureaucratic agents”, a phenomenon previously unseen in Beninese national politics.

(1) Benefits-and-costs stratagems consist of coalition-building inside and outside the (in this case) Ministry of Public Works. This entails alliances with other departments and unions in government, while also winning the support of influential groups outside the executive branch through the use of media, so as to mobilise outside supporters and influence constituency opinion.⁴³ Coalition-building was started through alliances with other unions (CSA-Bénin, CSTB, CGTB, Fensetraf-Bénin)⁴⁴ and other ministries among which the Ministry of Economy and Finances, a key player in Benin-China negotiations. Following successive denunciations by SYNTRA-TTP⁴⁵ in public press conferences, and by unionists over TV and radio, including highly popular radio broadcasts like “Caravane du Matin” on Radio Tokpa, where Jacques Ayadji often joins in, the union gained the support of then Minister of Public Works Lambert Koty who decided to set up an independent standards control bureau for all Lots, a decision highly contested by the Chinese, who finally agreed to an independent standards control on Lot 3 of the project. Refusal by Chinese contractors to give the Ministries’ staffs access to construction sites was also widely publicised by the local press.

(2) Procedural manoeuvres consist in manipulation of the legal context by the insertion of discriminatory criteria that exclude Chinese companies in calls for tenders issued by the Ministry of Public Works. This empowers the bureaucrats by determining the procedure to affect the outcome (viz. the choice of contractor) without having to induce individual preference change.⁴⁶ This action led the bureaucrats to impose several clauses making independent standards control compulsory on projects of Type 2 and Type 3, causing several Chinese companies, although not all, to withdraw from international bidding. This contributes to “drawing the circle” of contractors bidding on international calls for tenders, by reducing the group of participants.⁴⁷ By first succeeding in making the government appoint an independent standards control bureau (Louis Berger/ACEP/DECO) on Lot 3, which was made possible through funding by the European Union, with the support of the Minister the bureaucrats have succeeded in persuading the executive branch in their favour as well.

43. HALPERIN, Mark(1972), “The decision to deploy the ABM: Bureaucratic and Domestic Politics in the Johnson Administration”, *World Politics*, n°25, pp. 62-95.

44. Confederation of Autonomous Unions of Benin (Confédération Syndicale Autonome du Bénin); Workers union confederation (Confédération Syndicale des Travailleurs du Bénin); General confederation of workers (Confédération Générale des Travailleurs du Bénin).

45. Press Conference of SYNTRA-TTP at the National Assembly, 08 October 2013.

46. MAOZ, Zeev (1999), “Framing the national interest”, *World Politics*, n°42, pp. 77-110.

47. HALPERIN, Mark(1972), “The decision to deploy the ABM: Bureaucratic and Domestic Politics in the Johnson Administration”, *World Politics*, n°25, pp. 62-95.

(3) Informational tactics adopted by the bureaucrats consist in presenting arguments in support of their cause so as to enhance the likelihood of persuasion.⁴⁸ These tactics are executed through association with supposedly independent actors, but also by making normative and moral arguments justifying their position through denunciation. In this case, the bureaucrats use highly moral rhetoric: Chinese corporations “plunge Benin in continued under-development”; the “dignity” of Benin is being flouted. In so doing, the bureaucrats use an “issue escalation strategy” by converting a practical question into a matter of principle,⁴⁹ so as to gain a popular following.

Such denunciations were also made in association with popular civil society groups like the Association for the Fight against Communitarianism and Racism (ALCRED) in joint press conferences, but also through organising and abetting riots by Beninese local workers on construction sites to protest their work conditions. Other informational tactics have consisted in sending an open letter to the National Assembly⁵⁰ asking MPs not to approve the loan agreement in favour of the Chinese standards control bureau. The combined stratagems used by these bureaucrats have allowed them to exert bureaucratic agency, succeeding in converting neutrals to supporters and opponents to neutrals.⁵¹

Effects on outcomes

Despite these different actions, the Beninese executive branch has unilaterally decided to eliminate the standards control of Lot 3 of the Akassato-Bohicon, despite support from Lambert Koty and Ake Natondé, successive Ministers of Public Works, and to give it to a Chinese bureau. According to interviewees, this unilateral decision was due to pressure by the Chinese ambassador who threatened to cancel the loan and pressure from the executive branch on MPs the majority of whom belong to the President's party.

However, bureaucratic agency and organisation generated popular support and has allowed for pressure on the executive branch. The salaries and health assurance of Beninese workers were reviewed and upgraded. The combination of bureaucratic agency either led Chinese corporations not to bid on several international calls for tenders, where intentional discriminatory clauses were integrated (e.g. compulsory independent standards control), as was the case with the Pahou-Ouidah-Hillacondji road project funded by the African Development Bank, a bid won by Chaabane Sarl (a Tunisian consortium) in collaboration with Adeoti Sarl (a leading Beninese company operating in road works);⁵² or else obliged the executive branch to take account of multiple bids by Chinese SOEs on Type 3 projects.

48. KAARBO, Juliet (1998), 'Power politics in foreign policy: the influence of bureaucratic minorities', *European Journal of International Relations*, vol.4 (1), p.67-97.

49. LINDELL, PERSSON (1986), "The paradox of weak state power: a research and literature overview", *Cooperation and conflict*, n°21, pp. 79 - 97.

50. Open letter of SYNTRA-TTP to the National Assembly, October 2013.

51. ALLISSON, Graham, HALPERIN, Mark, (1972), "Bureaucratic politics: a paradigm and some policy implications", *World Politics*, n°24, pp. 40-79.

52. « Boni YAYI lance les travaux de la route Pahou-Ouidah-Hillacondji », Official Portal of the Republic of Benin,

<http://gouv.bj/actualites/marina/boni-yayi-lance-les-travaux-de-la-route-pahou-ouidah-hillacondji> (accessed on 16 February 2016)

Case study n° 2: The Administrative Tower of Cotonou

Project characteristics

The conception and execution of the administrative tower of Cotonou, comprising three ministries, was a project carried out by the China Anhui Foreign Economic Construction Group (AFECC), under the authority of the Ministry of Urbanism and Habitat. It was initially a Beninese project led by the National Agency of Works of Public Interest (AGETIP). AFECC took the first step by approaching the Ministry of Urbanism and Habitat to consult them on priority projects in their portfolio. The initial decision had been to ask for financing from China and implementation by AGETIP. However, AFECC requested to entirely implement the project with a loan provided by EximBank of China.

Technical characteristics

The 24-month-long project included the construction of a main building, two annexes, and water and electricity distribution. The project also included several facilities, and green spaces. The civil servants at the Ministry of Urbanism and Habitat are mostly architects and civil engineers, hence they succeeded in making comments on and amendments to the architectural plans.

Financial characteristics

The project cost a total of US\$95 million and was funded through a concessional loan provided by EximBank of China.

Bureaucratic agency

According to the civil servants of the Ministry of Habitat who were interviewed, working with the Chinese is not difficult so long as all clauses are stipulated in the contract. This makes the negotiation process crucial, and longer than normal.

Most bureaucratic agency was exercised in the negotiations. Several rounds of negotiation between AFECC and Beninese civil servants led to the imposition of several clauses which were not present or mentioned in the Akassato-Bohicon contract. These include stipulations to:

- (1) Provide assistance to the Chinese to acquire local construction material and fuel, and to assist the Chinese in hiring local workers.
- (2) Submit on a regular basis, and two weeks after the start of the project, a “roadmap” of the works.
- (3) Communicate to the Ministry monthly on the state of the project on the part of the Chinese.
- (4) Allow to Ministry officials and to engineers free access to the construction site, in respect of safety rules.
- (5) Respect the national laws of Benin in regard to salaries, work accidents, social security and employment.
- (6) Keep a diary of the progress of the implementation, as well as to permit the use of both French

and Chinese as working languages.

- (7) Use local Beninese materials, such as wood, sand, gravel and cement as defined in national regulation.⁵³
- (8) Train Beninese technicians in the use of machinery and equipment provided by the Chinese.
- (9) Specify tax-exemptions on certain materials used for the project.

Despite pressure from the executive branch and several attempts to reduce the bureaucrats' control, the clauses agreed by both sides were negotiated before the signing of the contract. The Ministry of Urbanism and Habitat used several techniques to delay the negotiation process in order to get the requested clauses figured into the contract before signature. Comparison between works contracts let to Chinese corporations by the Ministry of Public Works and the Akassato-Bohicon project by the Ministry of Habitat show that the latter exerted more bureaucratic agency in the negotiation, as they better circumvented or resisted pressure from the executive branch and the Chinese; whereas the Ministry of Public Works was more affected by executive pressure during the negotiation phase and was more able to exert agency after the signature.

For the two case studies, most of the interviewees highlighted the difficult relations with some of their Ministers, especially those who were not technocrats but appointed for political reasons by the executive branch and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The two latter were said to have affected the negotiation phase, as they demanded conciliatory measures from the career bureaucrats, in order not to adversely affect diplomatic relations between Benin and China. Most of the demands from the Chinese were subject to negotiation between the Foreign Ministry and the respective Ministries involved, which created a lack of coherence, synergy and equivalence between Beninese diplomats and technicians and other civil servants involved in the negotiation process.

Focus : Structural bureaucratic agency

Since 2011, besides the technicians and the diplomats, new regulatory bodies have begun to play more of a role. Favoured and promoted by President Boni, semi-autonomous regulatory bodies were created in various Ministries (ICT, Public Works), as they were thought to provide a solution to bureaucratic obstruction in sectoral ministries. Their role is twofold: to edit and review the calls for tenders, and to review draft contracts with contractors, including Chinese contractors, and other partners before execution. These regulatory bodies are composed of independent experts, most of them with experience in the private sector. However, these bodies compete with the ministry to which they are attached, as they take away regulatory work from the bureaucrats formerly charged with it. Their reviewing role has had a major impact on the negotiation of contracts, as they exercise agency on the process before the negotiation and execution phase.

ICT infrastructure has become a strategic sector for Chinese corporations. Like many African countries, Benin has undergone a mobile revolution, with five different mobile operators covering

53. The Beninese Presidency adopted a legal framework in August 2005 for the use of local materials in public construction works – Decret n° 2005-482. The Ministry of Habitat succeeded in securing for Benin 25% of materials used.

its territory.⁵⁴ Chinese contractors like Huawei provide several types of materials for these operators, but also compete with them on national calls for tenders, such as the National Programme for Electronic Governance (financed by a US\$131,200 million loan from EximBank).

The Transition from Analogue to Digital project is an ICT project led by the Ministry of Communication and New Technologies (on a budget of approximately US\$150 million). As a Type 2 project, it is financed through a non-concessional loan provided by the West African Development Bank. In this case, bureaucratic agency was exerted under the form of procedural manoeuvres which began with the editing of the international call for tenders. Before the call was issued, each point was reviewed by a semi-autonomous regulatory body, the ICT agency (AGETIC), which worked in parallel but in cooperation with the Ministry. Created in 2013, AGETIC is composed of experts in ICT.

The objective of creating these regulatory bodies is to avoid bureaucratic obstructionism and inefficiency in some ministries. In the case of the Analogue to Digital project, procedural manoeuvres consisted in specifying requirements for knowledge and technology transfer, quality of materials, guidance on the use of French, and the percentage of employment of local workers and qualified engineers in the international call for tenders. The call was won by Startimes, a Chinese SOE. Bureaucratic agency was more specific in the sense that former projects negotiated by the Ministry before creation of the regulatory body had not specifically required the competing contractors to stipulate how they would implement the project or respect aspects of it, notably: recruitment of local workers, technical and knowledge transfer, use of French as working language and language of materials used, quality of equipment, monitoring and evaluation, and post-project guarantees.

ACTIONS AGAINST BUREAUCRATS.

Bureaucratic agency in Benin-China relations is not without various reactions from the executive branch. Several actions were opposed to bureaucratic minorities in order to delay or obstruct their agency. In case study n° 1, such actions led to the transfer of Jacques Ayadji from the Directorate of Roads to another department not located in the Ministry of Public Works, where he was put in charge of providing technical advice. The substitution of Lambert Koty for Ake Natondé, enacted by President Boni following a Cabinet reshuffle, was also considered by many interviewees as a means for the executive branch to take out a figure who had voiced public concern about Chinese practices in infrastructure projects in Benin.

In case study n° 2, the Ministry of Urbanism and Habitat was circumvented in other projects under its competence, namely the construction of public schools, after it required additional standards control. Hence the schools infrastructure was not controlled from the Beninese side.

CONCLUSION.

This paper reports the finding that bureaucrats from small states are not passive, conformist agents

54. WILLIAMS Mark, MAYER Rebecca, MINGES Michael, "Africa's ICT infrastructure: building on the mobile revolution", Directions in Development, World Bank, June 2011.

in negotiations, and that bureaucratic minorities may use tactics of influence on majorities in order for deviant views to prevail. Often acting in the shadows, as agents they safeguard national law, often in opposition to an executive branch intent on pursuing narrow political interests. The case study of agency exerted by Beninese bureaucrats in asymmetrical relations and negotiations with China has proved that this agency lies in the tactics and stratagems of influence that these minority actors employ and combine, whether they bypass or exploit their status in order to influence policy.⁵⁵

This paper also asserts that the structural organisation of bureaucracies and inter-bureaucratic consultation may have an impact on the outcome of the negotiation process, and allow for the bureaucrats to negotiate better deals while excluding certain controversial clauses, and by so doing to exert influence on the outcome. This influence varies depending on bureaucratic action before the negotiations (while editing calls for tenders); during the negotiation (by assuring that national regulations are respected); and after the negotiations (by utilising benefits-and-costs stratagems, procedural manoeuvres and informational tactics as modes of resistance and action).

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55. KAARBO, Juliet (1998), 'Power politics in foreign policy: the influence of bureaucratic minorities', *European Journal of International Relations*, vol.4 (1), p.67-97.

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Annex 1: Benin Macroeconomic Indicators (World Bank database, 2015).

- Population: 10,6 million hbts
- Income level: Low income level
- GDP (current US\$) :8,74 billion \$
- GDP growth: 4%
- Demography: 122 622 km²



Annex 2: Infrastructure projects executed by Chinese contractors in Benin.⁵⁷



57. From left to right : (above): The Stade de l'Amitié; Congress Palace – (below): Administrative Tower; Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) / pictures taken by the author during fieldwork.

Annex 3: Increased dynamism in Benin-China relations under president Boni Yayi (source: national newspaper La Nation).

