Northeast Asian Firms and Corporate Social Responsibility in Africa: Emergent dynamics and geo-institutional dimensions

Scarlett Cornelissen

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Growing investments in Africa by multinational enterprises (MNEs) from across Asia have resulted in intensified economic ties between the two regions, yet the specific activities and practices of these enterprises are understudied. More international attention is placed these days on the impacts of MNEs from Asia and the Global South more broadly, and is framed in terms of norms and expectations about the mitigation by such enterprises of possible negative consequences or their contribution to sustainable development in host societies. This sees the increased promotion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) as an aspect of these MNEs' operations.

This project is a first-cut assessment of the contours, dynamics and implications of emergent notions of CSR in the investments of Northeast Asian firms in Africa, focusing on the paradigms that appear to inform MNE activities and the early processes geared towards the institutionalisation of CSR principles and rules.

The project appraises emergent and established CSR practices by firms from two countries in the Northeast Asian region − Japan and the People's Republic of China. The aim is to gain understanding of the dynamics related to the expansion and institutionalisation of CSR as a norm and as legal application in these settings; to determine prevalent CSR concepts and practices by firms in both their domestic and foreign operations; and to draw insights about the implications of these firms' engagement in African economies.

Towards these aims, analysis was conducted of a range of documentary material, comprising company annual and CSR reports; institutional charters; and reports by international governmental and non-governmental organisations. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with the representatives of firms in Japan. Finally, visits were made to the operational sites in Japan of a select number of firms.

The major findings that can be highlighted are: There are varied patterns of CSR practice by Northeast Asian MNEs on the continent that partly reflect the history and dynamics of economic ties between their home country and African locations, and partly are an indication of the extent of CSR adoption, internalisation and institutionalisation in their home environments. CSR is increasingly advanced in multilateral meetings by African governments and their Northeast Asian counterparts, even if still in broad terms. Therefore, while nascent,

CSR is a norm that is beginning to govern Africa-Asia relations in economic, political and diplomatic spheres. The project considers the ways in which these processes relate to the existing CSR governance architecture, and the implications they could have for production, trade and investment ties between the two world regions.

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1. Introduction

While growing trade and investment ties between Africa and Asia have received much attention in recent years, the role and corporate practices in Africa of multinational enterprises (MNEs) is relatively understudied. Economic ties between the two regions have deepened significantly of late, largely spearheaded by various forms of investments – direct, through joint ventures, or via subsidiary channels – by MNEs from Asia. The scale of investments by Chinese firms has been extensive, and has drawn most attention[1], but MNEs from a variety of Asian countries have increased their footprint across the continent. These include Indian firms like Tata, Bharti Airtel, Hindustan Petroleum and Reliance Industries, Malaysia's Petronas, and Korean firms such as Hyundai and Samsung. Japanese firms have had a notably longer presence on the continent, since at least the late 1960s, and a number of the larger corporations from Japan have been significant players, particularly in manufacturing, in a range of African countries (see Ampiah, 1997 and Morikawa, 1997 for overviews).

In scholarly and other analyses of Asia's involvement in Africa's political economy, the focus has tended to fall on the impacts that investments have on specific economic sectors. These have included analyses that have traced different waves of entry of Asian capital into the continent, from early generations of investments centred on resource extraction, to newer investments today in an array of sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fishing and information and communications technology (e.g. Alden and Davies, 2006; Brautigam and Ekman, 2012; Kaplinsky, McCormick and Morris, 2007). Most works emphasise the way in which Asian investments underscore novel forms of interactions between Africa and Asia in the economic, diplomatic and even cultural spheres (Ampiah and Naidu 2008; Cheru and Obi, 2010). But there has been relatively little attempt to understand the paradigms under which Asian investors function, and specifically how they might be subject to expectations about their contributions to development processes on the African continent.

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[1] Estimates of China's corporate footprint in Africa vary significantly. One widely disseminated claim is that there are around 800 Chinese firms active on the continent, while another, which includes estimation of the operations of medium and small firms in addition to large-scale state and private enterprises, is that there are up to 2000 firms present in Africa (Forstater et al 2010). These estimates are subject to dispute (see e.g. Brautigam, 2009), and there is often discrepancy in official data from both the African and Chinese sides about the nature, size and type of investments by Chinese actors, yet it is widely understood that the volume of Chinese investments is extensive, and that in some African countries, it represents a significant proportion of total foreign investments (Alden, 2007; Taylor, 2009).

A few very recent events in the international arena suggest that Asian MNEs, as a class of so-called new global investors, are increasingly the objects of discussions about the need to develop good business practices that impact positively on investment locations. While this has been part of a bigger movement in development and aid discourses that have started to look at the private sector as legitimate partners in international development (e.g. North-South Institute, 2012), it has also been based on an understanding that aspects such as accountability, ethics and what is widely known as corporate social responsibility (CSR) ought to be necessary parts of such enterprises' activities given their growing influence across the globe. In accordance with this a number of influential international bodies have paid more attention to the impacts of MNEs from developing Asia, particularly China, in the world. In 2012, for instance, the World Economic Forum made an assessment of the state of CSR expansion in China and by Chinese firms elsewhere in the world (WEF, 2012) and similar exercises have been undertaken or supported by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (see OECD, 2010 for an overview) and the United States Chamber of Commerce (Zadek, Forstater and Kelly, 2012).

Through multiple platforms – driven by international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), civil society figures and through state-to-state processes - a discourse has also arisen on the African continent about the behaviour and impacts of firms from Asia and the global South more broadly (e.g. GTZ 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2012). Because of the scale of Chinese investments and the visibility of China's presence in Africa, much of the focus has fallen on China, but firms from other parts of Asia are increasingly required to pay attention to their consequences on host environments and communities, and how they might play a role in sustainable development on the continent. Increasingly therefore, discussions about CSR are framing investment relations between Africa and Asia.

This project appraises emergent and established CSR practices in Africa by firms from two countries in the Northeast Asian region – Japan and the People's Republic of China. The aim is to gain understanding of the dynamics related to the expansion and institutionalisation of CSR as a norm and as legal application in these two countries; to determine resultant prevalent CSR concepts and practices by firms in their domestic and foreign operations; and to draw insights about the implications of these firms' engagement in African economies.

The following research questions underpinned the analysis:

i) What is the nature of the CSR institutional environment in the domestic sphere in Japan and China? Which frameworks exist in the domestic settings, what features do they have, and through which processes do or have they become institutionalised?

ii) How do firms orient themselves in relation to this environment?

iii) What is the resultant nature and content of firms' CSR profiles?

iv) What institutional and sectoral dynamics arise due to CSR norm diffusion and practice diffusion, and how do these dynamics shape firms' engagement in African economies?

2. Methodology

The methodology is multipronged and built on three pillars. The first pillar is textual analysis, which comprises review of company annual and CSR reports (n=20); review of relevant institutional charters (corporate, environmental and CSR); the collation and review of existing government CSR guidelines; and assessment of the relevant reports of CSR implementation by international governmental and non-governmental organisations. For the majority of the 20 firms covered, their most recent annual and CSR reports, as well as reports of at least the past five years, when available, were accessed and reviewed.

The second pillar comprises semi-structured interviews that were conducted with representatives of firms. Due to financial and time constraints, this part of the field research was limited to Japan. Nine (9) firms from a variety of sectors were accessed and interviews were conducted with staff representing variously, CSR divisions, export promotion and product development divisions, and operational and logistical divisions. Table 1 details the firms that were interviewed, as well as the economic sectors they represent.

Table 1

Semi-structured interviews (Tokyo)

Name of firm	Broad sector	Presence in Africa's political economy
Hitachi	Manufacturing, electronics, consumer goods	Yes
NEC	Electronics	Yes
JFE Steel	Steelmaking	Sales and distribution
Toray Industries	Chemicals + intermediate goods, apparel	No
Sumitomo	General trading firm	Yes (mining + manufacturing)
Sumitomo Chemical	Chemical	Yes (manufacturing)
Mitsubishi	General trading firm	Significant presence
* Bridgestone	Automotive/tires	Yes
* Sony	Media, electronics	Yes

Interviews were all face-to-face, and lasted 60-120 minutes. Interviewees were sent a list of questions by email beforehand; these questions were then discussed at length during the interview sessions. Additional questions or probing questions were frequently posed as an outflow of interviewees' statements, or to gain further information about aspects covered in the relevant firm's annual and/or CSR reports. Interview data was recorded by short hand during the interview session, and fully transcribed afterwards. Data analysis centred on the main themes arising from the interviews.

The third pillar of the research consisted of site visits. Research visits were arranged by the staff of two major steel firms, both located in Chiba Prefecture in Japan. During the visits the firms' operations and specific CSR programmes were explained.

3. Overview of report's contents

The report starts off with a conceptual discussion that considers the varied meanings of CSR, its history of institutionalisation over the decades, and how it relates to discussions about foreign investments, MNE activities and socio-economic development. Thereafter, the attention falls on the institutional context and dynamics related to CSR in the Northeast Asian region. This provides context for a third section that looks at existing forms of CSR praxis by Northeast Asian MNEs in Africa and what the nature of state-led processes are to institutionalise CSR principles. The concluding sections consider the implications of such processes for Africa-Asia relations in political-economic and geo-institutional terms by reflecting on how this could affect aspects such as producer networks, supply chains and broader economic relations, as well as political engagements geared towards possible new regime creation.

4. Review of the emergence, history and significance of CSR
4.1 Origins, expansion and contours
For various reasons corporate social responsibility has become an important topic of discussion in an array of public and private sector settings today. It has also become the focus of study in many fields in academia. Yet, there has been relatively little analysis of CSR as praxis outside of the developed economies of the west. It is only in recent times that some

attention has been given to CSR in the context of emerging economies (e.g. Chapple and Moon, 2005; Muller and Kolk, 2008; Visser, 2008). Within the Asian context much of the earlier focus has fallen on Japanese CSR, although that is being eclipsed today by assessments of CSR concepts and praxis in other Asian environments such as India, Indonesia, Taiwan, and most notably, China. While it is generally held that CSR is a relatively new phenomenon in Asia, it is the case that ideas about ethical economics, similar to current notions of CSR, have been present in many Asian countries for a significantly long time (Fukukawa, 2010; Williams, 2011).

Definitions vary widely, but at its most basic, corporate social responsibility may be regarded as investment/spending and other activities by firms that are intended to have a social impact, i.e. things engaged in by firms that on the surface go beyond their usual profit remit. These might include outreach activities in surrounding host communities, donations or spending by firms on social infrastructure such as education or health facilities, and money given as offsets for the negative environmental impacts that a firm might have had, all part of what is understood to be 'external CSR'. It could also include spending by firms on their employees above usual remuneration (also known as 'internal CSR'), intended to change employees' work conditions or as compensatory mechanisms.

In the west corporate social responsibility can be traced back to the rise of corporate philanthropy and outreach activities by industrialists (towards their employees and adjacent communities) in North America and western Europe in the nineteenth century. There is evidence of early 'industrial welfare' schemes (Caroll, 2008: 21) in the activities of many of the major corporations and businesses of the time, that included the provision by companies of clinics and recreational facilities, and the broader encouragement of leisure time (Davis, 2001). While aimed at improving the work conditions of factory employees, such corporate activities were also notably part of the creation of an industrial labour force and were linked to the rise of the modern working class in western countries.

Ideas about CSR gained new significance and started to be diffused in a different way in the late twentieth century, impelled largely by the expansion and partial institutionalisation of an international human rights regime, and as part of this, changed thinking about social rights and responsibilities that also extended to the corporate environment. Two sets of dynamics can be identified in this regard. The first arose as a result of societal changes in the western world associated with the shift to post-industrialism, and the growth, *inter alia*, of ethical

consumer movements that directed themselves to the roles and societal responsibilities of corporate actors. Civil society claims for greater accountability by domestic firms culminated in the more systematic codification of production and labour standards which western firms were expected to observe (see Moon, 2004 and Carroll, 2008 for reviews).

The second was transnational in nature and occurred within the context of the push for outward investment by western MNEs in developing countries from the 1970s onwards, negative experiences by a number of such enterprises in their host environments due to claims of labour or other malpractices, and resultantly, scrutiny of western MNEs' impacts on the developing world. Events that prompted this included the much publicised scandal in the 1970s of the Swiss firm Nestlé's promotion of formula milk in developing countries, especially Africa, to replace breastfeeding; and the extensive transnationally organised consumer boycott in the 1980s of apartheid South Africa and the firms that traded with the country (Segerlund, 2010).

But it was particularly experiences in the resource extractive industry that directed attention in the international arena on questions of the behaviour of corporate actors and their responsibilities vis-à-vis societies and even governments. Claims channelled largely through INGO campaigns that MNEs operating in sectors such as mining, forestry, timber and logging across Asia, Africa and Latin America were causing environmental damage, were guilty of unscrupulous labour practices, or were having adverse impacts on indigenous or host communities, led to efforts at the international level to address concerns about MNE operations and their ramifications. While these were at first mostly focused on MNE activities in the developing world, it also saw calls made in the industrialised world for greater accountability by firms in their domestic environments.

Internationally, discussions had two focuses: to develop widely agreed ethical standards and appropriate rules of behaviour for firms; and to improve the institutional capacities of investment recipient states in the developing world to oversee and regulate as needed foreign capital flows. A key idea in this regard was that, if appropriately directed and regulated, foreign investments could contribute to economic growth in recipient countries. In the 1970s and 1980s major outputs along these lines included efforts in intergovernmental forums such as the United Nations, the World Health Organisation and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to develop codes of conduct for MNEs, and by the OECD to formulate guidelines for firms investing in OECD and third countries. The OECD's 'Declaration on

International Investment and Multinational Enterprises', first adopted in 1976, has since been revised four times, with a latest iteration approved in 2011 (see OECD, 2011a), while the ILO's 1977 'Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy' has also been regularly updated.

The latter part of the 1990s witnessed a significant surge in the formulation of principles and standards for firms, enacted by a variety of intergovernmental organisations, national governments and the private sector themselves, signifying a broad acceptance and institutionalisation of notions of corporate ethics. The term 'corporate social responsibility' also became more widely used, reflecting underlying ideas about, variously, the societal embeddedness of firms, the transactional nature of their relationship with states and societies based on ideally mutual exchanges of rights and responsibilities, and resultantly, expectations about firms' behaviours and standards of accountability.

An expansive international CSR architecture has developed over the past two decades, with a notable intensification of the articulation of CSR guidelines and standards occurring since the beginning of the 2000s. This architecture comprises a range of voluntary and non-binding codes of conduct for firms developed by international organisations such as the OECD, the European Union, the United Nations and the World Bank; more legally binding instruments by the governments of individual countries to ensure compliance to corporate governance rules[2]; and a great variety of forms of self-regulation by the private sector itself. For representations of this architecture see Tables 2 and 3 below.

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[2] In the mid-1990s the United States government initiated the development of an ethical labour framework in the apparel industry – one of the first to do so – to try to combat sweatshops. This initiative later was followed by legislation introduced by a number of west European governments that attempted to regulate the behaviour and impacts of their multinational corporations. In 2000 the government of the United Kingdom for instance appointed a CSR minister and later made CSR reporting mandatory by firms involved in welfare provision (see Segerlund, 2010 and Moon, 2004 for overviews). At the regional and international levels notable frameworks include the OECD Guidelines, the United Nations Global Compact and the European Commission's policies to promote CSR.

Table 2

The CSR governance architecture
Principal frameworks and guidelines

	Public (state-based)	**Private**
International (global)	OECD Guidelines ILO WHO United Nations Principles on Business and Human Rights Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative International Finance Corporation (World Bank) sustainability norms	UN Global Compact Product Red International Standards Organization (ISO) Fair Trade International Global Reporting Initiative International Council on Mining and Metals Industry association standards (more than 250)
Regional	European Commission Policy on CSR (2011)	
Domestic (national legislation)	Examples of strong governance through legislation: USA; UK; some Scandinavian countries; South Africa (BEE policies)	

Regulatory measures by the private sector span guidelines on product quality, risk management and energy and environmental management issued by the private International Organization for Standardization; standards-setting and certification instruments developed by industry associations; and frameworks on sustainability measures and for corporate reporting evised by the Global Reporting Initiative. It also includes commitments made by individual firms to sell goods or use supplier networks that observe ethical standards, as well as more comprehensive consumer-focused frameworks such as Product RED, which sees some of the world's largest retailer firms give a share of their profits on specially branded goods to international aid programmes targeting communicable diseases in Africa (see Ponte, Richley and Baab, 2010 for a discussion).

Table 3

Myriad other transnational networks and formations centred on CSR emerging:

Multi-stakeholder initiatives	e.g. New aid modalities to Africa (Brand Africa) BoP business
Fair Trade networks	
Regional CSR networks	European Network for CSR CSR Asia Asean CSR Network Japan Forum of Business and Society Asian Roundtable; OECD-Asia Network on Corporate Governance of State-Owned Enterprises
Socially Responsible Investment Indexes	

CSR has therefore become a distinctive facet of global governance regime creation today (Levy and Kaplan, 2008). This is despite the fact that there are many different understandings of what CSR entails, with its use in the corporate environment often centring on aspects of 'corporate governance', 'business ethics' or 'corporate citizenship', which all mean different things to different entities. The emphasis given in CSR reporting also varies widely, ranging from focuses on labour issues, product quality or standardisation, to attention given to environmental and social matters. In general, advocates of CSR from the private sector seek to highlight the longer term profit maximisation benefits for firms if they follow a course of investments that help, directly or indirectly, to uplift the wider society in which firms are operating (the so-called 'business case' for CSR). In contrast, NGOs and civil society movements champion the 'civic case' for CSR, accentuating the rights of societies vis-à-vis powerful economic actors, and the responsibilities of the corporate world to mitigate possible material and social externalities arising from their activities (Sharp, 2006).

As an issue area within the international arena, CSR is therefore shaped by different perspectives that reflect at times highly different philosophical approaches and thus expectations about what ought to be delivered (Banerjee, 2008). This makes attempts to

establish benchmarks for CSR achievements difficult, something which is complicated by the fact that the emergent CSR governance architecture is amorphous and duplicitous - by one estimate, for instance, there are in excess of 250 industry and trade association codes of conduct across the globe (OECD, 2001).

4.2 CSR and the Global South

From the perspective of developing countries, one of the important effects of CSR's greater prominence is that it has stimulated new debate about international finance flows and the role of foreign direct investments. Underlying this are complex and at times highly politicised concerns about the impacts of multinational enterprises, and the question of what could reasonably be expected from foreign firms as far as their contribution to development is concerned. In the past, efforts to address this question through multilateral channels have been cast against a relatively clear-cut international division of global production and wealth, where MNEs from the industrialised world were the principal investors in the primary resources of developing countries.

It is for this reason that it was in industries such as resource extraction that landmark processes took shape that tried to strike comprises between MNE and investment expansion and the needs of developing countries. Major frameworks included the OECD's guidelines for MNEs, and since 2001, the Extractive Industries Review of the World Bank Group (World Bank, 2001) which sets self-monitoring guidelines for the Bank's involvement in countries' extractive sectors. Both the OECD and World Bank frameworks are informed by the logic of continued market liberalisation while promoting principles of sustainable development. Firms are required to observe those laws and policies of investment recipient states that are geared towards labour, environmental and social protection, while signatory states are encouraged to enhance their regulation of FDI in order to meet socio-economic development targets. In the latest version of its guidelines, the OECD has elaborated an even stronger set of expectations for multinational enterprises, requiring them to respect a wide range of human rights that extend, in strict definitional terms, beyond the economic sphere (advising, for instance, reference to the principal UN covenants on human rights, as well as frameworks on indigenous and minority rights and international humanitarian law) (see OECD, 2011a).

Analysts who have observed the impacts of the existing frameworks have critiqued that they serve the interests of MNEs, and more broadly international capital, better than they do

objectives towards social development or the needs of developing societies and states. Campbell (2010) for instance argues that processes that led to the establishment of the Extractive Industries Review have paralleled the weakening of the regulatory reach of the governments of resource-endowed countries in the developing world. Further, she contends that they have constrained the leverage that actors at the local level have over more powerful firms, and that together, these factors diminish the prospects of good returns from foreign investments for societies. Others have argued that firms utilise international regimes and codes of conduct as means of managing political demands or to mitigate risk in unstable investment environments (e.g. Hatcher, 2012; Levy and Kaplan, 2008).

The phenomenon of multinational enterprises from the Global South that are becoming major investors in their own right, brings to prominence issues about how they are accommodated in established regimes and how they position themselves in relation to international structures and recipient countries, particularly in the developing world. There is recognition that MNEs from the Global South operate from home environments that are different in terms of the regulatory and legislative requirements that are placed on them, and that their activities in host countries are often conditioned by relationships in the South that place political objectives ahead of other goals (e.g. Goldstein, 2007).

There are additional issues that relate to the nature of the CSR regime itself – first, that it is has been conceptualised largely as a response to perceived economic and political asymmetries between the developed and developing worlds, based on a tacit understanding that the former carries a historical burden of responsibility towards the latter; and second, that in its design it advances an agenda of international liberalisation and globalisation. Most importantly, the CSR architecture is fashioned on sets of norms and principles that reference with varying degrees of explicitness, ideas about human rights rooted in western political, philosophical and legal traditions (Kolk et al, 2010; Fukukawa and Teramoto, 2009). These include ideas about 'classic' individual rights, as well as more compound social rights concerning livelihoods, welfare, security, enterprise, property protection, and so on. The architecture has also been pillared on legal precepts arising from various strands of western jurisprudence.

For numerous reasons the need to accommodate MNEs from the Global South presents a range of new philosophical, political and practical complexities for the CSR regime: it complicates discussions about the meanings of responsibility, culpability and legitimacy when

levelled towards such firms; it rekindles debate about whether human rights are best viewed as universal or relative principle; and it gives a political tinge to discussions about how southern MNEs can have their interests represented in the evolving CSR governance regime. In practical terms, furthermore, southern MNEs do not have the extensive experience of CSR implementation as many firms do from the developed world, but are increasingly expected to practise CSR domestically and in foreign markets in line with international standards.

5. Northeast Asian MNEs and the question of CSR in Africa
5.1 The political and normative context

It is within this context that some concerns that have been arising about what the implications are of Asian MNEs' increased presence in Africa should be read. As noted, in recent times much scrutiny has fallen on Chinese firms' role on the African continent. One of the most damning appraisals has been made by Human Rights Watch in a study of labour conditions and practices in three Chinese-run mines in Zambia's copper belt (Human Rights Watch, 2011), which reported widespread incidences of worker 'abuse' in the form of poor safety standards and lower pay, non-compliance with domestic and industry regulations and efforts by the management to prevent trade union activities. Such reports, along with a number of widely publicised cases of tensions and even violence between African employees and Chinese mine-owners or shopkeepers in several African locales,[3] have given prominence to matters concerning the rules under which this class of investors from Asia operates on the African continent, and the expectations they are subject to.

While on one level this relates to issues about the impacts of these MNEs on host economies and how firms comply with domestic and international regulations, it also links to a set of important questions about how they orient themselves to values about corporate standards and practice. More fundamentally, it flags issues about the norm of corporate social responsibility and the regimes that have taken shape around it – whether and how CSR norms are being transferred, adopted, applied or changed and the reasons for this.

This is, first, because of the nature and profile of Asian MNEs in Africa. There is a perception that they operate differently to western MNEs (Chapple and Moon, 2005) and might seek to relate differently to their host environments. Lacking a colonial history on the continent, Asian investors are often viewed in a different light by African governments and are not

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[3] See for instance *Business Day*, 1 February 2013; Ori, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2011.

perceived to have the same baggage as western firms (see e.g. Taylor, 2009). Further, due to a variety of state-to-state frameworks that include bilateral investment treaties or multilateral summits such as the three-yearly Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the five-yearly Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) and regular gatherings between Indian and South Korean leaders and their African counterparts, there is the sense that Asian players present a common front on the continent in a way that is distinct from western investors.

A more tacit matter is the idea that even though CSR is internationally diffused, it is seen to be something novel for Asian firms (Kolk et al, 2010). This seems to be an assumption that underlies much of the discourse in bodies such as the World Economic Forum, for instance, about the slow pace with which Chinese firms are developing global corporate citizenship (see WEF, 2012: 3), but is also evident in many other appraisals by scholars and NGOs about CSR practice in and from Asia. At the heart of this are understandings about the western origins of CSR as norm, and the transferability of this norm to non-western contexts. This kind of discourse largely assumes corporate ethics as a norm that not only has to be institutionalised, but also socialised.

Yet, while the institutionalisation of CSR in the western tradition - that is, signing up to the codes of conduct and of regulation of international public and private organisations - is a relatively recent phenomenon for Asian countries, there is evidence of various guises of ethical economics being practised in diverse settings across the Asian region (Williams, 2011). While Japan's international 'CSR moment' is widely understood to have begun in 2003, for instance, when the Japan Association of Business Associations, a large and influential entity adopted and promoted a policy on CSR, it is also contended by observers in the country that CSR had existed in different format and name there since at least the period of early industrialisation in the nineteenth century, and had been part of businesses' role in Japanese development and the broader society in the twentieth century (see Taka, 1997 for a discussion).

In the 1980s, further, as Japanese firms became significant investors in European and American capitals, they came under pressure to follow prevailing norms in those countries concerning sexual harassment, women's rights and appropriate working hours for employees. In that decade, too, the concept of *kyosei* – 'living and working together for the common good' (Wokutch and Shepard 1999: 537), signifying the close relationship between Japanese

business and the society – also became more popular in Japan. [4] Similarly, in India philanthropy by firms such as Tata and Birlas dates back to the pre-colonial era, and many older indigenous firms are said to have lengthy histories of spending for social causes, some as long ago as the seventh century (Galliara, 2011).

In this regard it is usually held by scholars of business ethics in Asia that such practices are rooted in indigenous religious, cultural or philosophical systems, and are part of fixed societal paradigms. This leads to some notable specificities in CSR approaches and corporate practices that set Asian firms apart from western counterparts. Thus Japanese CSR is mostly seen to manifest in practices such as lifelong employment, extended corporate pension schemes and a national political-economic structure built on close policy engagement between big business and the government. It is also associated with the solidaristic nature of the society (see Fukukawa and Moon, 2005) or what Wokutch and Shepard (1999) termed 'micro moral unity' between firms, their employees and the community. Indian CSR is said to follow the tradition of business philanthropy set in the pre-colonial and colonial eras, by which such philanthropy gave firms access and influence over societies as well as the dominant political authorities of the day (Galliara, 2011). Finally, although nascent and significantly influenced by international processes of institutionalisation, the framework for CSR in the Chinese context is also understood to have a deeper cultural rooting (Kolk et al, 2010), and to have characteristics associated with cosmological and Confucian thinking.

The distinction for Asian firms therefore lies not in the history of experiences of ethical practice, but rather how corporate ethics are understood as a contingent of business operations and how they are institutionalised towards this aim (Fukukawa, 2010). It is contended by some scholars that national and cultural specificities in Asian countries not only shape what is practised as CSR, but also what is regarded to fall within the domain of CSR (Fukukawa and Moon 2009). Therefore things that have been exteriorised in the current international CSR regime as major focuses for good corporate practice, such as security of employment or accountability to shareholders and stakeholders, are often considered standard internal elements of business practice in many Asian contexts (Williams, 2010; Taka, 1997; Xiaohe, 1997). Tables 4 and 5 detail CSR institutionalisation processes and frameworks in the Northeast Asian context.

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[4] The concept of 'sañpo yoshi', which roughly translates into 'good on all sides', is said to have been advanced since the feudal period by Japan's merchant classes. It implies that there is a three-way and virtuous relationship between buyers, sellers and the society (see Fukukawa, 2010).

Table 4

CSR institutionalisation in China and South Korea

Timeline	China	South Korea
1999		Code of Best Practice of Corporate Governance
2002	Code of Corporate Governance in Listed Companies	
2006	Ministry of Commerce, Suggestions for Strengthening the Human Safety and Protection for Chinese Enterprises and Organizations Overseas	
2008	State-Owned Assets Supervision & Administration Commission, Guidelines to the State-Owned Enterprises Directly Under the Central Government on Fulfilling Corporate Social Responsibilities	**2009** – establishment of Dow Jones Sustainability Korea Index
2012	China Banking Regulatory Commission – adopted Green Credit Guidelines Endorsement of UN Guidelines on Business and Human Rights World Economic Forum study on Chinese CSR	Korean Chamber of Commerce signs CSR partnership agreement with Indonesian Employers Association

Table 5

CSR institutionalisation in Japan

Principal international frameworks referenced	ISO 14000 ISO 26000 Global Reporting Initiative UN Global Compact OECD Principles on Corporate Governance OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises
Frameworks set by the Japanese government	Ministry of Environment: Environmental Reporting Guidelines (2007, 2012) Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry: Environmental Reporting Guidelines
Private sector	Keidanren Charter for Good Corporate Behavior (1991, 1996, 2002 editions) Keidanren 1% Club

Nonetheless, differences concerning notions about and the centrality of human rights also appear to be important. In crude and essentialist terms, CSR practices in Asian countries are thought to prioritise values of communalism more than western approaches, which centre on the rights of the individual. Underlying this, however, are some fundamental distinctions in understandings about human rights and what ought to be posed as obligations on firms. These distinctions mirror in a noteworthy way the larger political contestation that was part of the establishment of an international human rights regime in organisations such as the United Nations, because they also call into question the meaning of human rights in different cultural contexts. The philosophical underpinnings of business ethics and CSR in Japan is perhaps demonstrative in this regard, where for many firms their social responsibility stems from bonds with the wider society that arise due to communal ties. These ties function based on principles of mutual obligation, loyalty and respect. Corporate ethics are therefore seen as a matter of social duty (see Wokutch 1990) rather than rights. The first is considered a more positive framing of social relations than the second.

5.2 Emergent dynamics

Given these dimensions, considering what the paradigms are that Northeast Asian MNEs operate by in African environments, and what the resultant forms of praxis are, could give perspective on emergent political-economy features of Asian-Africa interactions, and highlight some aspects concerning the wider international CSR regime. If, in this regard, it is understood that the diffusion and institutionalisation of CSR into the regulatory architecture it has reached today has been part of an extended process of norm creation, internalisation, spread and cascade (in the analysis of Keck and Sikkink, 1998), it is useful to ask at which point of the life cycle Asian countries are, and what the implications of this are for Asian firms' involvement in African economies. Further, how does CSR seem to be understood by Asian firms and how is it institutionalised in relations between Africa and Asia?

As far as the macro- and political contexts are concerned, it is noteworthy that a discourse is strongly emerging about the need for greater attention to corporate and social ethics by Asian MNEs active on the continent. This is as a result of two forces, one that comprises various forms of direct and indirect pressure placed on many of the larger firms by INGOs, civil society groups and African governments and civil society groups, and a second that takes shape around multilateral intergovernmental processes that sees CSR increasingly becoming a focal point for discussions about Asia-Africa cooperation.

Regarding the first source of pressure, the Human Rights Watch report cited above was one among several that have appeared in recent times that sought to frame Asia's economic presence in Africa through the lens of corporate ethics (see also Friends of the Earth 2012; RAID 2009; GTZ 2008). From within the African continent there has also been much remonstration from organised civil society groups, political and social figures, and sometimes through spontaneous worker protests against MNEs (e.g. *Business Day*, 1 February 2013; *Anglican Church of Tanzania*, 24 February 2011). It is particularly Chinese firms that are subject to such critiques, with large firms often admonished for using imported rather than indigenous labour, for having a lack of awareness about their host environments, or for having little regard for their environmental footprint. The activities of firms from other Asian countries have also come under scrutiny, however, particularly in sensitive sectors such as mining.

The second way in which expectations about CSR are being advanced is through government-to-government channels and in multilateral contexts. The general aim is to increase the

awareness of and commitments by Asian firms to CSR on the continent. Once again the spotlight tends to be placed on China's role as investor in Africa and on deepening China-Africa relations through the extension of a CSR agenda. At a summit on Chinese overseas investment in August 2012, for instance, the secretary-general of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) encouraged Chinese firms to 'take corporate social responsibility (in Africa) seriously' (SAFPI, 2012). According to the UNCTAD leader such a CSR agenda could centre on contributions by Chinese firms to social development programmes on the continent, the diversification and upscaling of Chinese investments to secondary and value-added activities, and knowledge transfer.

Further, multilateral forums of engagement between African and Asian leaders are increasingly vehicles for the promotion of CSR discourses. As a fringe event at the 5th Forum on China-Africa Cooperation summit of 2012, for instance, a declaration of social responsibility was made by Chinese firms that have operations in Africa (Fabricius, 2012). At the same time the Chinese government pledged to contribute US$20bn to help improve the observance of corporate and environmental regulations (Africa-Asia Confidential, 2012). The declaration laid emphasis on the potential use of CSR to deepen economic relationships between the two regions.

Japanese decision-makers have also been advocating the importance of CSR in the country's relations with Africa (e.g. JETRO, 2009). At a meeting of mining investors in South Africa in February 2012, a high ranking Japanese trade official noted how significant Japanese business involvement in strategic sectors, particularly mining, is for the African continent, and contended that the development of CSR as a further facet of mining investments would be important. The suggestion was that Official Development Assistance could be utilised for this goal (Matsushita, 2012). CSR also featured on the agenda of the latest summit of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development summit held in June 2013.

Against this backdrop, the level of CSR development and actual performance by MNEs across the continent are highly varied and are moulded by distinct political-economic and firm-specific factors. As a general pattern, emergent CSR forms by Asian firms tend to prioritise philanthropic contributions, or occasionally infrastructure development projects. This contrasts with western approaches that tend to emphasise more comprehensive measures of triple-bottom line sustainability (Zadek et al, 2012; also see Kolk, 2010). This reflects perhaps the history of CSR development in the western world more than anything else, where

over a fairly lengthy period, ideas about environmentalism and social and economic sustainability have become linked to CSR in distinctive ways (e.g. Matten and Moon 2008). But it is also consistent with established CSR modes in parts of Asia itself where, such as for instance in India, corporate philanthropy is a principal form of CSR (Galliara, 2011).

The history and contemporary dynamics for economic relations between Asian and African countries, along with the depth of CSR development in firms' home countries, are important factors in determining the degree of CSR activity by Asian MNEs. Given a lengthier and, in recent times, a more intensive period of economic penetration in key, resource-rich African states, many Japanese firms present on the continent exhibit a greater degree of CSR awareness than other Asian firms. Firms such as Mitsubishi, Toyota, Sumitomo, Sojitz, Marubeni, Sony and Ajinomoto, that have large-scale investments in manufacturing, but also in recent years, electronics, information communications technology and retail, have some mature CSR programmes (see Levermore, 2011 for a discussion).

Although not the focus of the current analysis, it is noteworthy that numerous Indian firms also display some deeper CSR penetration. These include firms such as Bharti Airtel, which has a CSR programme alongside its ICT operation in Nigeria; Lohnro, which incorporates CSR offset mechanisms in its mining activities in Equatorial Guinea and Mozambique (Ford, 2010); and Tata, with CSR programmes across the continent. By contrast, while increasingly significant investors, CSR operations by Korean and Indonesian firms are smaller. Surveys by international bodies of the global CSR profile of Chinese firms indicated some emergent CSR programmes in Africa in sectors such as construction (WEF, 2012), although these are fewer in number than CSR operations by MNEs from other Asian countries, and small in scale when compared to some CSR activities by Chinese firms elsewhere in the world.

This variation reflects to some extent the degree of maturity of CSR development in the different Asian countries, as well as the influence of international CSR dynamics on those countries. While CSR is still at an earlier point of expansion in Japan when compared to the industrialised west, for instance, the country is signatory to all the major intergovernmental frameworks, most noteworthy of which are the OECD's Guidelines and the United Nation's Global Compact. The country was the first to subject itself to the OECD's peer review (OECD, 2012), and the country's largest and influential business associations have been promoting their own charters for good corporate governance, usually in the wake of well publicised financial or management scandals (Taka, 1997; Choi and Nakano, 2008). As noted

above, there has also been carry-over of experiences from investments in North American and European markets. Those firms that operate in Africa reflect this internal institutionalisation of CSR within Japan, displaying as an integrated part of their business operations what Levermore (2011: 6) termed 'a historical commitment to CSR', - or at least stating that they attempt to.

Japanese firms with major involvement in the extractive sector also show the effect of 'norm pressure' towards transparency and stated commitments to socio-economic development that have prevailed in that sector for the past decade (see Gillies 2010 for a discussion) by having large CSR programmes in tandem with their operations. Examples include Sumitomo's contributions to a community development programme as part of a large-scale multinational nickel mining operation in Madagascar and similar activities by Mitsubishi in an aluminium smelter plant in Mozambique.[5]

For firms from other parts of Asia, the picture is varied. Although CSR is being adopted and internalised at a rapid pace across the Asian region (Williams, 2011) the degree of institutionalisation, benchmarking and performance is diverse (OECD, 2011b). This variation is evident in the extent to which many MNEs orient themselves to CSR on the African continent. Indeed, although the patterns differ MNEs appear to be at the point of the CSR norm life cycle where CSR is steadily being advanced as a guiding principle and objective for their operations - although with the exception of Japanese firms, not by themselves. The CSR discourse by many MNEs appears to be largely framed in a reactive manner, as a response to external critique by influential INGOs or in reply to expectations by their own and African governments for greater accountability.

6. Some implications

In order to grasp the implications of these emergent dynamics, they need to be framed against the more general history of CSR's development as international norm, and the specific features of Africa-Asia relations. There are as yet, it should be noted, few clear articulations by those who advocate for greater CSR what the form and substance of this should be on the part of Asian investors, and apparently not a specific vision how CSR should serve the interests of African development. Statements on the matter of CSR made by government leaders at forums such as FOCAC and TICAD, for instance, are broad and give little hint

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[5] For descriptions see http://www.sumitomocorp.co.jp/english/society/sustainability/index.html and http://www.mitsubishicorp.com/gb/en/csr/mcfea.html.

about concrete mechanisms for the advancement of CSR by their firms, and importantly, about the desired end results.

Because it is so amorphous, further, the existing international CSR architecture that Asian and African actors direct themselves to presents multiple and at times conflicting guidelines and measures of compliance and performance, to the point in the worst instances that it offers little leverage to governments (Banerjee 2008). One of the greatest limitations of this architecture, too, is that it relies on voluntary implementation and self-regulation, and it has been criticised for being largely ineffective in contexts where weak institutional and governance capacities have often allowed firms to sidestep pro-equity legislation or policies (Campbell 2012; Amao 2008). This has meant that one of the most pertinent objectives of the CSR regime, to foster simultaneously foreign direct investment and sustainable development, and to channel business activities so that they contribute to socio-economic growth, has not really been achieved. This compounded by the fact that there has been little progress in using CSR as a platform for strengthening the regulatory and oversight capacities of governments, a problem that has plagued in particular African states (Campbell, 2012).

There is therefore the question of what sort of compliance measures might be advanced in the context of Asian-African relations, what sort of transregional regulatory regimes might arise, and how these could fit into or compete with the existing regime. Within the framework of FOCAC, there is already a process of legal discussions underway that parallel the diplomatic and political gathering, which driven by legal practitioners from the two regions, is intended to be a forum where ideas about governance and legal issues are shared. Underpinning this is the claim that Africa-China relations, and south-south cooperation more broadly should also focus on the enhancement of common legal values that might differ from western ones. There are practical and political questions that arise from this for the issue of CSR. First, it could be considered whether such processes could be vehicles through which principles and rules moulded to the conditions and needs specific to African and Asian actors could be institutionalised. Second, however, there is the question whether these processes would see African and Asian counterparts on equal footing, or whether, given relative structural weaknesses, African actors would be rule-takers rather than rule-makers (also see discussion by Gillies, 2010: 124-125).

Finally, there is the question of how CSR could affect investment and trade relationships between Africa and Asia. This relates to aspects concerning broad investment processes as

well as things such as production structures and labour dynamics. When seriously implemented, CSR has some implications for the production-wage relationship as well as the production process itself. Attention to things such as environmental and social impact assessments by firms, for instance, or attempts to comply with a range of standards concerning safety, environmental protection or labour equity, affect how goods or services are procured, the firm networks that come into being and the types of supply chains that are relied on. The incorporation of CSR principles into business operations can in this way help reshape existing production and supply relationships. Also, if there is increased political pressure on firms framed as CSR objectives, firms could be encouraged to focus investments more extensively on value-added activities and to move from resource extraction to sectors such as ICT and services. They could also be prompted to include training and skills transfer as explicit objectives of investments. In this regard it should be recognised that multilateral frameworks such as FOCAC and TICAD structure Asian firms' interests on the African continent, and could structure aspects that have CSR dimensions.

7. Conclusion

Prevailing geo-economic shifts that see Asia being placed centrally in the global economy have had major ramifications for the African continent. Closer trade and investment ties and the steady entry into key economic sectors of large corporate players from Asia have been part of an important change in economic trajectory for many states in Africa. In this light, discussions about CSR and attempts to systematise and institutionalise expectations about corporate behaviour can be considered a significant next step in the economic relationship between the two world regions that also has political and diplomatic contours.

CSR is still in a nascent form of development for the majority of Asian MNEs operating on the African continent, but it is becoming a bigger focus for many, even if this is due to external pressure. CSR is also becoming an increasingly important aspect of discoursing between African and Asian states, and considerations about how it can be implemented in ways that serve the interests of both, help establish new horizons for Africa-Asia engagement. The question of how CSR could make substantive contribution to socio-economic development on the African continent, however, and whether its advancement would be asymmetrical or equal for the respective counterparts, remains open.

Given the distinctive positions of both Africa and Asia in the existing CSR institutional landscape, it is interesting to observe the dynamics that are beginning to feature in CSR's

institutionalisation in the investment relations between the two. CSR touches on intersecting debates about the role of international finance flows, how such flows are being redirected in the contemporary era, and the implications this has for development in the global South. It also focuses attention on the shifting nature of power balances within the global South itself.

In addition to raising to prominence issues concerning the impacts of multinationals, therefore, it prompts consideration of underlying political questions concerning rights, justice and equity and how they might converge or compete in different settings in the Global South. As such, the distinctive emphasis that is given to CSR principles and rules, and the kinds of governance structures that arise as a result, reflect important emergent aspects of Africa-Asia relations, as well as key political dimensions within the regions themselves.

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About the author

Scarlett Cornelissen is Professor in the Department of Political Science at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. She specialises in International Relations, and has conducted research and published on, *inter alia*, Japan-Africa relations, South African foreign policy and the political economy of African development.

In 2009 she received the President's Award of the National Research Foundation as well as the Scopus Young Scientist of the Year Award. In the same year she was Leverhulme Fellow at the University of Stirling in the United Kingdom. She was a Japan Foundation Fellow in 2010, which she held at Hitotsubashi University. In 2013 she received a grant from Stellenbosch University for being among the top researchers in the university.

She has been visiting professor at the following universities in Japan: Ritsumeikan (Kyoto), Hitotsubashi (Tokyo), Tsuda (Tokyo), Kansai (Osaka) and Doshisha (Kyoto), and has guest lectured at a number of other institutions in Japan.

Her most recent book publications include *Africa and International Relations in the 21*st *Century* (2012, with Fantu Cheru and Timothy Shaw) and *The Ashgate Research Companion to Regionalisms* (2011, with Timothy Shaw and J. Andrew Grant). In addition to these she has published five other books, and numerous scholarly articles.

Scarlett obtained a PhD at the University of Glasgow in the United Kingdom and a Master's degree at Stellenbosch University. She completed undergraduate studies at the University of Cape Town in South Africa.