



## Chinese influence on the African economy: The Nigerian experience

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### Abstract

The construct and idea behind the Chinese-Africa relation have been controversial and disputable. The emergence of China as a world power is one that was not accomplished from a standpoint of isolation but rather its interaction with other parts of the world. Communist China sought to create several avenues for diplomatic, economic, and trade relations with other parts of the world; an agenda to which Africa was most pivotal. Many perspectives distinguish the Chinese-Africa relation as predatory; others deem the relation as symbiotic; a necessity for both parties. This study will interrogate Chinese influence on the African economy. Using Nigeria as the springboard of my analysis, I will empirically appraise the degree of Chinese influence in the socio-economic framework of the African Continent.

**Keywords:** Influence, China, Africa, Experience

### Introduction

The article titled "Beyond Dragon in the Bush: The Study of China Africa Relations" by Daniel Large explains that Chinese economic interactions, trade, and fiscal dialogue are one of unprecedented consciousness and observation. Daniel posits that the backdrop of current issues relating to China and Africa have often been forsaken. Hence, there exists limited appraisals on the topical issue. Existing scholarly literature on Chinese foreign policy particularly with African states is part of its broader spectrum to 'non-aligned' 'developing' or 'Southern' countries (Large, 2008) <sup>[11]</sup>.

Several investigative examinations of China's renewed commitment with Africa presents China as the locomotive force as little or no acknowledgment is given to the role of African agencies particularly in light of Afro-Chinese engagement. Recent scholarship tends to emphasize the relational political dynamics. One position is the idea that Chinese representatives tend to act in a collective and more coordinated manner while their African counterparts tend to adopt uncoordinated dialogues and policies that often impair any form of advancement in the long run (Mohan, Lampert, 2013) <sup>[29]</sup>.

In retrospect, the unique and distinct case of the Zimbabwe-China relation according to Chun Zhang leads to the following conclusions

1. It is unique in that it has a momentum-driven by two elements, namely the sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe by the West and the re-engagement policy of China.
2. It is balanced internally among 2 different pillars, especially the political and economic pillars.
3. It has great potential to be a pioneer for China-Africa relations as a whole. Nevertheless, it is essential that we note the inherent dilemmas that lie ahead; this calls for a prompt reversal of negatively steady relationships into a more reliable and positive one (Chun, 2014) <sup>[9]</sup>.

I'm accordance to Xing Li and Abdulkadir Osman Farah IroiL's writing "China-Africa Relations in an era of Great Transformations" transcends beyond existing series of Juxtapositions, that in it's introduction from politics in command to economics in command, the China-Africa relations have experienced tremendous accelerations beyond debating the differences in ideology, and polity between Chinese normative communities of practice and traditional Africa, the authors give a comparative study of China's relational governance of Africa and Central Asia.

where they argue that China's adoption of the use of "Cooperative Power" in Africa, its impact to which cannot be measured by exactitude; has unconsciously witnessed the emergence of Africa as a major player in global geopolitics and the economic arena; this correspondence is evident in Chinese migration into different states in Africa for investments and economic gains; a dynamics that merely begun a few decades ago (Xing, Farah, 2016) <sup>[39]</sup>.

The history, potency, and prospect of Chinese-Africa relations cannot be examined without a discussion on the role of globalization and marginalization. The concept of China - Africa relations cannot be understood from a peripheral point of view, a concrete examination of this relationship helps establish an understanding of the fundamental and procedural linkages peculiar to the Chinese-Africa relation. In the view of Felix M. Edoho, Africa's collective efforts should be targeted at defining how Africa can derive maximum gains from China's engagements and economic rendezvous in the region. In the fullness of time, Africa is strategically positioned to determine the terms and conditions of its relationship with China and what it requires of China is in no position to dictate to the entirety of the African continent (Edoho, 2011) <sup>[12]</sup>.

In any form of interaction between two or more entities, there is always an occasion for myths and speculations of all kinds. And although this is somewhat true, in regards to the economic consequences and repercussions of China-Africa relations, it is essential to debunk fallacious and frivolous myths. Private, public and even anonymous agencies and actors alike adopted the use of Propaganda and frivolities to ensure the continuous perpetuation of imperialism. They adopt the use of misinformation to define narratives that often stigmatize Africa by projecting the stereotype of Africa as a guinea pig; a playground for imperial powers to further enrich themselves. African leaders and leadership alike are hereby pre-conditioned by these false narratives; Narratives that trade and economic development for the continent; integral elements for state building. Furthermore, there remains no substantial empirical evidence to backup menacing prophecies of coming catastrophe from critics of the direction of China-Africa relations whilst benefiting in the short run, African governments can tailor this relationship and address some socio-economic matters arising that may negatively affect the nexus in the long-term (Asongu, Aminkeng, 2013) <sup>[4]</sup>.

The aforementioned perspective that China's involvement in Africa has caused much debate. Chinese increasing presence in Africa has drawn mixed reactions from the academic and media platforms. It has however been argued that China is sapping Africa's manufacturing potential and also extracting Africa's resources without any significant benefits to Africa. In light of this, some perspective deem China as one of the actors and Perpetrators of exploitation further posing trade and economic complexities in the continent often resulting in de-industrialization and underdevelopment (Mlambo, Kushamba, Simawu, 2016) <sup>[28]</sup>.

It is somewhat understandable at least to some degree as to why China's interactions and dealings in Africa are perceived as the genesis of a new epoch of neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism. Such phobias and skepticism emanate from the intensity and volume of Chinese interactions in Africa in regards to the financial and economic dimensions as it pertains to the relationship between China and various African countries since the 1990s (Lumumba, 2011) <sup>[27]</sup>.

In regards to China's perspective on contemporary China-Africa relations, Sino-Africa relations have moved into an era of rapid development characterized by cooperation: The end of the Cold war in the early 1990s saw Africa lose its much-valued geopolitical status. Despite this, China's commitment to the development of quality relations with the continent has not dwindled, seeing that it (China) foresaw immense value in nurturing an across-the-board relationship through the establishment of closer political, cultural, and educational linkage as evident in the 1980s when Beijing began to concretize and enlarge its economic and trade ties with the continent (He, 2008).

In the experience of Ghana, for instance, The Beijing Summit and the Third Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation [FOCAC] held throughout November 3 to November 5, 2006, served to on the whole outline the Collaboration accord that China has or projects to establish in the not so distant future with African nations; Ghana inclusive. Agreements range from diplomatic agreements.

These pacts and accords reflect in the proclamation to support and respect individuals Independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity (Tsikata, Fenny, 2008) <sup>[36]</sup>.

It would be however erroneous to present the illusion of perfection in regards to the Sino-Africa relation. It is a relationship of complexity; with over two decades of debt-financed infrastructure development in Africa, the disquieting proportions of Africa's debt is an estimated US \$132 billion owed to China in 2016. Managing this new role owed as Africa's creditor constitutes disagreeable questions for creditors and debtors alike. A dilemma that very well transcends to structural changes and a series of core practices that guided China-Africa relations from its formative years (Alden, Jiang, 2019) <sup>[3]</sup>.

In light of these occurrences for China, its development model, and its governance practices and ideals become legitimate when they are subscribed to by foreign states and the international community at large. China is however strategically positioned to exert its influence and dominance well beyond its shores and the Asian continent. Thus we see a divergence of social relations, social capital, business investments, network building amongst many other variables come into play beyond the peripheral outlook of the Sino-Africa relation. The substantial outlook of China should be viewed through the lenses of China's economic prowess, natural resources extractions, and material capabilities. This will enable a well-detailed assessment of China's major ambitions in Africa (Benabdallah, 2020) <sup>[6]</sup>.

In Shubo Li's "Mediatized China-Africa Relations", Shubo's assessments examine the issues of media diplomacy, cultural conflicts, and propagation of consensus in the area of China-Africa relations. His premise is focused on the implementation and the fusion of sociological analysis, and international relations studies with media research (Li, 2017). "There were arguments as regards competing developmental templates after the adoption of China's new Africa policy of 2000, the Chinese principle of Non- interference and the condition of opposing western ideology". While China's increasing value as an economic and political partner has ushered new and diverse opportunities as well as dynamic layers of prospects, it has altogether created a new option for Africa's development; as we witness new frontiers of opportunities for the continent, Africa must be sensitive to the nature of economic aid it receives from China (Wissenbach, 2010) <sup>[38]</sup>.

According to Batchelor and Xiaoling's "China-Africa Relations: building images through cultural co-operation, media representation and communication" they help place the Sino-African ties in perspective. For instance, the increase in China's economic and political involvement in Africa has excited a lot of commentaries, especially in the media. While they are mostly negative, a series of accusations that China is a new colonizing power, only interested in exploiting Africa's resources and flooding the continent with low-priced manufactured goods. Hand in hand with the accusation that Beijing turns a blind eye to atrocities with whom it engages. A veritable mini-industry in the media has developed with all sorts of scare stories about how "the Chinese" are taking over Africa. African states under immense economic pressures and a dire need for direct foreign investment, especially those permeated with a degree of volatility have been the main targets for China and Chinese investments. This has however been at odds with official western policies regarding governance and development. But the idea that Chinese activities in Africa are uniquely evil or somehow reflect behavior that stands in strong contrast to the West does need challenging (Batchelor, Zhang, 2017) <sup>[5]</sup>.

There are however numerous reflections on the role of race in China-Africa relations. Huynh and Park in their analysis sought to disrupt restrictive binary constructions. As well as existing historical conceptions of race in China and Africa relations that take into account an often unconscious adoption of Western frames. They drive at the conclusion that race making, othering, and hierarchies of power are entwined and ongoing processes require rigorous analysis that disrupt and displace simplistic models, binary thinking, and application of existing theories based on experiences in the global north (Huynh, Park, 2018) <sup>[20]</sup>.

The idea of China-Africa relation and an economic transformation is best understood in Oqubay and Lin's perspectives. Human relations, organization and productions skyrocketed in the last quarter of the 20th century especially in regards to aspects of social activities such as carnivals, sporting events amongst others; thus, positioning China as an engine for global economic growth. Since the global financial crisis of 2008, China's annual contribution of at least 30 percent to global growth has been far more than that of any other economy. Moreover, China's economic rebalancing transitions beyond the fourth industrial revolution and into an innovation-driven economy are bound to affect China-Africa relations in multiple ways offering both opportunities and challenges to the continent (Oqubay, Lin, 2019) <sup>[31]</sup>.

China's radical implementation of the soft power approach in the formation and assertion of her foreign policy through its employment of political rhetoric it's explicit and implicit audiences become more and more important, both on a bilateral level and within the international arena at large (Corkin, 2014) <sup>[10]</sup>.

The centerpiece to China's new leadership in its Foreign affairs could be traced to the "One belt One Road" initiative. The enterprise seeks to usher a new pathway for the various nations of the world to higher growth and human development through infrastructure connectivity, augmented trade, and investment. The initiative offers tremendous opportunities for international economic cooperation, especially for African countries (Ehizuelen, Abdi, 2018) <sup>[13]</sup>. The economic growth performance of African states varies significantly over time and across countries, but the variation has tended to narrow, in both dimensions over the years. It is

not unusual to blame poor growth performance in Africa on the concentration of the region's exports on a relatively few primary commodities whose unstable and low prices take a negative toll on economic innovation and advancement (Ademola, Bankole, Adewuyi, 2016) <sup>[11]</sup>.

Over the years, the Western Hemisphere and its leadership particularly the United States has shifted its main course on counterterrorism efforts alongside cliché aid programs in Africa; China on the other hand ensure the development of a broad, unified strategy toward Africa, unified strategy toward Africa. The underlying principles behind the Sino-Africa cooperation, documented as far back as the first Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955 declared Beijing's respect for the sovereignty of other nations and pledged to avoid interfering in the internal affairs of other countries (Parenti, 2009) <sup>[32]</sup>.

In popularising Africa to the Chinese, the most influential event that popularized Africa amongst Chinese audiences was the serial TV program "A Passage To Africa", which was filmed and shown in 2003. Within the timeframe of 97 days, Phoenix t.v corporation which happened to be the most prestigious Chinese media in Hong Kong at the time alongside a film crew composed of the Chinese Central Television Staff, two influential singers and historical geography professor, traveled to thirty countries and covered more than 80,000 miles which ultimately made the project the largest Africa reportage in the entire history of Chinese media (Liu, 2008) <sup>[26]</sup>.

China's incremental and accelerative growth has transformed its relationship with Africa, industrialization has boosted China's import demand for oil and minerals (from iron ore, bauxite, nickel, copper), which Africa satisfies. China is now Africa's third-largest trading partner and these governments' global strategy encouraged Chinese companies to become multinationals. The concluding remarks remain that the need for systematic transformation is imperative in times like this, if Africa is to benefit in the long run, seeing China has the intention to remain engaged in much of Africa at least for the medium term. It is essential to transform this engagement and relation into additional development opportunities if Africa is to get the best deal out of the Africa-China relation (Gu, Schiere, 2011) <sup>[16]</sup>.

This ought to be deeply considered not only by individual states but for the continent at large

While China's public diplomacy is communicated as two instruments of engagement and non-interventionism as well as frequent reciprocal official visits; it is about the same for all African countries where China conducts businesses and provides aid. Albeit there remains a certain percentage of African scholars, academics, African states, and Africans alike who have negative perceptions of China's engagement in Africa. Some have even come up with conspiracy theories of China's endeavors to ensure the total control and domination of Africa through the instrumentality of neo-colonialism by ensuring that the contents remain continually and perpetually dependent and indebted to China (Kalu, 2011).

### **The chronology of China-Africa relations**

The month of April, the year 1955 witnessed Premier Zhou Enlai's reception of the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser at Burma's Rangoon airport. This grand occasion market event will go on to solidify Sino-Africa relations in years to come. It was the first-ever Asia-Africa conference at

Bandung, Indonesia. Premier Zhou's speeches and rhetoric at the first Asia-Africa conference largely addressed the plight of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia in regards to their struggles for independence respectively. He also addressed Egypt's attempt to restore sovereignty over the Suez Canal alongside deeply rooted racial discrimination and segregation in South Africa. Post first Asia-Africa Conference, the Chronology of China-Africa relations is as follows: The May 1955 visit of Egyptian Minister for Religious Foundations - Sheikh Ahmed Hassan El Bagouvi to China. Following this was the August 1955 trade delegation from Egypt led by the Minister of Commerce and Industry Mohammed Abu Nousseir. Nousseir's trip to China resulted in a three-year contractual trade agreement. As of February 1956, a cultural delegation from China visited Egypt. Although no real economic trade was attained, the expression of Chinese culture and tradition in Egypt was a focal point for such delegation. The 30th of May 1956 also witnessed the extension of China and Egypt's diplomatic relations; this was simply an extension of the Chinese aid agreement of US \$4.7 million to the latter. Subsequently, on the 20th day of December 1958, China and Algeria established diplomatic relations; before this was November 1, 1958, China-Morocco diplomatic relations. The following year on February 4th, Sudan followed suit by entering into diplomatic relations with China. The 14th of October 1959 saw China and Guinea establish diplomatic relations. China proceeded to formalize diplomatic relations with Somalia and Mali respectively in 1960. Also in the same year (1960), China advanced an interest-free loan of US \$25 million to Guinea in 1962, the 18th of October precisely saw Uganda enter into diplomatic ties with China (Fernando, 2007) <sup>[14]</sup>.

According to Cheru and Obi in their 2011 paper titled "Decoding China-Africa Relations: Partnership for Development or (neo) Colonialism by Invitation?", they state that China's rapid economic inroads to Africa and the growth in its volume of trade with the continent from a mere \$20 billion in 2001 to \$120 Billion as of 2011 which has come to call for concerns within Africa and Africans alike especially amongst its traditional trade partners in the Western Hemisphere. True the West has been critical of China's excessive influence in Africa, pointing to "Chinese Resource Grab". Support for dictatorial, authoritarian, and corrupt regimes under the pretense of non-interference and its adoption of exploitative and suspicious practices to monopolize the African market much to the disadvantage of the West. In reality, this has presented us with a modern and strategic model for the scramble of Africa's markets and resources; what is more troubling is the degree to which African leaders and elites have wholeheartedly gravitated towards Chinese investments and development aid (Chery, Obi, 2011).

### **The Chinese dragon and the African Giraffe**

Although Africa itself has witnessed explosive growth due to its choice it's economic bargains with China, China on the other hand is beginning to consolidate itself on the continent. Recently, there has been a series of official economic cooperation zones in Africa which are based on Chinese efforts to establish Chinese central zones. On the flip side of things, China has publicly and occasionally made pledges of state funded economic cooperative endeavors with Africa. Amongst these pledges, China's Ministry of Commerce (M.O.F.C.O.M) is fully in support of about six to seven

economic and trade cooperation zones. Chinese companies, enterprises, and institutions have also largely gone ahead to set up a handful of industrial zones outside the provisions of the MOFCOM Programme (Brautigam, Xiaoyang, 2011). Agriculture is also a rapidly evolving stage for China's economic engagement in Africa. During the cultural revolution, Chinese youths were prompted to go up the mountains, down the countryside in service to the people; today Chinese leadership, companies, and farmers desire and often require the citizenry to go down to Africa to help serve and foster China's strategic interest in the region. Be that as it may, very little is known about Chinese input for development in rural Africa (Brautigam, XiaoYang, 2007). As regards China's involvement in Africa; its scope, significance, and consequences are somewhat complex to define or identify. On the one hand, Africa seems to benefit, at least from the outlook of things, and on the flip side, the question that comes to mind is at what cost (Tull, 2006) <sup>[37]</sup>. China currently has one of the fastest-growing foreign aid programs in the world while this could be as a result of the immense political and economic returns from these investments, China is considered to be one of the top donor countries in the foreseeable future. In all, China seeks to position itself as a hegemon in the international arena and Africa happens to be an integral piece in China's ambitions (Toogood, 2016) <sup>[35]</sup>.

In 2016, the month of December, the administration of the People's Republic of China released its strategy for energy production and consumption revolution for 2030. A report explains that in the last three decades, the accelerative growth of China's economy completely modified the supply-demand equilibrium of global energy. In more recent times, Sub-Saharan Africa has become a pivotal source of energy and China; a dynamic that began as early as the Mao era from 1954 to 1976 (Grimoux, 2018) <sup>[15]</sup>.

The China-Africa relationship is not only limited to economic and socio-cultural relations, but also in terms of climate change. For instance, the article "China-Africa Cooperation: Joint Engagement in Adaptation to Climate Change" highlights first and foremost that the development growth path of emerging economies like Brazil, India, Russia, and China has taken a toll on the environment leading to extreme environmental degradation from land use, to water pollution, harsh weather conditions and air pollution. This has further caused the depletion of the Ozone Layer. Climate change has had an adverse effect on not only China but Nations although at relatively lower degrees. China remains the home to ten of the world's most polluted cities; this could be as a result of China's rapid and some could say excessive degree of uncontrolled or regulated industrialization. For Instance, 46% of the world's global coal production was mined in China as of 2007. This was subsequently used for the generation of Electricity (Grimm, Esterhuyse, 2013) <sup>[25]</sup>.

Tembe, Muresan, and Dlamini's position in the article "Towards A Common African Policy On China-Prospects, Politics, and Challenges" enumerate the discrepancies and inadequacies of the China-Africa relations. In light of their perspective, to the extent of empowering the AU commission to negotiate on behalf of the continent. For instance, an African FOCAC policy would have to address the divergences between Anglophone African economies and Francophone African economies that are closer to the French system of financial governance (Tembe, Muresan, Dlamini, 2017) <sup>[34]</sup>.

President Xi Jinping's visit to Africa in 2013 saw him express his immense value for people-to-people exchanges. In his mind, this is an important pillar for the new type of strategic partnership between China and Africa by which propellant and spiritual impetus are provided to enable the entire relationship (Hanauer, Morris, 2014) <sup>[17]</sup>.

In its inaugural white paper on Africa, China's African policy, issued in the January of 2006; the identification of China's general principles and objectives were premised on sincerity, friendship, and equality (Hofstedt, 2009) <sup>[19]</sup>.

### The Nigeria experience

Concerning the Nigerian experience, it is imperative to highlight that Nigeria and China established diplomatic relations in February 1971. The relationship between these two countries blossomed over the years. This was feasible due to high levels of visits and the conclusion of a series of bilateral agreements that intensified economic penetration into the Nigerian economy (Rindap, 2015) <sup>[33]</sup>.

China's influence and economic prowess in Nigeria soon took deeper roots during the late General Sani Abacha regime from the period of November 17, 1993 - Jan 8, 1998. This solitary and British Nigerian leader gained popularity for his military, authoritative and dictatorial endeavors during his leadership of Africa's most populous nation. His actions drew worldwide criticisms and subsequently, sanctions from the West. This prompted Sani Abacha to establish economic relations with China. Economic ties between Nigeria and China cut across trade, investment construction activities, loans, and grants. This began in 1972 sequel to bilateral agreements on the economy and technical cooperation and trade. An agreement that provided the continuous unmonitored importation of Chinese goods into Nigeria. This adversely gave China the upper hand; a dynamic that very much remains to date. An example is the 1975 and 1976 statistical account that reflects Nigeria's total import from China at a whopping US \$210.73m while export stood at US \$8.85m. Sani Abacha's government responded to Sanctions from the United States by looking towards Asian countries for collaboration. This trade continued to be in favor of China as shown in the trade of balance of 2007, 2008, and 2012 in a total of N515, 322, 082120, N470, 948, 778909, and N270 billion respectively (Lawal, Ahmed, 2018) <sup>[23]</sup>.

The need to secure resources to meet the development aspirations of her country made China increasingly forge formidable trade ties with almost all African countries, especially Nigeria, in the industry of manufacturing. While these realities have proved to be beneficial to trading partners, there is still skepticism about the benefits of such trade relations in Nigeria (Akpoilih, Farayibi, 2016) <sup>[2]</sup>.

Nigeria-China bilateral relations have been constantly described as an ongoing strategic and ever-growing bilateral relation, highlighting economic development for the two nations. The Nigerian economy is bewildered by Institutional inadequacy and incompetence. It can be argued that the guiding principles of Nigeria-China bilateral relations can be understood better by attempting to understand their economic distinctions. The Chinese have entered into agreements with Nigeria in critical areas like power, mining, railway projects, oil supply, etc (Onuba, 2019) <sup>[30]</sup>.

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