



THE UNFOLDING DYNAMICS OF NIGERIA'S STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH CHINA

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ABSTRACT

The entrance of China into African and subsequently Nigerian markets has raised questions of the trade imbalance between Nigeria and China. Although various aspects of the trade relations between the two countries have been studied, scant attention has been paid to how the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), an important policy implementation tool, conditions Nigeria-China trade relations. This study was therefore designed to examine the emerging opportunities that have arisen as a result of Nigeria's trade relations with China. Through purposive sampling, twenty-five in-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted with 25 respondents. Secondary data were garnered from books, journals and media publications. The trade statistics between Nigeria and China were sourced from the World Integrated Trade Solution, Trade Maps, SAIS-CARI, the Central Bank of Nigeria trade statistics, UNCTAD reports and World Bank reports covering 1995-2020. Data were content analysed. For Nigeria, the SPA has contributed to modernising railways and airports, institutionalising annual scholarships for university students, and rehabilitation of the manufacturing and agricultural sectors. For China, the SPA increased cultural exchanges and opened greater access to Nigeria's natural resources and markets with increased imports at an annual rate of 21.3%. The SPA challenges identified were worsening Nigeria's trade imbalance, with imports rising by 68% between 2018 and 2020 due to the CSWAP, increased illegal fishing, mining and logging of wood, poor monitoring, evaluation, and weak enforcement of policies. A greater decline in the quality of Nigeria's traded goods, non-adherence to import regulations, distance problems, language and security were reported challenges faced by China. The Strategic Partnership Agreement has introduced opportunities and challenges for Nigeria and China. There is a need, therefore, for both countries to develop an inclusive and comprehensive economic growth strategy.

Keywords: Nigeria – China, Trade, Foreign Policy, Strategic Partnership Agreement

Introduction

Nigeria and the People's Republic of China inaugurated official economic ties on February 10, 1971 (Egbula and Zheng, 2011); relations between the two countries continued to blossom as they got closer. The two countries are both endowed in human and natural resources. One out of every four African persons is a Nigerian. Statistics depict 214 million Nigerians out of an African total of 1.4 billion. Approximately 16.72% of the continent's population are Nigerians (World Bank, 2022). China is the largest single market, with a population of 1.41 billion (World Bank, 2022). As a result of the fruitful cooperation in political, economic and social fields, Nigeria and China (the two sides) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the inauguration of a Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) on



the 11th of January, 2006. The agreement is characterised by political trust, mutual benefit in economic spheres, “mutual support” in world affairs and devotion to enhancing friendly cooperation in the following spheres. There are six spheres of cooperation as encapsulated in the MOU. They are Political Cooperation, International and Regional Cooperation, Economic Cooperation and Trade, Financial Cooperation, Cultural, Scientific, Technological and Educational Cooperation and Cooperation in other fields (Security, Judicial and Consular affairs). The paper begins with a historical narrative of Nigeria- China relations. After that, the methodology of study and the contemporary opportunities and challenges presented by the SPA are discussed. Undoubtedly, volumes of literature exist on Nigeria's relations with China- but there is inadequate knowledge of the SPA and its unfolding dynamics: a gap this study intends to bridge.

Methodology

Using the descriptive methodology, comprising qualitative data, which depended on existing literature and oral interviews, this study specifically investigated the linkages between the SPA and its policy effects on Nigeria's trade relations with China. The data was collected via primary and secondary sources.

Twenty-five in-depth interviews were held with the following: the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly (1), Officials of the Asia and Pacific Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abuja (2), The Cultural Office of the Chinese Consulate in Abuja (1), Former Ambassadors of Nigeria to China (2), scholars who have publications on the Nigeria - China relations (4), (2) foreign policy practitioners, (4) "Chinese Embassy" recognised Sinologists, the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) (2), (1) researcher from the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER), (1) Editor in Chief of the China Africa Newsletter, (1) Chinese Trader in China town, Lagos State, (1) business leader who had extensive links with the Chinese was interviewed.

Primary Data

The primary sources were collected by interviewing 25 respondents. We carried out In-depth interviews with persons who could provide adequate information on Nigeria's Strategic Partnership with China. Using purposive sampling, 25 In-depth Interviews (IDIs) were conducted involving former ambassadors of Nigeria to China, foreign policy practitioners, civil servants, and the Academia.

The interviews were important in order:



1. To assess the nature of the Strategic Partnership Agreement between the two sides: that is, Nigeria and China
2. To investigate how the Strategic Partnership Agreement has affected Nigeria-China trade relations.

The data was collected through a telephone conversation or email when the interviewee(s) was physically unavailable.

Secondary Data Sources

The work relied extensively on secondary data. This data was collected through a review of extant literature, particularly on the Nigeria and China trade relations from textbooks, journals, newspaper publications, newsletters such as the "China-Africa Newsletter", bulletins, published documents and articles on Nigeria-China bilateral agreements. Trade statistics between Nigeria and China were sourced from different sources. The sources include the World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS), World Bank reports, Trade Maps, China Africa Research Initiative (CARI), The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) trade statistics and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) reports covering 1995- 2020. This study also relied extensively on government publications and a wide array of materials were surfed from the internet. All these materials were used to complement the primary data.

Data Analysis

The primary data from the IDIs were collected through tape-recorded interviews. After carefully organising the responses in line with the study research questions and objectives, these oral interviews were transcribed and subjected to content analysis. The first stage of the content analysis was data transcription. The researcher commenced transcription immediately after the first interview was conducted. The second stage was a review of the transcriptions. The second stage of transcription review was done for the sake of quality assurance. The recorded messages were processed alongside the researcher's field notes

The secondary data collected from the libraries were also subjected to summaries to give credence to the primary data.



Results /Discussion

Nigeria-China Relations 1960-2023

The first official contact with the PRC was in 1960 when Nigeria invited China for its independence celebration on the 1st of October, 1960 (Zoaka and Ogbu, 2018). However, Nigeria and China did not formalise relations until the rule of General Yakubu Gowon in 1971 and General Yakubu Gowon became the first head of state to visit China in 1974 (Ogunsanwo, 2008). The visit did not amount to much because Gowon was removed from power through a military coup d'état ten months later. General Murtala Muhammed as the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, took over as head of state. Between 1960 and 1998 Nigeria-China relations recorded little success. While China was emerging from an agrarian back-woods country to economic power, Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s had political instabilities due to the coup d'états the country experienced (Gimba and Ibrahim, 2018).

Olusegun Obasanjo's ascendancy into power as a consequence of the 1999 elections coincided with the start of the "Going out Strategy of China". "The Going Out" was an initiation by the government of China to enhance China's investments abroad. The return of Nigeria to democratic rule presided over by General Olusegun Obasanjo has been proclaimed to mark the contemporary relationship between Nigeria and China. During General Olusegun Obasanjo's second tenure (2003-2007), China's President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao visited Nigeria and other official visits were documented.

In 2006, Nigeria and China signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA). As mentioned in the introduction, the agreement involved investments in all the critical sectors of the Nigerian economy (Egbula and Zheng, 2011). The signing of the "Strategic Partnership Agreement" (SPA) between Nigeria and China has elevated the relationship to a new level. The SPA is a three paged document hinged on agreements covering: investment, telecommunication and technical cooperation to expand economic and trade relations and boost two-way investment, improve cooperation in oil and gas, infrastructure, construction and manufacturing, enhance political cooperation, coordination in international affairs, South-South cooperation and the promotion of the establishment of new international political and economic order that is characterized by fairness (Akinterinwa, 2015).

The immediate impact of the SPA signed by Obasanjo led to the adoption of the 'Oil for Infrastructure' (OFI) policy (Omeje, 2009). The OFI deals awarded oil contracts on favourable key infrastructure improvement projects (Salter-Mthembu, 2013). However, when the helms of affairs were transferred to President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in 2007, he suspended or cancelled most OFI deals signed by his predecessor Obasanjo. Little achievements were



made in 2010. Vice President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan assumed power after President Yar'Adua and Nigeria-China relations began to recover as China declared its new plan for strategic partnership in 2010. The new program aimed to: promote "reciprocal" political trust, promote cooperation in the critical sectors of the economy, and increase people-to-people exchanges and coordination in global issues which include, the promotion of global peace, human rights war against terrorism and the promotion of the North-South and South-South dialogues.

With the Buhari administration which took place after the Jonathan administration, Nigeria-China relations have been lauded for policy continuity. One of the participants of this study noted, "...only President Buhari came believed in continuity... (Dr Ubi/IDI/2019)" The policy continuity of the administration is evident in all the sectors as enunciated in the SPA. The logging into the BRI and the Currency Swap Agreements by the Jonathan administration corroborates this fact.

The methodological framework of the SPA in Nigeria is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The elements of the BRI are policy coordination, uninterrupted trade, financial exchanges, socio-cultural linkages and people-to-people exchanges. The main focus of Nigeria's BRI is a proposed plan to build a 1,042km coastal railway that will connect Calabar, the capital of Cross River state, to the Eastern part of Nigeria, connecting ten states (Ige and Akingbesote, 2018). Zhang Qian inaugurated the concept of the Silk Road approximately two thousand years ago. However, President Xi Jinping resuscitated the OBOR in 2013 and proclaimed to revive the ancient Silk Road by initiating a link between China, Asia, Europe, and Africa through infrastructural development and the construction of railways and roads. As we shall see in the next segment, Nigeria's logging into the BRI at the September 2018 FOCAC conference held in Beijing, has indeed enhanced her strategic partnership with China. Unfolding opportunities and challenges have emerged with Nigeria's Strategic Partnership with China and to this we now turn the discussion of this paper.

Unfolding Opportunities

The Strategic Partnership between Nigeria and China has led to increased relations between Nigeria and China. The bilateral relations are largely premised on trade and investment in one of the largest economies in Africa (Taylor, 2006). The current trade volume corroborates this fact. The volume of trade in 2021 stood at USD 22.49 billion. At the same time, Nigeria's exports to China stood at only USD 1.85 billion. Its imports were USD 22.64 billion (CEIC, 2022)



Before the signing of the SPA between Nigeria and China, the Nigerian railway was virtually non-functional. In the history of the contemporary revival of the Nigerian railway, the initial arrangements for the Abuja light railway system in Nigeria in 2006, were precisely after the signing of the SPA. In that period, the Nigerian railway chairperson, Mohammed Waziri, lobbied the government for USD 35 billion to rehabilitate the Nigerian railway using the Oil for Infrastructure (OFI) deals. Thereafter, the Obasanjo government facilitated the deal to secure commitments from China, South Korea, and India to provide the railway programme processes in place of oil blocs (Salter, 2009). The Chinese government were given the task of constructing a 1315km rail line between Lagos and Kano and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed in April and October 2006. The CCECC was awarded the contract with an initial quote of USD 15.4 billion: but was reduced to USD 8.3 billion when the Nigerian government refused the initial price of USD 15.4 billion. In November 2006, the Nigerian government signed a loan facility agreement with China's EXIM bank for a loan of USD 2.5 billion, out of which USD 1.3 billion was to be used for the railway. (Salter, 2009; Siyanbola, 2017). In 2012, the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan was termed: "a revolution revamping of the railway system in Nigeria" (Pamela-Jack, 2016). The Jonathan administration subsequently signed a contract with two Chinese and a local firm to rehabilitate 2,119 kilometres of rail lines in Eastern Nigeria.

Consequently, in March 2017, the Vice President who was the acting President of Nigeria, Professor Yemi Osibajo, inaugurated the Lagos-Ibadan rail line to run from Apapa port in Lagos to Ibadan. The project is the second segment of the organized six segments of the Lagos-Kano standard gauge rail track. Others are Kaduna to Kano, Ibadan to Ilorin, Minna to Abuja and Ilorin to Minna. The Abuja-Kaduna and the Lagos-Ibadan Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) systems are fully functional.

Still, in the transportation sector, Nigeria further intensified its strategic partnership with China in 2013 when the former President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, signed a USD 3 billion loan targeted at refurbishing four new airport terminals in Abuja, Kano, Lagos and Port Harcourt; and USD 50 billion loans for the Abuja light railway project, which was completed and commissioned in 2018. Furthermore, there was also the rehabilitation of roads: like the Papalanto-Lagos expressway and the Akpaden-Okoroette road. President Muhammadu Buhari commissioned the Abuja Light Railway project in July 2018 (ChinAfrica Newsletter, July 2018; Onanaiju IDI/2019)). Through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the transportation sector in Nigeria, as contained in the SPA, is being rehabilitated.



Another increased opportunity is in the sphere of transfer of technology. China offers Nigeria a good opportunity for Nigeria to get advanced technologically. No Western country will transfer technology at the rate at which China is transferring (Prof. Alli/IDI/M/2018). This statement suggests that there has been an increased transfer of technology due to ongoing trade relations. In the areas of diversification of the economy and investments, it is recorded that Chinese companies have invested over USD 16 billion in fixed assets/facilities nationwide to build and supply most network operators in Nigeria (Abdulkadir, 2018). The erstwhile Chinese Ambassador to Nigeria, Dr Zhou Pingjian, corroborated this fact by stating:

...take made in Nigeria with China, and you see more and more investors are now expanding their investments in Nigeria and I think that it is a cooperation between our two sides and that is good news for Nigerians in pursuit of industrialization and diversification” (Aidoghie, 2018)

China’s disposition to transfer technology is conspicuous in investments in the refurbishment of the railways, refineries, agriculture, and industrialization.

Chinese FDI is positively felt in Nigeria’s manufacturing sector. While the National Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC) listed 221 firms, the China Ministry of Commerce has listed 297 Chinese companies with approved investments in Nigeria (Chen et al., 2016). Large numbers of subsidiaries around Lagos and Ogun areas are into furniture and homeware that arose due to the SPA (Adunbi and Stein, 2019; Onanaiju, IDI/2019). Examples are the Lifemate Furniture Company and small companies like Mark Sino Company. Chen et al. (2016) also note that some Chinese businesses are present in Nnewi, Onitsha and Anambra. These companies can also be found in the China Free Trade Zone Areas in Nigeria. In Nigeria, China’s Free Trade Areas are in Lagos, Ogun, Akwa-Ibom, Calabar, Kano, Owerri, Kano, Osun, Imo, Ilorin, Ibadan, Enugu, Warri, Lokoja and Port-Harcourt (UNDP Reports, 2015). A participant echoed that:

In the South-South, especially in Cross River State, we have many Chinese companies operating in the Cross-River Economic Free Trade Zone. The most popular among them is the Skyrun electronics makers of home equipment and other home conveniences like fridges, fans, and televisions... in Lagos, you have Galaxy. Galaxy is one of



the manufacturers of iron rods in Nigeria... (Onanaiju/IDI/2019).

The aforementioned connotes that the Nigeria-China strategic partnership has contributed to honing the potential of Nigeria's ailing manufacturing industries. More importantly, these companies are producing jobs for Nigerians and participating in the "re-industrialization" of Nigeria.

Another unfolding opportunity is in the agricultural sector. Nigeria and China are both major agricultural nations. There has been quantum growth in agricultural production which experienced a decline from the 1970s to 2000.

China has provided agricultural training for hundreds of Nigerian candidates, leading agricultural development in Nigeria. In 2016, the China-Nigeria Agricultural Technical Training Program was held, and 40 Nigerian officials and technicians trained in Abuja on different agricultural innovations. Similarly, there was a repeated version of the training in 2017 where 40 participants from the thirty-six states, including the FCT, were trained on pest control, mechanization and application of farm input.

China's contributions to Africa's biofuel agricultural products are also increasing. Efforts are being made to diversify its structure of energy resources from fossil fuel to biofuel production. This diversification is to mitigate the impact of climate change and improve environmental conditions. The Chinese government has stated that China will use minor crops, such as cassava, oil and sugar cane, rather than staple food crops to produce biofuel (Jacob, 2018). For the procurement of strategic machinery for rural development and agriculture (tractors, bulldozers, graders, irrigation pumps, and many other types of equipment), China loaned Nigeria USD 4.5 billion in 2017. The loan has a 20-year credit repayment term with a year moratorium.

In furtherance of the partnership in the sector, Nigeria and China signed a tripartite agreement on the 1st of October 2018. In the tripartite agreement, Chinese experts in Agriculture were sent to various states in Nigeria to boost the Agricultural sector. An offshoot of the agreement led to Agricultural Demonstration Centers (ADC) and 40 rice processing Mills in Nigeria. The impact of Chinese loans is yet to be felt by the Nigerian Agricultural sector; as the implementation of the agricultural policies is still underway as 65% of farmers still employ crude farming methods. Moreso, storage facilities, post-handling methods and infrastructure, have not improved.



Be that as it may, the agriculture sphere has received enormously the much-needed boost from China. Research has shown in recent times, that China's involvement in agriculture has contributed significantly to job creation and Chinese FDI in Nigeria has led to Chinese agricultural enterprises providing high-quality seeds for Nigerian farmers and creating hybrid rice farms, the building of regional fishing industries, 15 model farms, and the creation of honey bee cooperatives (Ubi /IDI/ 2018; Kesse/IDI/2018, CERS/2 IDI/ 2018, Jacob, 2018) These have led to the transfer of technology/expertise in the agricultural s

In addition, there are also emerging potentials in terms of education and Tourism. In contemporary times, Nigerians make trips to China, Malaysia and other Asian countries to study Architecture, Engineering and Medicine. Nigeria has 'the increased opportunity to cooperate with China under the Forum for China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the BRI to implore China to establish universities in Nigeria (Onanaiju/IDI /2019). Generally, through FOCAC and now the BRI- Nigeria benefits from cultural and educational exchanges as China offers more scholarship programmes for Africa than the West (Edeh, 2018).

There is a Bilateral Educational Agreement (BEA) between Nigeria and China. There are about 5,000 Nigerian students distributed across various provinces of China, including Guangdong, Beijing, Shenyang, Jinzhou, Nanjing, Sichuan, Jiujiang, Tianjin, Wuhan, and Nanchang. There are also an estimated 300 students on scholarship, and the remaining are on self-funded programmes. The Chinese government also offered to increase its scholarship awards to Nigerian students from about 100 to 700 annually (Ogunsanwo, 2018; IDI/Onanaiju, 2019). In January 2018, The Embassy of the PRC awarded scholarships based on merit to 47 students of the University of Jos. Ambassador Zhou Pingjian informed at the University of Jos Multi-purpose hall in April 2018 that China is projecting a blueprint of understanding and cooperation with Nigeria in the educational sectors where both countries can collaborate in educational opportunities for Research and Development (ChinAfrica Newsletter, April 2018). In the area of tourism, ample opportunities abound. Nigeria has the potential to attract Asians. Records have it that most tourists in European tourist centres are Asians. With the BRI, Nigeria, therefore, has more prospects to attract Asians for tourism.

In a related tune, the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries is an association that ensures that the two countries deepen their interaction. More than 70,000 Nigerians arrived in South China's Guangdong province in 2016 for a myriad of reasons, like business, tourism, education and health care (Oloko, 2018). Similarly, Nigerian students, year after year, apply to Chinese schools to study the Chinese language and Information Communications Technology (ICT). There are several Confucius institutes in



Nigeria where students can learn Chinese Mandarin. China has instituted two Confucius institutes at the University of Lagos (UNILAG) and the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, to teach and learn Mandarin (Vanguard, 2019).

Analogously, China has assisted Nigeria in expanding military cooperation with 60 million Yuan to support and engage in combating piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. Similarly, there have been various efforts to help Nigeria combat terrorism. From the foregoing, Nigeria-China relations have brought many benefits through Chinese investments and cooperative efforts, as evidenced in the political, economic, and social spheres.

Regarding the welfare of the people, the findings of this study detected that Chinese companies in Nigeria are creating jobs, thereby impacting the lives of the people. The construction of the railway sector has been shown to have created over 3,000 jobs (Ubi, 2018). In the Ogun Guangdong Free Trade Zone, it is reported that 50 companies have been registered, 26 companies have commenced operations with 12 companies under construction, and 4000 Nigerians are employed in these companies (Adunbi and Stein, 2019). The narrative is the same for all Chinese companies in Nigeria. It was estimated that Chinese investments in the telecommunications sector would help create about one million jobs (ChinAfrica newsletter, June 2018).

From the agreements mentioned above, increased opportunities have invariably arisen in the critical sectors of transportation, trade, agriculture, manufacturing, aviation, finance and science and transfer of technology due to the SPA between the duo (Nigeria and China).

Challenges

On the other side of the SPA between Nigeria and China are the obvious imperfections (costs) due to apparent dynamics such as poor monitoring and evaluation (weak policy framework), Corruption/bad governance, lack of institutional capacity to manage the dynamics of the strategic partnership, nature of trade (trade imbalance), quality of traded goods, lack of industrial base and the ability for Nigerian traders to identify genuine Chinese companies. For China, the reported challenges include issues with distance, security, language and the failure of Nigerian traders to adhere to China's import regulations.



In Nigeria, the inability and lack of capacity to formulate consistent, well-structured foreign policies is a function of a weak policy framework. The sources of this study reveal that Nigeria's lack of strategic depth towards China reflects ambiguous domestic policies. A participant recounted that "... Nigerian leaders that deal with China are there because of what they can get for themselves..." (Utomi/IDI/2018). The elements of self-aggrandizement, bribery and corruption, embezzlement of Chinese loans by Nigerian public office holders and lack of transparency (clarity) in most deals show Nigeria's lack of tactics with China. The first element to analyse at this junction is the issue of corruption of Nigerian leaders. However, it was discovered that both sides (that is, the Nigerian and the Chinese counterparts) are corrupt. The "Enugu State Coal Saga", bolsters this statement. In 2018 and 2019, findings revealed that there was the illegal production of coal in Enugu state by two Chinese companies. While the Nigerian regulatory and law enforcement authorities were aware, actions were not put into place to restrict the illegal activities of Chinese companies. Omeje (2019) recorded these two Chinese companies set up factories for wood charcoal, contrary to the National Environmental (Control of Charcoal Production and Export) Regulation, 2014. The Chinese companies are purportedly exporting charcoal through the Onne Port in Rivers State. The two companies were neither registered with the Nigerian Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) nor paid taxes. These illegal actions have consequently led to deforestation. An official of the Enugu State Forestry Commission in an in-depth interview revealed that:

The Chinese are powerful because they bribe our politicians with dollars. They can easily ask politicians to displace you from your jobs... (Omeje, 2019).

The fear of job loss has prevented the Department of the Enugu State Forestry Commission from taking legal /official actions against erring Chinese companies. Also, it has been reported that armed guards of Kwo Chief Investment Limited (a Chinese company) move around the factory with armed men in conjunction with the Nigerian policemen. Findings have revealed that State officials have not issued official permits to these Chinese companies that are perpetrators. Still, no authority is questioning the illegal activities, and state officials claim ignorance of the two Chinese companies investing in coal in the territory. Commenting on the illegal logging of wood in Enugu state- a participant verified this:



...every leader in Nigeria is there because of what he wants to take for himself...Chinese companies are here for what they can take, and the Nigerian government should get committed... (Masari/IDI/2019).

The singular action of illegal coal production led to Enugu State losing 15% of its tree cover between 2001 and 2015 (Omeje, 2019). Apart from denying the indigenes of these territories the means of livelihood, these activities by Chinese companies in some areas of the state have led to permanent deforestation.

Still, on corruption, Chinese companies have also been accused of illegal fishing in Nigeria's Exclusive Economic Zone (Page, 2018). In 2017, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture blamed Chinese vessels for illegal fishing. This, the Chinese private enterprises did by bribing maritime patrols with United States dollars. Illegal fishing in these territories has led to fish scarcity and loss of revenue for indigenes. Illegal mining by Chinese-sponsored Nigerian outfits also affects the mineral-rich, conflict-prone areas such as Mambilla-Plateau in Taraba state and Jos Plateau negatively in Plateau state. Intermediaries in these locations collect and process the ore extracted by unlicensed miners before selling it to the Chinese and other international entrepreneurs. '...a lot of key players in Nigeria's illegal logging, mining and fishing operations are Chinese (Page, 2018). Yet government authorities are silent about the illegal operations. A participant noted: "Who controls these Chinese technical and security outfits? Who bothers to keep a catalogue or a quota on the natural resources they tap? I do not know what the government is doing, but I can say from my experience that the Chinese are here for what they can get. The Nigerian government could care less about these natural resources and national image" (Babatunde/IDI/M/2021).

Corruption has made it difficult for policymakers to critically assess the opportunities and challenges of Chinese commercial activities in Nigeria. How do we explain the illegal logging of wood, extraction of ore and fishing going on around Nigeria by Chinese businesspeople without the intervention of the federal authorities to stop such aberrations? The illegal activities of Chinese people in business and greedy Nigerian go-betweens and politicians in these territories have further led to the plunging of the locales into the abyss of abject poverty and unemployment. Simply put, the unfettered Chinese access to Nigeria's national resources without following due process portrays the weak nature of the ruling elites. Even though China is virtually in all of the 36 states in Nigeria (CAC,2018), it is apparent that Nigeria is not deliberate in its cooperation with China. Nigeria is not strategically involved with China. No



Nigerian company would dare to perpetrate illegal actions in China. This is because strategic policies and retributions are put into place to safeguard against this' (Prof. Babatunde/IDI/M/2019). The illegal activities of the Chinese in Nigeria can largely be blamed on bad and divisive leadership. If there were strategic policies, there would be sanctions for the prohibition of laws.

On another note, this study observes that Nigerians are also guilty of unethical practices towards China. A Chinese trader mentioned that there is more tendency of the media at large to focus only on the Nigerian side of the relationship. A Chinese trader in Abuja explained that:

...look at the dangers we face in Nigeria... You (Nigerians) suspect us every time... and your politicians are allowed to do anything to us without nobody saying anything... (Chinese Trader/M/ 2019)

Fawehinmi (2018), in narrating from the viewpoint above, chronicled that Jason Han and John Xue moved to Nigeria to manage one of the Free Trade Zones but had to abandon the project because of harassment targeted against their companies and were forced to leave Nigeria.

In addition, the successive regimes of government starting from the Abacha regime prove beyond doubt- that corruption deters Nigeria from reaping the enormous benefits the Chinese public and private companies offer. Each regime of the Nigerian government, starting from the Abacha regime, continuously re-negotiated and concluded deals with China. A good scenario can be found in the railway sector. Abacha made several rail deals with China. Most of the rail deals were abandoned and never implemented (Salter, 2009). In 2002, Obasanjo also commissioned a 25-year strategic vision to rehabilitate the existing railroads and connect them to the thirty-six states in Nigeria. This is approximately two decades later, and most of these railway routes have either been stalled or are still in progress. In response to the railways' slow progress, Chen concludes that '... a wider problem is lack of policy continuity and railway plans' (Chen, 2016). The loans offered by the Chinese government in 1993 and subsequently for the refurbishing of the Nigerian railway were and are still not properly accounted for: there has been abandonment/ stalling of most railway projects. There is apparently, a lack of continuity of trade and investment deals.

In related tune to bad leadership and the corruption of officeholders is the lack of trained human capacity in the bilateral relations which restricts the growth of Nigeria-China relations. Getting useful information from the public officeholders for this research was almost an arduous task. In cases where information was given, it was a sight so obvious that there was a



lack of knowledge on the state of play of events of the Nigeria-China trade relations. Some of the Nigerian ministries visited and displayed the ignorance of most officeholders. Prof. Utomi, in an oral in-depth interview with the researcher, submitted that:” you will not get anything (information) out of the system”. In answering the question as to why this is so, the respondent further laid bare that:

The Nigerian bureaucracy since the oil era has been notoriously un-serious. There is a certain arrogance in our foreign policy bureaucrats about this great Nigeria...compounded with the fact that they are not educating themselves in the area, so they don't even know the state of play...so they are both out of touch and ignorant... there seems to be a disconnect in the System... (Prof, Utomi/IDI/2018)

There are obvious cases of “disconnect” due to negligence and the laissez-faire (lackadaisical) attitude of the Nigerian government. It has been noticed that there is no differentiation between loans, investment and aid. In its current state, the relationship is not calculated - anything goes. The field report of this study observed the absence of relevant data, project details and expected economic outcomes of the government. Furthermore, a field visit to key Ministries in Nigeria and the National Assembly further depicts the ignorance of foreign policy bureaucrats on the state of play of events. The revelations of ignorance were quite flabbergasting, to say the least, in some ministries visited and just like Prof. Utomi laid bare “... there seems to be a disconnect in the system...” (Utomi/IDI//2018). These inadequacies limit the success of Nigeria's strategic partnership with China. Each government is there because of personal aggrandizement. The extent of involvement of China in Nigeria nobody knows. Both the public and private sectors are involved in trade relations with China without a form of documentation. A participant corroborated this further by saying that" 'the sectors are engaging with China carelessly anything goes... we are scatterbrain'. (Prof. Alli/2019). A validation of this “scatterbrain” claim can be inferred from the ongoing construction of Nigerian railway modernization projects. As of 2019, there were 534 staff working on the Kaduna Railway Project, and the CCECC has a technical team of 17 specialists providing technical support. The implication of China providing technical assistance is that only semi-skilled and unskilled Nigerian workers are employed to construct the railway project. This arrangement hinders the transfer of technology, and just like Prof. Alli observed, ‘...we do not



know what we want and how we want it' (Alli/IDI/M/2019). Despite the attempts at transfer technology, this study's results show that there has been no systematic transfer of technology to Nigerians. Chen et al. (2016) reveal that there is no evidence of the transfer of technology. In the transfer of hardware technology and machinery, A participant further reiterated that most of the so-called electronics manufactured in Nigeria are assembled in Nigeria (Babatunde/M/2018).

Since there is a focus on the Nigeria-China trade relations, there have been many critical companies, but there appears to be no institutional arrangement. A field visit to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) confirms this. A senior staff of the Ministry of External Affairs who spoke to the researcher on the grounds of anonymity quoted, “ ... my bias is that we have not been able to engage the Chinese as adequately as possible...there are so many programmes, but the government is unserious about it... there is no single Chinese desk in the NIIA that monitors the Nigeria-China trade...” In line with this, a participant confirmed this statement by asking the following rhetorical questions that validate the fact that there is a seemingly shallow human capacity training for Nigeria-China trade relations. ...we have not been able to engage the Chinese as adequately as possible. For instance, there is no institutional arrangement. If you go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, you don't see Chinese-speaking people. The Chinese are the most strategic, most organized country I know (Prof. Alli/IDI/2018). The extent of the lack of human capacity on the part of Nigeria was further elaborated by an informant who stated thus: What is the human capacity context in the context of economic relations? China has the current software to analyse the trade. What has Nigeria? Are there investment summits in Nigeria to analyse the relations? Our interest is secondary. Their interest comes first. (Prof. Babatunde/IDI/2019)

It has been additionally observed from the aforementioned discussion that the nature of the Nigeria-China trade depicts one of imbalance. In 2021, while Nigeria's exports to China stood at only USD 1.85 billion. Its imports were USD 22.64 billion (CEIC, 2022). It has been observed that The SPA has created for Nigeria further trade imbalance, with imports rising by 68% between 2018 and 2020 due to the CSWAP, (currency swaps) which have further aggravated trade deficit issues

It is not surprising, however, that the trade is at a disequilibrium because while China's exports to Nigeria include machinery, chemical products, and unglazed materials, among other finished goods: Nigeria's exports to China include crude oil, liquefied gas, bituminous minerals, sesame seeds, rubber among other raw unfinished materials (Lahtinen, 2018). On the contrary, 'China's exports to Nigeria are well-defined machinery equipment and industrial



finished products which attract high economic values (Amb. Keshi/IDI/2019)'. In its current form, Nigeria exports raw materials to China in exchange for finished goods. This discrepancy leads to a high balance of trade deficit skewed in favour of China.

Closely related to the nature of trade is the quality of traded goods, which also hinders bilateral relations. All the participants of this study maintained the stance that the quality of trade hinders bilateral relations. These participants aver that the main exports of Nigeria to China are agricultural and mineral products which attract very low prices. Akinterinwa (IDI/2018) states that '... most of these commodities get spoilt before getting to China...'. The Nigeria-China trade is comatose and is currently not meeting up to the required standard because of manufacturing challenges. Nigerians prefer low-cost and quality imported goods. A participant further added, ...you hardly see the Chinese importing our goods...' (Prof. Babatunde/IDI/2018). The quality of goods being traded is substandard. Due to the poor quality of goods/ substandard goods, the Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON) discussed the nature of traded goods in Nigeria. Nigerian importers who order these products and Chinese manufacturers are urged to focus on quality and brand reputation. 'With a population of more than 1.3 billion people with cash in their pockets, China is ready to trade with Nigeria. Still, the nature of traded goods serves as a deterrence for made-in-Nigeria goods' (Onanaiju/IDI/2019).

In addition, the lack of industrial base/ Infrastructural support dwarfs the bilateral trade relations. This fact was attested to when a participant proclaimed that, "...we produce nothing". A respondent rehashed this when he viewed that:

Today we import a substantial amount of goods from China, most of them finished products. I cannot think of any item we do not import from China. There is the importation of cheap textiles and even wine...as a result of the fact that we are not industrialised... we have become a consuming nation; subsequently, we depend so much on imports. Over 90 per cent of our needs are imported. (Amb. Keshi/IDI/2018)

All the respondents interviewed for this segment maintained that the lack of infrastructural facilities stunts bilateral relations. The availability of good infrastructural facilities coupled with cheap labour has contributed to high productivity and low prices of Chinese products. The poor state of infrastructural facilities in Nigeria has led to a high cost



of production and high cost for Nigeria's exportable products, making the goods less competitive in the Chinese market. This work found that Nigeria will need additional infrastructure before the Chinese investments can be felt. For instance, the lack of electricity militates against the advancement of Nigeria-China trade relations. 'Whether we like it or not, electricity slows down the pace of technology (Babatunde/IDI/2019)'. This opinion was shared by a Nigerian Business Leader (NBL) with strong links with the Chinese when he viewed that,

...most Chinese manufacturers have to generate electricity which has implications. If you take a look at the Chinese economy, they prefer cheap labour. These are determining factors that make the trade ongoing. The absence of power is discouraging to most Chinese.
(NBL/IDI/Male/2018)

Furthermore, Chinese diplomats in China informed that the distance between the two countries is a bedevilling factor that affects the Nigeria-China trade relations. The distance between the two countries, which is a minimum of about seventeen (17) hours of flight time and about forty-three days (43) for sea vessels- serves as a limiting factor in the trade between the two countries (Ogunsanwo, 2020). The high cost of transportation integrated with the already low quality of these goods that sometimes perish before getting to China makes exporters seek other markets where their products are more competitive (Akongbowa /IDI/2018).

The time difference of seven hours and language barriers make several Chinese importers prefer to import agricultural products from Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia (Ogunsanwo, 2018). Furthermore, the findings of this research work revealed that language serves as a bane of Nigeria-China trade relations. Most Chinese businessmen speak only Mandarin. Very few Nigerians speak Mandarin. A respondent critiqued that:

...if we go to China- they translate for us...if they come to Nigeria, they translate for us... you don't even know whether they want to kill you...
(Prof. Alli/IDI/2018)

Furthermore, issues with import regulations hinder bilateral relations. This study reports that once a commodity arrives in China from Nigeria, it receives a red alert. Such goods



are thereafter thoroughly checked because it is often assumed that Nigerian products are of inferior quality and often rejected due to inability to meet international requirements. ‘The case is otherwise if the goods are coming from Ghana or South Africa’ (Masari/IDI, 2018).)

Correspondingly, Ogunsanwo (2019) wrote that Chinese officials in China have established that the failure of Nigerian businessmen and traders to adhere to import regulations has consequently led to making the goods less attractive. Exporters of goods like Cassia Tora and Tiger Nuts have been recorded to export their products without following the due process of registering with the Chinese General Administration for Quality Supervision Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ). The AQSIQ is charged with the responsibility of inspecting and certifying all exports into China. Once found sub-standard, Chinese officials destroy the goods and services. However, Ogunsanwo (2020) correspondingly records that the Embassy of Nigeria, three consulate offices in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hong Kong, as well as the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) in collaboration with Nigeria Registration Investment and Trade Office (RITO), Shanghai have been at the vanguard of resolving these trade issues.

The identification of genuine Chinese companies serves as an obstacle to bilateral relations. Some Nigerian companies have transacted businesses with Chinese companies listed on some websites such as Alibaba.com, and these companies have turned out to be fake. In response to the fraudulent actions, Alibaba claims that erring companies have been removed from their website in such cases (Ogunsanwo/M/IDI/2019). The contention here is that Alibaba ought to have painstakingly investigated the originality of such companies before enlisting them. The tendency to purchase fake products poses a great barrier to Nigeria-China trade relations as most business individuals in Nigeria are wary of making transactions via Alibaba’.

This study infers that the unstable security situation in Nigeria limits the progress of bilateral relations. In cases where there is the availability of economic input that can be used to produce goods and services, security is a major challenge: which serves as a hindrance to the Chinese seeking to invest in Nigeria. A good example of this fact can be culled from the recent discovery of crude oil in Nigeria's North East. The high level of insurgency (Boko- Haram) in Nigeria curbs some Chinese companies from setting up their exploration companies (CERS/1/M/2019). Informed by fieldwork in Nigeria in 2017 and 2018, Paige (2018) added that Nigeria is one of the most dangerous zones in the world in a special report to the United States Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies. A Chinese businesswoman who spoke on the grounds of anonymity to the researcher informed that: ‘...Our investments are not safe in Nigeria... We are not safe’ (IDI/F/2019). The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) also makes numerous threats to kidnap Chinese personnel of multinational corporations in the



Niger Delta (Gimba and Ibrahim, 2018). The 2011 Safer World reports validated further the state of security in Nigeria in a report that armed groups have targeted Chinese oil installations in African countries, including Nigeria. Similarly, China's illegal logging, mining, and fishing activities have exacerbated existing domestic conflicts in Nigeria, making peace a seeming mirage.

Apart from bad leadership lack of knowledge and the lack of infrastructural facilities that hinder China's involvement with Nigeria, security plays a major factor. Nigeria is one of the world's most challenging business environments because of insecurity. A senior Chinese trader in an interview rehashed that:

Most times, it feels as if we are sitting on time bombs... there are violent attacks and outbreaks virtually everywhere, and it could get very scary out here...

Additional challenges include issues with exchange rates, trade policies, and financial agreements.

In summary of the challenges of the Nigeria-China trade relations, a participant recounted that:

...despite the challenges encountered currently with the bilateral relations are opportunities embedded within. For instance, when it comes to the social challenge of language, so many Nigerians are now learning Mandarin with the One Belt One Rope (OBOR), and the movement of goods within Africa and China generally will improve. The OBOR will also lead to different infrastructural development. It may, in the future, as I can see, lead to a Nigeria-China trade agreement if not an Africa-China trade agreement (Prof. Ogunkola/IDI/2018)

It was as if Prof. Ogunkola cast a horoscope into the future when he was being interviewed for this study in June 2018. This is because some contemporary events have unfolded, that have proven Ogunkola right. Nigeria joined the BRI in September 2018 and this has improved transportation, technology and the nature of goods transported to China.

Mlambo et al. (2016) summarised that:



...the China-Africa relationship offers a great opportunity rather than a threat to Africa, but realistically, the relationship benefits China. Trade imbalances between the two partners, the exportation of substandard goods to Africa from China, China's negligence of governance and human rights issues, and China's contribution to deindustrialization... an analysis of China-Africa relations showed that the relationship presents both opportunities and challenges for African countries...

The SPA between Nigeria and China as depicted, is encouraging and interesting in design and structure but is considered monotonous and ordinary (Akinterinwa, 2015). The monotonous allegations of the SPA are ironic because the multi-layered structure (which should analyse its costs/ benefits) and design of the SPA should indeed prevent it from its current unidirectional nature. Nevertheless, there have been efforts by the Nigerian government and the Chinese government to seek plausible solutions.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The narratives above present that despite Nigeria's dependence on China, the relationship is a mixed blessing. The relationship is truly one of complex interdependence. Challenges (cost) and opportunities (benefit) are attached to Nigeria's trade relations with China and vice versa. This standpoint aligns with the complex interdependence theory, which highlights that states need each other to thrive.

First and foremost, Nigeria must be deliberate in the trade relations, there must be rules of engagement. These should be enshrined in Nigeria's strategic policies towards China. The SPA between Nigeria and China should metamorphose into a bi-national commission which will automatically further aid Nigeria in defining its policies with China. Arguably, the SPA, BRI and currency swap policies are adopted by Chinese foreign policy initiatives. Nigeria needs to expand its foreign policies by formulating specific homegrown policies steered towards China. Participating in international trade/relations without "specific content" (coherent "documented" policies) can be likened to a sailor who goes out to sea with neither a map nor a compass. Nigeria's engagement with China must be tied to getting results. In essence, there should be a link between trade and foreign policy. Policy documents should



serve as a guide. Nigeria's negotiation and bargaining power should be strong enough to ensure a mutually beneficial strategic Nigeria-China trade.

In related tune, there should be Nigeria-China desks at the NIIA and the NIPS whose role will be to monitor and evaluate the trade. It is recommended that there should be periodic and event-based evaluations. The Periodic evaluation of partnerships could occur every year and the event-based evaluation can occur anytime in the event of a specific emergency. The evaluation would help monitor and inform the government policies towards China. Relatedly, the roles of these desks will be to monitor what goes in and comes out of Nigeria (quality assurance) and the desks will monitor the Export Processing Zones in Nigeria. Since the Export Processing Zones were used for China's economic growth and development. Nigeria can draw inspiration from the Chinese experience. Strategic partnership experts should be employed, and the engagement should indeed be a "strategic partnership".

Nigeria must also address its problem of industrialization. Highly industrialised countries have an undue advantage over their less industrialised counterparts in trade due to lack of industrialisation. Efforts must be targeted towards diversifying the economy to boost exports. The issue of Nigeria's infrastructure, especially the erratic power supply, the inability of the railways to lift heavy cargoes, and poor roads and aviation networks, must be addressed. Addressing these issues will provide a platform for the success of the BRI and enhance easy accessibility to the areas of production and markets.

In conclusion, despite all odds, the SPA is a foreign policy instrument that has precipitated dialogues and cooperation between Nigeria and China and has presented a positive outlook for the growth of both economies.



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