

Nigeria–China Relations: The Contemporary Challenges

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Abstract

2018 marks the 47th anniversary of Nigeria-China diplomatic relations. Nigeria's relation with china is decisively important for the future of both countries and to an ever evolving international system. It is appropriate to understand the contemporary challenges facing this relationship. Thus, this article examines Sino-Nigeria relation with a view to providing a balance sheet of cost and benefits. To do this, the study rests on qualitative research method that examines and synthesizes extant literature on international relations and in particular relevant literature on Sino-Nigeria relations. It is thus discovered that in the bilateral relations between the two countries, China has gained more than Nigeria in terms of balance of trade and the unwillingness of China to transfer technology to Nigeria. Since the relationship is asymmetrical, the article concludes that China cannot solve Nigeria's problem and that the latter must learn from China bitter and hard way to greatness.

Keywords: Foreign policy; Unit of analysis; Diplomacy; Technology.



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1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

Demographically, both China and Nigeria are destined giants in Asia and Africa respectively. China with a population of over 1.4 billion is the most populous in the world. Nigeria, endowed with 170 million, has the largest concentration of black people in the world and the most populous in Africa. Both countries are richly blessed with vast mineral resources.

Though there is no colonial link between the two countries, yet historically, Nigeria shares a lot in common with China. Just as Nigeria is burdened with its colonial past, in the same manner was China trampled upon by the Western powers, particularly, in the 19th century. China as a semi colony was made to sign unequal treaties, to the extent that she had to relinquish its sovereign claims on Burma, Korea, Vietnam, parts of Central Asia and Siberia, the Ryukyu Islands, outer fringes of Mongolia. Substantial pieces of Chinese territory were also ceded to India, the Soviet Union, Vietnam, Burma, and other states.

Whilst the Communist People's Republic of China accepted to relinquish its claims on most of these territories, yet border wars ranged on between her and the USSR, Vietnam and India. China's claim over some islands is still unresolved particularly with Japan and some of its Asian neighbors. China changed to a communist ideology with time; however, there were occasions she had to pattern her ideals in accordance with the western worldview.

Central to China was its survival. The patriarch of Communist China, Mao Zedong, with his loyal colleagues, followed the steps of Josef Stalin of Russia. Land was collectively owned and workers organized into communes. Mao Zedong, through his centrist party-state, extracted capital from agriculture; the proceeds was used to build state-owned industries, and returned the profits to more industrial investments. Economic reforms followed the death of the patriarch in 1976.

The economic reforms was initiated by Deng Xiaoping, and its strategy was tagged "reform and opening." By reform is meant effecting economic and administrative changes within the domestic realm, especially in freeing the peasants from the communes so that they could both farm and own local industries; it also introduced competition associated with capitalism.

The liberalization in China attracted foreign investment. With the reform, China became one of the world's major trading nations and as the need arose, she had to join the World Trade Organization which sets the rules for global trade. Today, China has displaced Japan to occupy the status of the second largest economy in the world and has the potential to supersede the United States.

Yet, this assumption is shrouded with guarded optimism. China till date acknowledges that its involvement with the market economy is new and cannot be fully deregulated. She sees herself as a developing nation; China's economy is still under the governmental control and the liberalization of the economy is done piece-meal. First, China ensured a sound and stable financial system; this was followed by agricultural reforms. Thirdly, six special economic zones were initially established including Shanghai to attract foreign investment. China's foreign policy is directed towards re-asserting its dominance in the world. To achieve that, the country accepts the humiliations of the past as a opportunity to re-invent itself.

China's foreign policy is a tool for economic enhancement. The foreign policy goals are directed not only towards reclaiming its lost territories but also to reassert its historic global dominance. China's creativeness inspires Nigerians as a people to face challenges with courage and renewal.

Nigeria's foreign policy thrust, now dubbed economic diplomacy gives preeminent attention to the achievement of crucial economic interests of the country. In this context, economic interests are elevated in the foreign policy priorities along with political and other considerations. Unlike the *laissez faire* attitude of certain regimes, the economic diplomacy orientation uses the Nigerian diplomatic corps for the active pursuit of the country's economic interests. Nigeria's former Foreign Minister, Ike Nwachukwu, eulogized the superiority of economic considerations in the face of the synergy between politics and economics:

Today, politics and economics have become so interwoven that it is difficult to separate them. Indeed, some analysts are of the opinion that relations among nations, by and large, are determined by economic considerations. The power and influence wielded by the industrialized countries derive from their economic strength and technological knowhow. In addition, the pursuits of their economic interests, to a certain extent, determine their strategic and diplomatic priorities in the world (Nigeria's Economic Diplomacy, 1992).

China and Nigeria have histories that are rich in dramatic events. Nigeria's colonial experience and its civil war testify that both countries attach importance to the preservation of national sovereignty and territorial integrity. But how had their respective foreign policies enhanced their bilateral relations? This necessitates an exploration of the evolution of the diplomatic relations. Thereafter, the basis of the bilateral relations will be examined. The challenges that confront this bilateral relation will be outlined before a conclusion is drawn.

2. The Evolution of Sino-Nigeria Relations

Following the World War II, China's foreign policy has persistently been driven by two well articulated principles: an anti imperialist agenda that inevitably was as a result of its colonial subjugations in the 19th century; the second is China's unrepentant claims over Taiwan. China's anti colonial stance justifies its South-South solidarity, a foreign policy objective that has its roots in Chairman Mao Zedong's "Three World" policy: (a) the defence of state sovereignty (b) non-interference in internal affairs and (c) a pluralist/anti universalist/'Asian Values' conception of human rights (The "three World theory", 1974).

The struggle over Taiwan is based on China's erstwhile leader Chiang Kai-shek initial conviction for the unification of war-torn China in the 1920s and his determination to fight the invading Japanese in the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). After the end of WWII, Chiang fought his Communists compatriots but was exiled to Taiwan, where he remained the leader of the Nationalist (Kuomintang) government until his death in 1975. Before Chiang's death, both Beijing and Taipei struggled for state recognition.

These two foreign policy objectives are undoubtedly driven by the domestic interest of China. Before the onset of the Nigerian-Biafran war, "Lagos made no attempt to form a working relationship with the Chinese" (Ogunbadejo and Oye, 1976) In effect, there was no substantial diplomatic relations between Nigeria and China as at 1966.

As the Nigerian civil war raged on, China flirted with the Biafran secessionists possibly to counter the Western and Soviet involvement. Moscow's intervention on the side of Nigeria influenced the Chinese Foreign Minister, Chen Yi to denounce what he termed the "Soviet revisionism, in league with US and British imperialism" in "massacring the Biafran people in a vain attempt to squeeze into Nigeria and enjoy an equal share with imperialism there" (Porter, 1984).

The denunciation must have paid off positively to the secessionists since there were unconfirmed allegations that [cautious] China transferred a limited number of small arms to them through Tanzania (Porter, 1984). As the Sino-Soviet conflicts abated and China's support to the African liberation movement increased, many African governments supported the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution admitting the Peoples Republic of China to the world body in October 1971. 1971 is thus significant to the Sino Nigeria relations.

At the 26th session of the UNGA, Nigeria surprised the West and in particular the United States, when she recognized the inclusion of mainland China in the UN as well as to the exclusion of Taiwan. China is appreciative of this African solidarity as Jin Yongjian, a Chinese ambassador acknowledged that the 1971 UN episode remains indelible to the Chinese people:

The Chinese people will never forget that in 1971 it was African countries that helped restore the legitimate seat of the People's Republic of China in the UN. Over the years, without the firm support from African countries, China could not have defeated anti-China draft resolutions tabled by some Western countries at the United Nations...and moves made by a handful of countries on Taiwan's so called participation in the UN and WHO ...The Chinese Government always attaches great importance to Africa...As China is the largest developing country in the world and Africa has more developing nations than any other continent, China-Africa co-operation constitutes an important part and parcel of the South-South co-operation (Yongjian, 2005).

Nigeria and China established formal diplomatic relations in February 1971, the same year the communist People's Republic of China obtained the right of place in the UN Security Council; 1971 simultaneously coincides with the expulsion from the United Nations of the nationalist government in Taiwan, which previously occupied the seat. China's permanent presence in the Security Council meant that from 1971, it started to enjoy the use of veto and participates effectively in the deliberations of the UN Agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the specialized fields, like the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). China's foreign policy has centered in promoting relations with many countries; it asserts its sovereignty over Taiwan and rebukes any country that accepts diplomatic dealings with the later.

1971 is also symbolic to Nigeria. For Nigeria, 1971 marks the close of the first ten years of its post colonial existence (1960-1970) as a state. The successful conclusion of the Nigerian civil war in 1970 and the increasing

dependence on rents from the sale of oil gave the African state a new level of confidence to pursue a more dynamic foreign policy, thus abandoning the idealistic yearnings that featured in its first republic. Nigeria's successful conclusion of its civil war and the recognition of the People's Republic of China in 1971, opened new vistas to the two countries.

The establishment of formal diplomatic ties between the two countries in 1971 was followed by the first visit to China by a Nigerian Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon in 1972, shortly after the Nigeria's civil war. Other Nigerian presidents also visited China without the Asian power reciprocating the gesture for over twenty five years. Nonetheless, in President Obasanjo's second tenure (2003-2007), a deeper Nigeria-China relation dawned. After series of visits by Obasanjo to China, China's President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jinbao returned those visits to Nigeria (Egbula and Zheng, 2011).

What constitutes China's interests in Nigeria? A Chinese scholar, Wang Jisi, provides an insight. Jisi postulates that nation-states in the international system achieve their grand strategy when guided by three questions: What are the nation's core interests? What external forces or principalities threaten them? And what are the leadership roles in safeguarding those core interests?⁹ Ordinarily, every country's foreign policy must be structured around these questions; the manner Nigeria or China understands and appreciates the strategic importance of what constitutes their respective core national interests helps in their realization. The pursuit and achievement of a country's core foreign policy objectives finds its expressions in bilateral and at times multilateral relations.

3. The Bilateral Relations

There were debates in the 1960s, following Nigeria's attainment of independence, as to the reasonableness of establishing diplomatic relations with Communist China. These debates centered on Nigeria's unconcealed ideological leanings to the West and the government's lukewarm attitude towards the communist bloc as a whole.

The government's effort to balance its non-aligned status was worsened by statements that saw the People's Republic of China (PRC) as communist and therefore evil. Okeke, a parliamentarian in the first republic, vouched that Nigeria does not know the "ideology of communism ... The one we have had is democratic which is pro-Western and there is no harm in our pro-Western attitude". [House of Representatives Debates](#) During the post independence years, Nigeria watched with suspicion as the Communist China trained subversive elements in neighboring Ghana (Hutchison, 1975). It was in the midst of such suspicion and the ones that trailed Nigeria's civil war that the diplomatic recognition of 1971 was warmly embraced.

Nigeria-China relation is seen by some analysts as an era of progression and expansion since 1971. Nigeria's geo-strategic importance particularly in Africa has made China to look for "amends for its relative disinterests in the country in previous decades" (Srinivasan, 2008).

Kirby outlined the basis of China's foreign policy towards Africa which by extension can be adapted to Nigeria:

- ❖ To foster sincere friendship and become each other's reliable "all-weather friend";
- ❖ To treat each other as equals, respect each other's sovereignty and refrain from interfering in each other's internal affairs;
- ❖ To seek common development on the basis of mutual benefit;
- ❖ To increase consultation and cooperation in international affairs;
- ❖ To look at the African situation in a realistic and sympathetic way (Kirby, 1995).

Though these objectives are couched in ethical terms, no foreign policy is driven on moral grounds. In the main, foreign policy choice takes place in an atmosphere of uncertainty and several contending interests.

Be it as may, the abovementioned summary resembles the set of five principles agreed upon by Nigeria and China in 1971 as the two states established their diplomatic bilateral relations. The five principles contained in a press release issued by Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Information in April 26, 1971, include:

- ❖ mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity;
- ❖ mutual non-aggression;
- ❖ non-interference in each other internal affairs;
- ❖ sovereign equality;
- ❖ and peaceful coexistence ([Federal Ministry of Information \(FMI\), 1971](#)).

Had the Sino-Nigerian relation been guided by these basic principles, one might ask? It is obvious that fundamental changes have taken place between these two nation-states within 45 years. First, China is no longer the very rigid communist ideologue that characterized the country during the 1949 communist revolution. Today, China with over 1.4 billion population has a politically directed communist government with a market driven economy. Its significant economic success has made the country an undeniable economic global power house. Nigeria, with all sense of modesty is rigidly in the old form it met China in the 70s – petroleum rent collecting state. Nigerian economy since 1971 is basically mono-cultural; its oil revenues are dependent on the ever changing oil prices. With the current fall in oil prices, its debt profile has continued to rise. While China can boast of an external reserve of over 300 trillion dollars, Nigeria has slumped to about 28 billion dollars. It is against this backdrop that the Nigeria-China bilateral relations will be examined using the most salient strands, namely, political and economic foundations.

4. Political Relations

Sun Gouping, the Chinese national that founded the China Town at Ojota, Lagos, confided to the Daily Sun Newspapers his impression of Nigeria for the past 30 years he has been in the country:

I love Nigerian people male and female. I have made a whole lot of friends here too. I love yam and stew and enjoy Nigerian pepper soup a lot. I prepare the Nigerian foods I eat myself. I love the weather too because the hot season here is just like summer in China. For us to be able to come here means that we love Nigeria. Chinese too love strangers and eagerly welcome them (Omegoh, 2016).

Gouping is only one out of over 65000 Chinese nationals residing in Nigeria as at 2014 (Liu, 2014). While Gouping is having a field day in Nigeria, thousands of Nigerians are languishing in the Chinese prisons, as reported in the media:

Nigerians in Chinese prisons are used as labourers in producing most things made in China, yet they are not paid up to the minimum wage. They set targets based on what machines produce. If you don't meet the target, your sentence won't be commuted... There are thousands of Nigerians in Chinese prisons being used as slaves. Most of them don't know when they are coming back home because the government doesn't care for them (Ezeobi, 2016).

Another returnee from China attested that the Chinese "treat the black people like animals". "The Chinese hate blacks. All they want is our money" (Ezeobi, 2016). A Non Governmental Organization, Patriotic Citizens Initiative, reinforced the ordeals of Nigerians in China. The director, Osaneme, alleged that at least 40 Nigerians are executed yearly or die mysteriously in Chinese prisons, and in many instances, some of them undergo unfair or no trial at all. (Ezeobi, 2016) Legal prosecution of Nigerians has further challenges in China. This is due to language barriers; it is understood that many Nigerians in detention could not follow the proceedings since trials are conducted in Chinese.

On a lighter note, the restoration of diplomatic relations in 1971 opened a pro-China undertaking by Nigeria. This is evident from the communiqué that ensured that "the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria recognizes the Peoples Republic of China as the sole legal Government representing the entire Chinese People" (Federal Ministry of Information (FMI), 1971).

The diplomatic recognition in 1971, thus, opened the gates for inter-state visits. On the Nigerian side, almost all the Nigerian Heads of State and Presidents starting with General Yakubu Gowon to President Buhari had visited China. China is different. For about forty five years from 1971, as a matter of emphasis, China only reciprocated when President Hu Jintao visited Nigeria in April 2006.

Several agreements were signed in the course of these visits; these include: Agreement for Reciprocal Promotion and Protection of Investments; Protocol on Co-operation on Electric Power Projects in Nigeria; Protocol on Bilateral Co-operation in Steel Industry and Oil Industry Cooperation to mention but these. Following President Buhari's recent visit to China in April 2016, Buhari and his Chinese counterpart Jinping signed several agreements and memorandums of understanding (MoU). Some of the memorandums of understanding include a framework agreement between Nigeria's Ministry of Trade and Investment and the Chinese National Development and Reform Commission. There were also memorandum of understanding on aviation, scientific and technological cooperation between the relevant Nigerian Ministries and the Ministry of Commerce of the Peoples Republic of China. On the political level, Nigeria supports China's principle of "One China, Two systems".

To this effect, Nigeria supported the return of Hong Kong and Macao to China in July 1997 and December 1999 respectively. To demonstrate Nigeria's vision of China, the status of its mission to Hong Kong was changed to that of trading post manned by a Consul General. In return, China has launched Nigeria's first space satellite to the orbit. Called Nigcomsat 1R satellite, China Academy of Space Technology is the manufacturer (Clerk, 2011).

When Nigeria's relation with the West was problematic, mostly during the Abacha's military rule, China benefited immensely, using its foreign policy principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Nigeria also turns to China for the supply of arms during its current period of insurgency. Nigeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Onyeama, made this known when he attested that "we are engaging with various partners like China, which has asked us to indicate where we will need military assistance... So, it's just the resources and process to get the equipment" (Iroegbu, 2016).

China is not leaving any stone unturned in its search for footprints in the Gulf of Guinea, where Nigeria enjoys a pre-eminent position. China therefore helps to train the Nigerian military as the nation battles the Islamic fundamentalists, Boko Haram, in the North East region. It is against this background that Maloof (2012) assumed that China is taking advantage of the unresponsiveness of the West to Nigeria's strategic need for military cooperation to expand its own oil and trade relations with Abuja:

In addition, the People's Liberation Army is providing training to make Nigeria's military colonels into general officers and has provided arms sales which include the Chinese-made supersonic F-7 fighter aircraft. China will help Nigeria to develop a squadron of F-7s, which will form the backbone of the Nigerian Air Force. Now, China is helping Nigeria to build a domestic arms industry and naval capacity in the gulf of Guinea, which will help in China's new doctrine of power projection beyond its traditional area of the South China Sea (Maloof, 2012).

In these political ventures, can China be accused of benevolence? Never! China seeks allies in international institutions like the United Nations Security Council and the United Nations Human Rights Council. Economically, Wright flawlessly remarks, "during the cold war, Chinese arms transfers to Africa were motivated by ideology. Now, profit is the main objective" (Wright, 2001). The quest for profit is fundamental in China's economic relations with Nigeria.

5. Economic and Trade Relations

The Peoples Republic of China, instituted a centrally planned economic system from 1949 until Chairman Mao's death in 1976. Deng Xiaoping, that took over subsequently, introduced certain economic reforms that to a very large extent decentralized the Chinese economy. In 1979, Xiaoping designated fourteen cities along China's coast as "coastal open cities" quite attractive to foreign investors.

In addition, five "special economic zones" were created with even more attractive free market privileges. The result is that China is what it is today in the global economic reckoning. In these economic reforms, China's foreign policy was geared towards the improvement of friendly relations with other nations irrespective of their ideological leanings or leadership traits. China's economic success is a source of inspiration to Nigeria that still seeks for an alternative form of economic growth. Today, Nigeria has established economic zones in some of its coastal cities. In furtherance to the economic trade and technological relationship, Nigeria and China have signed series of agreements in addition to the ones that are tied to investment protection.

In effect, China's interest in Nigeria had grown exponentially since 1971; this is evident in the number of Chinese companies operating in the country. China has gone ahead to solidify its interest in Nigeria and other African countries by strategically initiating the China-African Co-operation in Beijing from the 10-12 October, 2000.

The aim of the forum from China's perspective was to create a formidable platform for China and her 'African friends'; to form a new strategic development partnership that will, in the long term, accelerate the pace of co-operation between China and Africa in the 21st century.

Besides the first Beijing 2000 Forum, other ones were held in Addis Ababa in 2003, Beijing in 2006, Cairo in 2009 and Johannesburg in 2015.

It was at the 2015 Forum, that President Buhari hilariously testified that "China remains a strategic and dependable ally" in his determination to "change the direction and content of governance including the management of national resources with priority on accountability, transparency and result-orientation in governance" (Buhari, 2015).

Buhari went further to identify with the laudable objectives of FOCAC in "cultivating, fostering and deepening political, economic, technological, social and other forms of relations between China and Africa". Buhari specifically lauded China for the vision behind the establishment of FOCAC as a "platform for higher level Africa-China relationship" (Buhari, 2015).

Whilst Buhari, the Nigerian President, ironically sees China as a "dependable ally", China bases its economic relations on timeless shrewd principles. This is made manifest when President Jiang Zemin, in 1999, reminded the Chinese negotiators on accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) of their country's core foreign policy principle that is interest driven: "Hold an active attitude, use flexible methods, excel at negotiations and reserve naiveté" (Lai, 2001).

There is no doubt that China's political ingenuity has helped her to achieve its economic desires. In this economic exploits, China is an exporter of finished manufactured products to Nigeria. In a recent conference, the Chinese Ambassador to Nigeria, Gu Xiaojie, proudly declared that "Nigeria is China's number one engineering market, number two export market, number three trading partner and major investment destination in Africa" (Akinterinwa, 2016).

Nigeria exclusively imports more from China than from USA and India combined, with little exports in return. China only imports unprocessed agricultural items like cotton and timber and mineral like crude oil from Nigeria. China has added mechanical and human expertise and investment capital to its list of exports to Nigeria with over 200 Chinese companies operating in Nigeria.

The China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation is almost exclusively in charge of rehabilitating Nigeria's railway system. The China National Petroleum Company (CNPC) and the China National Petroleum and Chemicals Corporation (CNPCC) are getting juicy projects and making enviable inroads into Nigeria's deep water oil fields. China National Overseas Oil Company (CNOOC) won a 45% stake in OPL 246 in Nigeria's Akpo oil field. In that deal, CNOOC is to have 70% of the profit whilst Nigeria's NNPC goes home with 30%. Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) was awarded the license for four oil blocks-OPL 471, 721,732 and 298; in return, CNPC was to help rehabilitate the Kaduna refinery estimated to cost \$2billion.

China's interests are also shown in Nigeria's new Liquefied gas; Petro China and other Chinese companies have signed agreements to buy some of Nigeria's crude oil. In these endeavors, China's main interest is to uphold its economic boom back home through market expansion and access to raw materials. China is not only involved in federal jobs; many Nigerian states like Lagos and Ogun, and business men like Aliko Dangote are all doing some projects with China.

China's Civil Engineering Construction Corporation - CCECC - has long been awarded the Lagos State Blue Rail Line; it is also charged with the modernization of the Lagos-Kano 1,215 kilometres railway line and the expansion of Lagos-Badagry road. Aliko Dangote, in partnership with a Chinese firm, Sinoma, signed a \$3.9 billion cement contract. The rationale is to help the Dangote Group to increase its cement output across Africa to over 50 million metric tons (Mbamalu, 2015).

China's strategic initiatives have enhanced its stronghold not only into the Nigeria economy but also in Africa, to the extent that the Asian great power's activities is currently dubbed "re-colonization" (Blair, 2007) as a "scramble" (Melber, 1964) or even an outright "invasion" (Rice, 2011). The bilateral trade relations between Nigeria and China have grown by nearly 300 percent since 2004 and had gotten to 14.94 billion dollars in 2015 with the balance of trade strongly in favor of China (Premium Times, 2016).

Besides South Africa, Nigeria now ranks as China's second biggest trade partner in Africa. Nigeria has also signed a currency swap with China, possibly to enhance the trade relations. This is coming at a time the Chinese exports to Nigeria accounts for about 80 per cent of the total bilateral trade volumes. Does Nigeria stand to gain something from the currency swap, particularly as cheap Chinese goods have flooded the Nigerian market to the detriment of the domestic industries?

6. Contemporary Challenges

The emergence of an industrial China is a source of concern to many analysts and practitioners of foreign policy. China's communist ideological structure even after the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991 is still a source of worry.

As China advances industrially, with the capabilities of outstripping the United States, there are troubles in identifying what actually constitutes China's global interest and its specific foreign policy objectives towards the least developed countries like Nigeria. China is perceived in Nigeria as a Santa Claus, a provider of low interest loans, to uplift the Nigerian downgraded infrastructures.

A number of analysts have called for the re-examination of the Nigeria-China relations, particularly as China is seen today as a scrambler, an invader and the 21st century colonizer. This is because China is only interested in exporting its manufactured goods and least interested in adding any value to the processing of our primary products exported to China as raw materials.

In 2016, almost every Nigerian economic sector has been invaded by China, from the rail system, hydrocarbons, telecommunication, agriculture and roads. As the market is flooded with cheap Chinese products, local manufacturing firms have folded with untold consequences to the weak Nigerian industrial sector. As Nigeria struggles to produce low technologically domesticated products like textiles and detergents, the Chinese products present stifling competition.

Chinese firms are known to be pushing substandard goods into Nigeria thereby stifling the locally made ones. Must China be seen as a "dependable ally" in this sad situation? But part of China's strategy is total rejection of import substitution, an economic measure canvassed by the Nigerian governments. The irreconcilable perception between the two states on the issue of import substitution is indeed a worrisome challenge.

In this circumstance, Nigeria can look into what is most attractive to the Chinese firms and entice make them to establish their manufacturing outfits in the country. This Nigeria's quest for industrialization, leads to the concept of technological transfer. Is China prepared to transfer its hard earned technology to Nigeria, to help us industrialize? Technology transfer, dearly canvassed by the least developed nations like Nigeria, is the process by which discoveries from scientific research are tailored into solving societal needs. Is China that is technologically looking to the West to modernize its facilities, prepared to part with its scientific discoveries? China is no Santa Claus, and is convinced that it has to protect its bases of greatness. China is only prepared to launch Nigeria's satellite to the orbit after paying some fees. The scientists remain Chinese working in China. The scientific template is Chinese and the Asian Monarch is least prepared to reveal or teach Nigeria the modalities.

Possibly, Nigeria can learn from China on what the later did. China's economic zones that attracted foreign investors were established close to the country's centres of research principally to encourage technology transfer. Besides cultural and language barriers, Nigeria's inability to locate its economic zones near its industrial and knowledge centres is a big problem. There is no synergy between Nigeria's institutions of learning (the academia) and the industry. Nigeria's quest for a technological transfer through China therefore remains a dream and the foremost contemporary challenge in the Sino-Nigerian relation.

Another challenge is in the area of foreign aid, whether it comes in the form of grants, low interest loans or other cultural advances like teaching the Chinese language in the Nigerian schools and awarding scholarships to Nigerians to study in China. Underdeveloped countries like Nigeria are so dependent on capital inflow that it is difficult to make an issue of terminology; conversely, rich nations like China are interested in presenting their contacts with poor countries like Nigeria, to the highest degree possible, as "aid", even when what is really involved is a simple profitable business.

The pattern of confining the much greater part of the Chinese "aid" or grant to bilateral programs has greatly enhanced Chinese exports rather than helping the Nigerian economy. What is worrisome is that the Chinese "aids" like most western aids pass through the hands of government officials that are not directly involved in running the Nigerian economy. Tales of corrupt tendencies abound among these officials of the government, thus making the "aids" counter-productive.

Has it been disproved that a disproportionate chunk of Chinese "aid program" does not go to the birth regions of the political leaders? In effect, politics rather than poverty or economic potentials dictate the flow of the Chinese development projects that reach these undeveloped countries.

The fourth contemporary challenge has to do with trade. China, like the United States, took the path of isolation before opening its borders to outsiders. Nigeria favours trade no doubt. But must Nigeria now join the developed economies in the general movement towards freer trade? If Nigeria needs to develop, with its slender industrial beginnings, there is the need for protection. An unprotected market leads to flooding of the Nigerian market with every type of Chinese products including toothpicks, exercise books, domestic bulbs, textiles and cutleries to mention but these. Today, Nigerian infant companies that produce these essential items are moribund. Do we expect China to protect our infant industries for us? The consequences of unprotected trade are colossal.

Many Nigerians are out of job; unemployment gives rise to societal crimes that China is worried about. Though some can argue that there are now Chinese companies operating in Nigeria, the problem is whose interests are the

companies protecting? Not Nigeria's of course. Thousands of Chinese in Nigeria came with visitor's visa; the type that should not allow them to work in the country. But what happens? These visiting Chinese are shielded by the Chinese companies and given jobs meant for Nigerians. In China, Nigerians are languishing in prisons for violating basic immigration laws; Nigeria is different; each Chinese in Nigeria is an expatriate that must be shielded at times with the connivance of the Nigerian immigration service. Should the Chinese violate basic Nigerian immigration laws, because they are dependable allies?

There are many areas of strength to learn from China. China provides a better template to Nigeria to develop our industrial sector. In establishing economic industrial zones, China never compromised its expatriate quota meant for foreigners on joint ventures. China reached an understanding with those expatriate to train and to empower their Chinese workforce. Must Nigeria treat the Chinese companies differently? China did not only encourage foreign firms to empower the Chinese workforce, but trained people in the best western higher institutes of learning; on return they improved the country's economy. Nigerians best brains are outside developing other states while Nigeria is in tatters. China that compelled foreign companies in the realm of affirmative action is unprepared to replicate same in Nigeria. Must a "dependable ally" be constrained to live by his sermons?

Another area of strength to learn from China is on the issue of ideology. China has a communist ideology with strict Confucian religion as a means of social control. This has led to the Chinese working hard whether it is the mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore or even Indonesia and Malaysia where the Chinese population is quite negligible. It is a puzzle that the "giant of Africa" has no guiding ideology. Is Nigeria's ideology any of these: capitalism, communism, mixed economy, Christianity, Islamism, African religion, totalitarianism or what? Defined ideology and purposeful leadership can be a source of inspiration to citizens. China's use of ideology is inspirational.

Some of these contemporary challenges are quasi-ethical and legal issues. But international politics has never and can never be guided by ethical values. Nigeria can only make moralistic appeals to China; such appeals include import substitution, technological transfer, respect of the Nigerian immigration laws etc, whilst the Asian Monarch is guided by its interests.

7. Conclusion

Nigeria-China relations has been flourishing since the two states established their diplomatic relations in 1971; but even the blind has seen that it is an asymmetrical relationship where the economic and trade balance has more been to China's favour. Nigeria is the weak vessel in the partnership.

China is currently the second richest country in the world, displacing Japan to the third position. In that position, China has flooded Nigeria with its manufactured goods. Nigeria on the contrary depends on rents from crude oil and some unprocessed agricultural products exported to countries like China; Nigeria is unlike China; Nigeria, is a very poor country. The contemporary challenges discussed in this article constitute the major obstacles in the Sino-Nigeria relations.

As the economic and trade gap between China and Nigeria keeps widening with a disproportionate favour to China, the possibility of eliminating this asymmetry is remote, particularly in a world where economic issues are structured. Nigeria's reliance on exhaustible oil, whose price per barrel has plunged downwards by over 50%, has not helped the African giant. Nigeria's plight is worsened as countries technologically, develop alternative sources of energy. China cannot solve Nigeria's problems even as a dependable ally. Issues of political instability, insecurity, dilapidated infrastructure, capacity building through functional education and economic diversification among others must be addressed by Nigeria. Nigeria must learn from China the bitter paths to greatness.

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