

Chinese Companies in The Nigerian Construction Industry Since 1999: Issues and Contentions

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Abstract

There is no gainsaying the fact that China (and her multinational corporations) has penetrated a large portion of the global economy in the last three decades. There is hardly any country in and a sector of the African economy (Nigeria in particular) that does not have a significant presence of Chinese transnational corporations. The economic inter-relationships between Nigeria and China has witnessed a tremendous increase since the birth of the fourth republic in Nigeria. From the backdrop of the country's infrastructural deficiency and colonial experience, the Nigerian construction industry has been exposed to participation from different foreign multinational corporations from Germany, Egypt, Italy, and China among others. In the last two decades, however, Chinese companies have dominated the Nigerian construction industry. Through the lens of historical scholarship, this study examines the factors that seem to have provided the Chinese an edge over other multinational construction companies in Nigeria. Using the theories of international economic relations such as the liberal theory, the comparative advantage theory, the factors proportion theory, and the strategic trade policy theory. The study expatiates some of the issues and contentions relating to the presence of Chinese companies in the Nigerian construction industry. It adopts a qualitative research methodology using historical approach to data collation and interpretations. Information is derived majorly from secondary sources via extant literature, media reportage, and internet materials from the websites of companies. Few oral interviews are also conducted to verify some of the information from the media and the internet.

Keywords: Chinese Multinationals, Economic Globalisation, Nigerian Construction Industry, Infrastructural Development

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Introduction

The construction industry constitutes a significant aspect of every economy. It plays a significant role in the socio-economic development of nations across the world (Moavenzadeh, 1978). It is the sector of the economy that transforms different resources into constructive facilities or items such as roads, highways, railways, hospitals, post offices, bridges, and facilities for the provision of electricity, gas, and water supplies among others (Ofori, 1990). It is also a leading provider of employment and every sector of the economy depends on it directly or indirectly. Constructive facilities could be broadly divided into public sector projects and private sector projects, particularly based on their clients. Public sector projects include those that are purely social projects and sometimes those constructed to earn some profits. The social projects are constructed to provide free services to the citizenry. In recent times, however, there have been a reduction in the provision of social infrastructure by the government in most countries. Most projects are now constructed under different arrangements that involve public-private collaborations such as the public-private-partnership, build-operate-and-own, and build-operate-and-transfer mechanisms which necessitate the profit-making aspects (Ofori, 2015). Examples of private sector projects include family buildings, churches, mosques, club houses, speculative buildings, institutional facilities, and industrial outlets among others.

One of the main characteristics of the construction industry is that it is highly capital intensive making most countries prone to the idea of loan and aid seeking for infrastructural projects. Nowadays, the idea of seeking loans for construction activities is more prevalent in the developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America where the financing of major projects is often largely by international agencies and borrowers which usually attach conditionality and stipulations on their loans (Ngowi et, 2005; Shafiu et al 2023; Shafiu and Salleh, 2021). In these countries, there is always an imbalance between construction requirements and local resources capacities leading to an overdependence on foreign sources of finance and expertise. The construction industries of many developing countries is thus exposed to participations from multinational firms because of the advance technical, mechanical, and technological involvement. Therefore, apart from the influence of colonial experience on the participation of multinational companies in the construction industry of the developing countries (including Nigeria), paucity of funds and technological expertise have always provided the window for the foreign construction firms to dominate the industry.

The history of Nigeria's modern construction industry is traced to the colonial period starting from the closing decades of the nineteenth century (Ezeife and Bolade, 1984). The colonial government embarked on the construction of many infrastructural facilities that were geared towards promoting the overall socio-economic interests of the British crown and its agents (merchants and industrialists inclusive). To fast-track the evacuation of agricultural produces and mineral resources from production spots to the ports for shipment to overseas, railway tracks and feeder roads were constructed. Railway construction started in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and had witnessed huge improvement by the second

decade of the twentieth century criss-crossing many parts of the country. The focus at this level was on the construction of economic infrastructures which would yield good returns to the British. Other socio-economic infrastructures such as telecommunications, marine services, electricity, health facilities, and educational institutions were later constructed during the colonial period. The construction of social infrastructures became expedient in the period immediately following the Second World War. The first attempt at economic development planning in Nigeria was in 1946, tagged Ten Year Plan of Development and Welfare, contained a series of projects relating to the construction of health infrastructures, educational facilities, and other social amenities (Uche, 2019).

The Nigeria's construction industry has witnessed participations from different multinational corporations. For instance the German giant construction firm, Julius Berger, was engaged in the construction of many infrastructural facilities in post-colonial Nigeria. Other multinational construction firms such as the Arab Contractors, Hi-Tech and many others have participated significantly in the Nigerian construction industry. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century and the fourth republic, however, Chinese construction companies such as the Chinese Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) have also been noticeable in Nigeria. Apart from the current status of China in the contemporary global economic and political orders, the prolonged international relations between her and Nigeria tend to have contributed to her discernible presence in the Nigerian construction industry. China began a more active participation in Nigeria's affairs during the civil war (1967 and 1970). She supported Biafra against the federal republic because of the intra-communist ideological differences with Russia which supported Nigeria and against the Capitalist West which also had supports for the federal government (Emordi and Osiki, 2009).

Though scholars have tagged the Chinese support for Biafra as a mere verbal support that had no material implications and diplomatic nicety, the fact remains that it provided a sort of psychological boost for the Biafra army and populace at that period. Notwithstanding that formal diplomatic relations were established in February 1971, Nigeria-China relations were maintained at the level of individual and corporate affairs until the 1990s when the relationships became solidified with tremendous focus on financial and technological investments, trading activities, healthcare delivery system, socio-cultural exchange, and the construction industry among others. The adoption of open and competitive economy against the initial emphasis on protectionism prompted massive economic growth and expansion in China. On the other hand, from the early 1980s, Nigeria witnessed doldrums that affected every sector of the economy including the construction industry. The railway sub-sector of the economy was severely affected leading to the taking over of its management by Brazilians and Indians. In 1996, a group of Chinese experts took over the management and rehabilitation of the Nigerian railway sector. This laid the foundation for the increasingly massive participation of the Chinese multinationals in the country's construction industry. This participation has attracted some advantages to both countries whereas a number of negative implications could also be recounted.

A History of the Nigerian Construction Industry

The Nigerian construction and building industry covers all sectors of the country's economy. The establishment of construction companies in the country could be traced to 1930s when the Public Works Department and the Royal Army of Engineers (which later became the Nigerian Army of Engineers) of the colonial administration were created. The industry's activities include construction of houses, offices, factories, roads, bridges, dams, ports, harbours, railroads, airports, and stadia among others. By the virtue of provision of capital projects, the government involvement in the sector has been prominent. This is reflected in the development plans and infrastructural policies that have been introduced in the country since the colonial period (Lawal, 1997). Since independence, the government had paid attention to building and expanding road networks in the country to facilitate the distribution of raw materials and finished goods. The construction of dual carriage roads started in the country in the 1970s with the completion of the Lagos-Ibadan expressway and later the Sagamu-Benin expressway. Subsequently, the Ibadan-Ilorin road, Ibadan-Ile-Ife road, Aba-Calabar road, Kano-Maiduguri road, and Abuja-Jos road were also reconstructed as dual carriage ways. In the same vein, many of the state governments also embarked on the construction of series of dual carriage roads since the 1980s. The federal and state governments in Nigeria have also invested enormously in the construction of fly-overs, the Eko Bridge, the Third Mainland Bridge, the Carter Bridge, the second Niger Bridge and others.

Apart from the construction of roads and bridges, governments across levels have also made huge investment in the building industry. There was the expansion of the building industry with the provision of more administrative, educational, health, communication, electricity, local government, and other institutional facilities. The building sub-sector witnessed the rapid expansion from 1968 after the creation of twelve states in the country. The creation of additional seven states in 1975 further prompted construction works such as secretariat buildings, staff quarters, stadia, houses of assembly, and government houses across the country. Secretariat complexes were also constructed for the state and federal ministries. Further expansion was generated following the reorganisation of the local government administration in 1976 with each local government having its own secretariat. In addition to the two tertiary institutions that were created during the colonial, both the federal and state governments have established numerous universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, colleges of technology, technical colleges, unity schools, federal colleges, and model colleges among others in the post-independence period. The entrance of private entities in the provision of education across different levels further increased the construction of education infrastructures in the country.

From the 1970s, housing schemes and policies were introduced by the federal and state governments in Nigeria. The decree of 1972, for instance, authorised the erection of 59,000 housing units across the twelve states in the country. The Federal Housing Authority (FHA) and the Federal Mortgage Bank (FMB) were established in the 1970s to give credence to the construction of houses in the country. The hosting of FESTAC 1977 by Nigeria also

resulted in a massive financing of housing and infrastructural facilities such as the Festac Village, National Theatre, Tafawa Balewa Complex, Trade Fair Complex, the Satellite Town, and the 1004 Housing Estate. The relocation of the federal capital territory from Lagos to Abuja also necessitated huge construction activities which started from the 1970s within the areas of the capital. Provision and construction of electricity and water infrastructures have also been dominated by the government in Nigeria. The programmes of energy supply were financed on a massive scale as outlined in the four development plans and subsequent integrated development initiatives. Series of hydro and thermal electricity infrastructures were constructed in different parts of the country.

Though the size of the Nigerian construction industry is very small in relation to the overall global construction industry, the industry has recorded some impressive performance since the start of the fourth republic in 1999 in the country (Business Monitoring International Group, 2018). It is currently the highest among all the West African countries. Dantata identified some factors that have influenced the impressive performance of the industry since the fourth republic (Dantata, 2007). The growing government revenue is a major contributor to this improved performance as the government retained its dominance on the construction industry. The increase in the price of oil (where the country derived about 80% of her income) significantly boosted the revenue of the country which provided opportunity for massive investment in the construction of infrastructures. Another factor that paved the way for the availability of finance for embarking on infrastructural construction was external debt relief. In 2006, groups of external creditors particularly the London and Paris Clubs allowed the country to pay off its \$30 billion external debts. This payment significantly reduced the amount used in servicing external debts annually allowing more revenue to remain in the coffers of the government. Apart from the government's crackdown on corruption that was identified by Dantata, recovered looted funds also constituted another major source of funding for the construction of series of infrastructural facilities in Nigeria (Dantata, 2007). Enhanced by the oil boom of the 1970s and the desire to heal the wounds and infrastructural destructions created by the Nigerian Civil War, the introduction of the policy of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction (3Rs) also contributed to infrastructural development in Nigeria. In addition, the phenomenal of cyber-criminality and public fund looting have also been identified as contributing to the growing level of construction activities in Nigeria. The entrance of estate managers and developers has also contributed to the growth of the construction industry in Nigeria. Many of the estate developers have assisted in rehabilitating, construction, and the reconstruction of dilapidated buildings across the country, particularly in the urban centres (see Table 1.0 below). The establishment of mortgage banking by the federal government and the presence of cooperative societies within the nooks and crannies of the country have also assisted in making funds available for the construction of houses and other infrastructural facilities.

Table 1.0: 10 Top Major Estate Developers in Lagos State (The Commercial Capital of Nigeria)

S/N	Name of Company	Major Estate	Location	Unit
1.	Homework Group	Dunvale Court VI	Chevron, Lagos	50
2.	Deluxe Residences	Empire Vogue	Oniru, Lagos	96
3.	Megamounds	Greater Lagos County	Surulere, Lagos	340
4.	Landway	Audacity Skyline	Eko Atlantic, Lagos	100
5.	Mixta Nigeria	Lakowe Heights	Lakowe, Lagos	22
6.	Godmade Homes	Redemption Towers	Gbagada, Lagos	84
7.	Grendines Homes	Skyvilla	Ikoyi, Lagos	24
8.	Arkland Properties	Phonix Tower	Eko Atlantic, Lagos	122
9.	Dave Kulak Construction Ltd	The Gwen	Chevron, Lagos	32
10.	Foreshore Waters Limited	Signatoria Court	Ikeja, Lagos	40

Source: <https://estateintel.com/news/here-are-the-top-10-developers-in-lagos-based-on-ongoing-projects-on-estate-intel>

Participants in the Nigerian Construction Industry are divided into two major sectors including the formal and informal sectors (Mudi, Bioku and Kolawole, 2015). The formal sector comprises all the major companies which are legally registered in the country. This sector carries out their activities under a set of rules and regulations established by national laws and policies. These registered companies pay regular taxes to the government and many of them are listed on the Nigerian Stock Exchange. On the other hand, the informal sector of the Nigerian Construction Industry comprises the single residential and commercial buildings by private citizens. These were constructed through the efforts of artisans and labours usually supervised by the owners. In different localities in the country, these sets of labours organise themselves into artisanal professional groups to provide some form of regulations, mobilisation, and lobby (one of such is the Building and Construction Skilled Artisan Association of Nigeria, BACSAAN). Sometimes they are recruited by the registered companies to carry out construction site activities. Though the informal sector has the higher number of labours and activities in the industry, the government has insignificant control and generation of revenues from their operations. In another vein, clients in the Nigerian Construction Industry are divided into public and private. The Nigerian governments through their ministries and agencies are the major public clients for the construction companies. The private clients are individual home owners, international bodies (e.g. the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and the United Nations), large and medium size private companies, real estate developers, and multinational companies among others. The increasing involvement of the private clients in the

Nigerian Construction Industry has been influenced by factors such as the deregulation of the sector of the economy, the privatisation of the economy, ambitious property by private entities, construction by private national enterprises and conglomerates (e.g. Dangote Group), construction by religious houses, and looted funds. Construction of gigantic structures by churches and mosques has increased tremendously in Nigeria over the years (Ukah, 2016).

The construction companies in the Nigeria could be majorly categorised into three including the indigenous construction companies, the subsidiary construction companies, and the multinational construction firms. There are some indigenous companies that have distinguished themselves in the country's construction industry. The Julius Berger Nigeria Plc which was incorporated in 1970 and listed on the Nigerian Stock Exchange in 1991 is the largest indigenous construction company in Nigeria (Dantata, 2007; Nambudiri and Iyanda, 1986). It was an offshoot of the Germany Julius Berger AG which was established in 1890. It currently has over 16,000 employees and is managed by a team of Nigerians and Germans (Julius-berger.com). The company is active in almost every sector of the economy including infrastructures, residential and official buildings, industrial plants, and oil and gas exploration structures. Its major projects in the country include the National Stadium in Abuja, the Obajana Cement, and the Bonny LNG Plant. Another popular indigenous construction company is Dantata & Sawoe Construction Company Nigeria Limited. It was founded by a northern Nigerian entrepreneur in 1976 when there was massive construction in the country owing to the oil boom. Sixty percent of the company's share is owned by a group of Nigerian entrepreneurs, while the remaining forty percent is owned by a German company, CEC. It focuses on the construction of roads, bridges, and other infrastructural projects.

In 1977, Setraco Nigeria was established in the defunct Bendel State of Nigeria as an indigenous construction company. Currently it serves as one of the largest building and construction firms in the country. Initially its operations were limited to the construction of township roads in Bendel State, but its activities are currently in several states of the country. It also majors in the supply of aggregate and asphalt. Also, the PW Nigeria Ltd is a subsidiary of the PW Group (a larger international conglomerate with operations in Africa and Europe). The company was established in Nigeria in 1974 by a group of Nigerian and Irish investors. It engages in the construction of roads and bridges, water supply and sewage, and commercial, residential, and office buildings. It constructed the Abuja water supply project in 1996, rehabilitated the Lagos International Airport in 2001, and constructed the Ibadan-Ilorin Expressway in 2001. The Reynolds Construction Company (RCC) Nigeria Limited is a subsidiary of the Israeli Company (Solel Boneh International Group, SBI, Company Limited). It was incorporated in 1969 and started operation in the eastern part of Nigeria. Its operations have now spread to other parts of the country and it has completed many projects such as the Ibadan-Ife Road dualization in 1999, Jos-Buruku Water Project in 2000, Ife-Ilesha Road dualization in 2002, and the Katampe district extension and infrastructures in 2008. The Dangote Group is a famous conglomerate in Nigeria which has also played significant roles in

the country's infrastructural development. The Group's construction sub-sectors such as civil engineer, real estate, and other infrastructural project have engaged in series of construction works in Nigeria including the recent rehabilitation of the Oshodi-Apapa expressway. There are quite a good number of other local and indigenous construction companies in the country.

Multinational Corporations in the Nigerian Construction Industry

There is no doubt that foreign companies have played significant roles in the Nigerian economy (Otusanya, 2011). In particular, they have dominated the Nigerian Construction Industry since the birth of the industry as an organised sector during the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1940s, the foreign construction firms from Italy and Britain began to take active parts in the country's construction industry. By the 1980s, the number of these foreign construction companies had increased and they became predominant in the country's construction industry. This situation has become even more certain owing to the increasing domination of the global economy by the new dimensions of neo-imperialism, economic globalisation, and socio-political interconnectivities. The situation of limited technical knowledge, low level of human resource development, and inability to dissociate professionalism from inordinate affairs have confronted the indigenous construction companies and have constrained their ability to meet with the increasing demands of the industry (Ogbu, 2018; Ogbu and Edosa, 2023; Akinsiku, 2020). Lack of local capacities coupled with poor economic performances in the country prompted the situation of enormous infrastructural deficiency which also created vast gap for the foreign construction giants to explore. With the huge infrastructural deficit in the country which has been attributed to the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme and the prolonged military rule (Uhunmwuagho and Ekpu, 2012), there was the requirement for substantial capital for foreign direct investment into the Nigerian construction industry by the multinational corporations. The burgeoning demography of the country did not only impose stress on the available infrastructural facilities and social amenities, it further warranted the construction of more infrastructures to meet the socio-economic necessities of the huge population and the nation. The multinational corporations have also exploited the avenue created by this mismatch between population increase and infrastructural deficits in Nigeria to dominate the country's construction industry.

Another factor that opened the window for the domination of multinational firms in the Nigerian Construction Industry is the presence of huge mineral and material resources in various parts of the country. The need to explore these resources and establish unhindered linkages between the production location and the market also promotes the entrance of the multinational corporations into the construction industry. In addition, the availability and exploration of these mineral resources increase the revenue and capital base of the country. This huge capital in the national and state savings, particularly during the period of oil boom, increased the avenue for the participation of the foreign construction firms in the Nigerian economy. The return of the country to democracy in 1999 and the need to normalise socio-

economic relationships with many other countries of the world including the United Kingdom, France, the United States, and China also provided opportunities. In this process, the multinational corporations of these countries made further entrance into the country economy, particularly the construction industry (Mudi, Bioku, and Kolawole, 2015). In addition, the increasing debt profile of the country has necessitated that she fulfils some conditionality which includes that construction contracts for which the loans are obtained are handled by multinational companies of the crediting countries or organisations (Stanley et al, 2014; Saka and Olanipekun, 2023; Ogun et, 2014). Inadequate local production of construction machineries and building materials is another factor that has enhanced the domination of the foreign construction firms in the Nigerian Construction Industries. Importation of construction machineries and building materials attracted some of the multinational corporations into Nigeria, particularly since the commencement of the fourth republic (Odediran et al, 2012). The need to use the expertise of the expatriates has been a major factor promoting the participation of the multinational corporations in the Nigerian construction industry since the colonial period. In fact, some local construction companies have always employed the services of foreign civil engineers and experts at different levels of their field, administrative, and managerial operations. Availability of huge capital base is also attributed as among the factors that have provided lead way for the foreign companies in the Nigerian construction industry. While some of them were funded by their home governments, others obtained a huge part of their capital from loans and overdraft from national and international financial institutions such as World Bank and International Monetary Fund (Benjamin and Simon-Ilogho, 2023).

The Costain West Africa PLC is one of the prominent multinational construction companies in Nigeria. It started operation in the country in 1948 and was one of the first few firms that constituted the organised sector of the industry (Abiodun, 2024). It was the first construction company to be listed on the Nigerian Stock Exchange in 1974. Its areas of competency include the construction of residential, commercial, and official buildings, railways, dams, roads, and bridges. It has a Technical Service Agreement with the Costain Group PLC (a company based in the United Kingdom) and has successfully completed numerous construction projects in Nigeria including the 32-storey NECON House in Lagos, and the Rivers State secretariat building. Secondly, Dumez Nigeria is a French multinational corporation and one of the major building and construction companies in Nigeria. It was incorporated as private limited company on 5 May 1958 (dumeznigeria.com). In over six decades of existence in the Nigerian construction industry, the company has successfully prosecuted more than 100 projects at various locations. It constructed the River Niger Bridge at Onitsha between 1964 and 1965 at the cost of 5 million pounds. The company has constructed 4,600 kilometres of roads and highways; 750 bridges and concrete; three airport runways; two dams; a number of dredging works for oil companies in Nigeria; LNG cryogenic tanks, and infrastructure, industrial facilities.

Cappa and D'Alberto Limited is an Italian multinational construction company that has been in operation in Nigeria for more than 90 years (capdal.com). It started operation in 1932 with headquarters at Campbell Street, Lagos Island, Lagos, Nigeria. The company is engaged in various sub-sectors of the construction industry including commercial, industrial, educational, residential, religion, state, and federal government projects. The company has constructed some bank headquarters such as the Standard Chartered Bank in Victoria Island, Lagos; Zenith Bank in Victoria Island, Lagos; Citi Bank Limited in Victoria Island, Lagos; Guarantee Trust Bank Plc in Victoria Island, Lagos; Access Bank Plc in Lekki, Lagos; and First City Monumental Bank Plc in Marina, Lagos. Series of monumental structures such as the Civic Centre in Victoria Island, Lagos; Mike Adenuga Centre in Ikoyi, Lagos; the BUA Towers Lagos; the United Nations Common Premises, Abuja; Mobil House in Victoria Island, Lagos; the Cocoa House in Ibadan; the Tafawa Balewa Square in Lagos Island, Lagos; the National Stadium in Surulere, Lagos; the Afreximbank African Trade Centre in Abuja; and the National Art Theatre in Iganmu, Lagos; the Ikeja City Hall; the Palms Mall Lekki; and many others were prosecuted by the company. The company has also constructed some gigantic religion houses such as the Hunnuani Mosque in Lagos, the Citadel Global Community Church in Oregun, Lagos; Holy Cross Cathedral in Lagos Island, Lagos; and the Church of Assembly in Ikoyi, Lagos. The company was established as a partnership by two young Italian Pietro Carlo Cappa and Viginio D'Alberto. It started venturing into the Nigerian construction industry with little patronage from the Catholic Mission in Lagos offering series of small jobs. It made giant strides when it was awarded the construction of the Kingsway stores in Lagos. In 1991, the company became a public limited company in Nigeria.

The AG Ferrero is another Italian company that has contributed to the development of the Nigeria construction industry. It was established by Mr Antonio Giovanni Ferrero as a business entity under the Names Ordinance (Cap. 195) Form in 1953 (agferrero.com). Subsequently, it was incorporated as a limited liability company, building and civil engineering, and construction outfit under the name A. G. Ferrero & Co. Limited on 28 July 1959. It is headquartered at Makera Road, Kaduna South, Kaduna State (Nigeria) with branches in Abuja, Kano, and Lagos. It became registered with Federal Works Registration Board on 26 August 1982. In its 65 years of practices in the industry, it has completed over 650 projects for more than 38 private and public clientele. It has constructed several roads, bridges, and culverts in various parts of the country. Prominent among the projects executed by the company include the Bornu State Secretariat in Maiduguri; the Jigawa State Secretariat in Dutse; the Ahmadu Bello University Senate Building; the Mallam Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital in Kano; the Unity Bank Building in Abuja; and the NCCE Office Tower and Conference Centre in Abuja.

The Roads Nigeria PLC is a British construction multinational company operating in Nigeria. It was incorporated in 1974. It provides infrastructure construction services and offers civil engineering works including roads, airfields, and dams. It also involves in the sales of construction materials and has its base in Sokoto State, north-western part of the country.

The Israeli construction company, Solel Boneh, is another multinational in the Nigeria construction industry (Azeez, thecable.ng, 2023). It was incorporated in 1967 with some Nigerians having minority shareholdings in the company. The Arab Contractors is a leading multinational company in the country's construction industry. Some of the services rendered by Arab Contractors include public buildings, bridges, roads, tunnels, airports, housing, water and sewage projects, power stations, dams, hospitals, and sports buildings among others.

The foregoing are some of the major multinational companies that have dominated the Nigerian building and construction industry. They have often taken the advantage of technological expertise and equipment to gain big government contracts including highways, airports, flyovers, dams, stadia, water infrastructures, and telecommunication projects among others. Despite the introduction of the Indigenisation Decree in the 1970s, the multinational construction companies have continued to maintain a dominance in Nigeria. Though later comers in the industry, the Chinese multinationals have continued to gain increasing participation in the Nigerian construction industry, particularly since the start of the current fourth republic in Nigeria in 1999. This reinforces the changing patterns of the global economic order.

The Chinese Multinationals in the Nigerian Construction Industry

That the new global economic order is favourable to China and her multinational corporations can be substantiated using various indices such as her economic penetration into many parts of the world, the huge amount of loan she has granted to countries across the world (especially the third world countries), the huge amount of exportation of Chinese products to different parts of the world, and the expansive rate of technology transfer to many places in the world among others. Sequel to this global position, the Chinese multinational companies have maintained a substantive dominance in the Nigerian economy, especially the construction sector of the economy. Certain factors have been responsible for this firm presence and one of these is attributed to the large amount of loans that are given to Nigeria by the Chinese government and the Chinese transnational companies. For the fact that the Chinese government financed many of the infrastructural facilities in Nigeria through grants and loans, Chinese multinationals were awarded the contracts aiding their presence and dominance of that sector of the economy. The Chinese government reserved about US\$30 billion under the China African Development Foundation (CADFUND) to promoting economic cooperation between Africa and China.

Prominent among the Chinese construction companies is the China Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC). CCECC is a state-owned construction company which was established in 1979 and has become one of the largest multinational contracting and construction companies within a space of forty years. In close to 50 years of establishment, the company has established operational branches in several branches in various countries of the world including China, Nigeria, Russian, and the United Arab Emirate (UAE). The major focus of the company is railway construction, though it engages in other aspects of the

construction industry. In Nigeria, it has handled several projects such as the rail link between Lagos and Kano (the two most prominent commercial centres in the country), a \$530 Million Contract Rehabilitation in 1995, Purchase of Locomotion and Rolling Stocks for the Nigerian Railway System in 2003, completion of houses in the games village of the National Stadium in Abuja in 2005, construction of \$16.6 Million Construction of NCC Corporate Headquarters in Abuja. Other major projects handled by the company include the construction of Abuja and Lagos Airports Terminals, the National Assembly Complex, and the Federal Secretariat Complex, various water schemes, and power transmission lines among numerous others (Adaora, 2016).

The China Gezhouba Group Corporation is a Chinese multinational company in the Nigerian energy and construction industries. It is responsible for the construction of the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, the development of the Mambilla Hydroelectric Power Project, and the Abuja Light Rail (David, 2013). The North China Construction Nigeria Limited (NCC) is another major Chinese multinational in the Nigerian Construction Industry. It is a subsidiary of the North China Construction Group Company Limited located in Beijing, China. The mother company was established by the Chinese government as a state-owned and Policy Company with a strong capital and financial base. The subsidiary was established in Nigeria in 1983 to further the implementation of the Chinese global strategy of “going abroad”. Other factors that influenced the establishment of the subsidiary in Nigeria include the prospects of the infrastructural challenges and deficiencies in the country coupled with her status as the biggest economy in Africa. The company has constructed series of infrastructural facilities in Nigeria including roads, highways, waterways, railways, and harbours among others.

Another major Chinese construction company in Nigeria is El-alan Construction Company. It was incorporated in 1982 as a private limited liability company and has been adjudged as one of the fastest growing civil engineering companies in Nigeria (Adaora, 2016). The company’s activities in Nigeria started with renovations and sub-contracting and later went into the construction of different facilities such as residential, commercial, and industrial projects in various parts of country. The China Harbour and Engineering Company has also participated in the Nigerian construction industry. It is a subsidiary of a large Chinese construction company, the China Communication Construction Company. The main focus of the company was in the construction of ports and terminals, coastal and offshore engineering, dredging and reclamation, road and bridge construction, railway and building construction, water treatment and supply, and environmental protection among others. To this extent, the company is involved in the construction of the Lekki Deep Sea Port in Lagos, expansion of Tincan Island Port in Lagos, the construction of Abuja-Kaduna-Zaria-Kano Road, and the construction of the Second Niger Bridge in the southeast of the country. The China Railway Construction Corporation is another major player in the Nigerian construction industry. It was responsible for the construction of the Abuja-Zaria-Kano Railway, the Lagos-Ibadan Railway, and the Itakpe-Ajaokuta-Warri Railway.

The Issues in Chinese Construction Practices in Nigeria

There is no gain saying the fact that the Chinese multinational corporations have contributed positively to the economy of Nigeria. The country’s construction industry has been dominated by Chinese companies since the inauguration of the current fourth republic. In fact, the inaugural president of the dispensation (Olusegun Obasanjo) took many trips to Beijing to reinvigorate the diplomatic and socio-economic relationships with China (Sanubi et al, 2017; Lanre and Ogunnoiki, 2015). The huge presence of the Chinese companies is manifested in the increasing number of projects by the Chinese multinationals and their favourable competitions with the long-existing construction companies from other foreign nations (Table 2.0 below shows some of the metrics for this dominance). For instance, the Chinese companies have maintained the lead in the construction of railways and other large infrastructural facilities in Nigeria during the last three decades (Ayoola and Yusuf, 2023; Ogunbiyi et al, 2018). In 2005, the federal government of Nigeria re-awarded the rehabilitation of the Nigerian railways to the Chinese construction giant, CCECC, after the collapse of the initial arrangement of 1996 due to lack of funding from the Nigerian government. In the new deal, China was to provide the loan for the implementation of the project and this enhanced the fruition of the contract. This is coupled with the fact that China has become one of the largest construction marketers in the world in the recent time (Corkin and Burke, 2007). This is demonstrated in the size and volume of the Chinese construction market and industry where she possesses about 16,000 design and architectural firms; about 11,000 construction companies; and about a million employees across the world in the industry (Sridharam, 2021). The upsurge and conspicuous presence of the Chinese construction companies in Nigeria has been attributed to certain factors which could be explained using certain theories of international economic relations.

Table 2.0: Gross Revenue of Chinese Construction Projects in Nigeria, 2006-2021

Year	Gross Revenue in Million US dollars
2006	1,105
2007	1,388
2008	1,614
2009	2,004
2010	2,930
2011	3,460
2012	4,995
2013	4,274
2014	4,532
2015	3,481

2016	2,613
2017	3,104
2018	4,084
2019	4,596
2020	3,510
2021	4,113

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1321630/gross-annual-revenue-of-chinese-construction-projects-in-nigeria/>

One of the main factors that have promoted the noticeable presence of the Chinese multinational corporations in the Nigerian construction industry is located in the Chinese strategic trade policy which reinforces the unwavering desire to spread economic tentacles to the nooks and crannies of the world. In a highly interdependent and competitive global setting, advanced economies have adopted the principles of the strategic trade policy theory in the process of shifting profit from foreign to national corporations. The United States, Japan, European Union and China are leading countries in the adoption of the different shades of strategic trade policies. For instance, the Japanese government supported the Japanese firms to foreground their increasing penetration and threatening of American domestic industrial and business community through the Japanisation of America strategic trade policy. In the same vein, the United States targeted the European Union markets under the strategic trade policy of Yankee Imperialism. As a result of the Chinese “Going Out” Strategic Policy, the government has consistently provided the necessary funds for the Chinese construction companies to compete in the global economies including Nigeria. In this regard, most of the funds used by the Chinese companies for construction in Nigeria have come from the China Exim Bank which was initiated by the Chinese government to support Chinese industries and promote export and import businesses. The bank has provided the companies with enormous loans and overdraft for the execution of various capital intensive construction projects in Nigeria (Akinrinde, 2020; Kevin, 2021). The “Going Out” Strategy was designed to enable China to gain increased access to international market, raw materials, and foreign exchange; a strategy which has reflected in the Chinese presence in the Nigerian construction industry. The availability of funds for the Chinese companies assisted them to finance large construction projects which provided opportunities for them to even bid lower than their local and multinational counterparts. This made them to win giant contracts from both the governments and private entities in Nigeria (Chen, 2020; Seteolu and Oshodi, 2018).

Another factor which has promoted the conspicuous presence of Chinese multinationals in the Nigerian construction industry is the enormous amount of loan that the Chinese government has often offered the Nigerian governments, both at state and federal levels. In line with the

theory of economic liberalism or the liberal theory of international economic relations which promotes the limitation of barriers and excessive protection of local economies through policies such as mercantilism, nationalisation, and indigenisation, the fourth republic Nigeria has leaned very much towards allowing massive participation of multinationals in the economy. The adoption of liberal economic principles in Nigeria since the era of SAP in the 1980s has led to the country's engagement with privatisation, commercialisation, and deregulation policies which have enhanced the participation of multinationals in the economy (Adejumo, 2011). To this extent, all post-military era presidents of the country engaged in numerous foreign trips in order to attract foreign direct investments to the country (Dauda, 2007). This does not only promote liberalism but also inhibits free trade and competition; though it has limitations such as leading to dominance and accommodation of poverty and inequality. Therefore, the liberal economic posture has attracted many multinational construction companies from many countries such as Italy, France, Germany, Israel, Egypt, Britain, and China. The Chinese companies have exploited the avenue of loans offered by their home countries to maintain dominance in the Nigerian construction industry. Nigerian governments have continued to patronise Chinese loans for infrastructural development. With the offer of unconditional and low interest loans, China provided alternatives to the high interest loans that are offered by the Western firms. The situation has been a kind of win-win scenario for both countries. While the loans have promoted infrastructural development in Nigeria, the Chinese multinational firms have exploited the avenue to gain dominance in the construction industry fulfilling parts of the strategic global presence agenda of China. It is natural that multinationals of the crediting country are awarded the infrastructural construction contracts. However, some have criticised the Chinese loans offered to Nigeria on the basis that it was an instrument for debt trap diplomacy (Akinrinde, 2011). They argued that the loans that were granted were intentionally and strategically to subjugate the larger part of the Nigerian economy in the hands of the Chinese. Some even sprouted that Nigeria's future had been mortgaged to China owing to the huge amount of loans that China has granted Nigeria. However, it should be noted that the Sino-Nigerian socio-economic relations initially have been influenced by south-south collaborations where both were expected to derive mutual benefits from trade relations.

Another theory that could be used in explaining the presence of Chinese multinational corporations in the Nigerian economy and particularly the construction industry is the comparative advantage theory which was projected by the liberal school of economics including David Ricardo. In this sense, many of the Chinese construction companies in Nigeria are engaged in the business of exploration and exportation of certain natural and mineral resources which are advantageously endowed to earn consistent and reasonable amount of foreign exchange that add up to their capital bases. While many indigenous local contractors in the industry usually find it difficult to obtain foreign exchange in purchasing the needed equipment, materials and paying for expatriates, the Chinese companies have always obtained foreign exchange due to diversification and involvement in the exportation of raw materials from

Nigeria. In addition, the huge advantage of technical and scientific knowledge necessary in the construction industry that is endowed the Chinese has been of advantage, while the labourers that needed for the physical implementation of the construction works are provided from the teaming Nigerian populations. This also explains the role of the factors proportion theory which stipulates that the availability of some factors of production in a particular area is driving force for furthering economic interrelationships.

The period between 1994 and 1998 was when Nigeria restrained in international political and diplomatic relations due to massive human rights infringements from the junta regime (Odediran, 2012; Ogunmbode et al, 2017). Political and economic sanctions were imposed on the country by the western nations including the United States, Britain, France, Germany and others turning the country into a state of pariah. The participations of the multinational corporations from these countries in the Nigerian economy (the construction industry inclusive) also dwindled drastically. This scenario strengthened the activities of Chinese firms in the Nigerian construction industry (although this was supposed to be the period Nigeria should have experimented with inward development strategy in the like of the *Sakoku* practice in Japan). For instance, it was during the period that CCECC got its major contract in Nigeria; the rehabilitation of Nigeria railway at \$528 million (Bukarambe, 2005; Chen, 2018). Nigeria recognised the Chinese role in mitigating socio-economic challenges that accompanied the sanctions that were imposed by developing closer economic and diplomatic ties with China.

China's status as the world second largest economy and her tremendous economic expansion into Africa is another contributory factor. With a huge capital base and foreign reserve coupled with her worldview of global presence and dominance, China has penetrated virtually all aspects of African economy. On the other hand, Nigeria remains the largest economy (market) in Africa with a vast deficiency in both social and economic infrastructure. Therefore, the economic capacity and global economic view of China marries that of Nigeria's needs for increasing integration in the global economy and infrastructural facilities for socio-economic transformation. The situation was consolidated with the "Look East" policy that was prevalent in Africa and adopted in Nigeria where African countries directed their attentions towards seeking aids, grants, and loans from China against their former colonial masters in the West.

A number of criticisms have been raised against Chinese construction companies in Nigeria. Apart from the normal and general allegations against multinational corporations in the host country such as capital flight, economic dominance, and suppression of indigenous initiatives and industries, the Chinese firms have been found wanting in some specific areas. Poor treatment of Nigerians who are recruited as labourers has been identified. This is in terms of remuneration and placement where many of them were not only badly compensated but restricted from certain positions. While glass ceiling is maintained for Nigerians regardless of their qualifications and/or expertise, Chinese expatriates in the Nigerian construction industry with lesser qualifications are not only placed above their Nigerian counterparts but are remunerated in foreign currencies. This is why some scholars and observers have described the nature of the

Chinese involvement and engagement with their workers in the Nigerian construction industry as neo-colonial and imperialistic because it represents the form of labour relations that were obtainable during the colonial era and one of the factors that drove the nationalist struggles in the country. Like the colonial period, some Chinese staff still beat workers with horse-whip for alleged negligence of duty in Nigeria (Ofosu and Sarpong, 2022; Oya, 2019; business-humanrights.com). Worst still, many of the Nigerian workers are placed on temporary employment (popularly known as casualization of workers) against international standard and dictates of international labour law and the principles of the international labour organisation. In this form of engagement, the casual workers perform their duties under uncertain conditions such as the absence of fringe benefits and the possibility of being laid-off prior to their first wage or salary (the salary is often paltry without necessary allowances). In addition, the workers are subjected to long hours of work. The Chinese multinational construction firms have often hinged upon the prevailing rate of unemployment in Nigeria which guarantees the presence of cheap labour to exploit Nigerian workers.

Criticisms have also been levelled against the activities of the Chinese multinational construction companies in Nigeria. One of these is from the angle of indirectly promoting insecurity and banditry in the country. The spate of insecurity has increased significantly in Nigeria in the last two decades leading to loss of numerous lives, destruction of properties, and disruption of general socio-economic development of the country. A number of factors have been ascribed as promoting the seemingly unending security challenges in the country. Many of the terrorist and banditry groups have resulted to kidnapping and ransom taking as means of generating funds for their nefarious activities. In the northern part of the country, some communities were ransacked and held hostage by the terrorists and were asked to pay tributes either in kind or cash. In addition to this, eminent persons and expatriates were intermittently kidnapped for ransom taking. Foreign construction engineers including those from China were targeted for ransom taking particularly because of the payment in hard currencies. In actual essence, the activities of the bandits and terrorists have often obstructed smooth operations of the construction companies making many of them to result to paying a sort of “royalty” to the criminals before site operations (Ayeni, 2024; Sippy, 2023; Iheamnachor, 2021). Many Chinese construction companies have resulted to making this form of payment out of desperation to execute assigned construction works. This has enhanced the criminal activities of the bandits and added to the cost of the projects executed.

The Chinese firms have been severally accused of delivering substandard jobs in Nigeria. Some of the roads constructed by Chinese firms hardly stand the test of time as they are easily washed away by rain. They have been accused and caught culpable of sharp practices such as using clay where laterite was supposed to be used (Osondu-Oti, 2016; Olanrewaju and Abduaziz, 2015; Alutu, 2007; Babatunde and Low, 2013). In this regard, they have connived with corrupt officers of the ministry of works and other agencies to deliver substandard projects at state and federal levels. The Nigerian populace still have regard and preference for the

works constructed by Julius Berger Nigeria Plc because of the durability test they have passed. In addition, many of the Chinese construction firms have been accused of prolonging project execution period though they have often attributed this to the inability of their clients to provide funds in due course. For instance, the Lagos-Badagry Expressway which is being constructed by CCECC has lasted for more than 20 years. Also, there have been allegations of over-invoicing where the firms connived with officers of the ministries and parastatals to increase the cost of projects (Obiowo, 2024).

Conclusions

The birth of the fourth republic in Nigeria coincided with an era where the Chinese People's Republic had become more determined at penetrating economies and expanding her global economic dominance. With her rapidly rising economic profile, expanding capital base, and the lead in the areas of scientific and technological innovations, China became a reliable match for Nigeria which had just bid farewell to authoritarian military regime dispensation and was battling socio-economic decadence particularly infrastructural deficiencies. The study has recounted the history of the Nigerian construction industry and the important roles played by the Chinese construction companies since 1999. Exploring the advantages offered by the status of China in the contemporary global economy and finance, the Chinese multinational corporations have competed favourably in the Nigeria construction industry. They have contributed to the development of infrastructural facilities and creation of employment opportunities in Nigeria. On the other hand, the Chinese construction firms have engaged in some unhealthy practices in Nigeria. From the study, it is deduced that Nigeria has got potentials for massive investment in the construction industry and the needed population for the workforce. It is therefore recommended that the Nigerian governments should design mechanism towards promoting knowledge and technology transfer from China where Nigerian nationals could closely monitor the Chinese expatriates in the industry. Local manufacturing of building equipment and materials, and avoidance of over-reliance on Chinese loans for capital projects would also enhance local content and participation of Nigerians in the industry with an overall economic advantage.

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