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Socio-Historic Contexts of Sino-Nigerian Relations in Infrastructure Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The emergence of Sino-Nigerian relations in the Nigerian economy, can be attributed to the Military Government that strategically brought the Chinese closer to Nigeria for economic transformation. This action is intended to fill the gap created by the isolation of the country by the United States and her Western allies as a result of political crisis in Nigeria especially in 1990's. Consequently, despite the cooperation from China, through Sino-Nigerian partnership, there is uncertainty surrounding the level of relations between the two countries in terms of infrastructure development. This is due largely to the antecedent of the Chinese economic interactions in some countries in Africa where most of the benefits were more of advantages to China. The study assessed the context of transportation diplomacy between China and Nigeria, and also examined the enthusiasm behind the Sino-Nigerian partnership in transportation infrastructure modernization in Nigeria. The study engaged descriptive research design through qualitative approach, which relied on interviews and secondary data. The study concluded that Sino-Nigerian relations is laudable, the sustainability outcomes of the relationship remain a major concern because of historical antecedents of relationship termination between the two countries. The study also discovered that of a lack of transparency on the part of the Nigerian government, based on the fact that highly placed Nigerian officials from successive governments to the present governments have no first-hand knowledge of the terms and conditions of China-Nigeria relations, especially in railway-related matters. Although, the study identified that the Sino-Nigerian relationship has yielded infrastructural developments with special focus on railway projects, however, this has not translated into human development in terms of job creation and improved standard of living. The study, therefore, recommends that there is need deliberate policy safeguards, mutual trust, and lessons drawn from past experiences to ensure continuity, accountability, and sustainable development outcomes.

Keywords: Infrastructure development, Rail Transportation, Socio-historic Contexts, Sino-Nigerian, Relations,

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Introduction

Nigeria and China are two countries with similarities with regards to their population size, but at different spectrums of development, and have established bilateral and diplomatic ties, with economic interests that yields benefits in trade, infrastructure and development. Historically, China first had contact with Nigeria through its delegate in 1960 at the Independence celebration, and proposed diplomatic relationship to Nigeria on infrastructure and economic development in 1964 which Nigeria refused, but later accepted in 1970 after China decided to support the Nigerian government post-civil war, and this led to the bilateral relationship between the two countries. This bilateral interaction began officially on February 10th, 1971, while China set up its embassy in Lagos on 6th April, 1971 (Nwala & Enyindah, 2023; Idrees et al., 2024).

The Sino-Nigerian relations in the Nigerian economy during the Military Government was strategic to revitalize Nigeria for economic transformation after the civil war and fill the gap created by the isolation of the country by the United States and its Western allies as a result of the political crisis in Nigeria. However, this relationship has yielded dividends in terms of trade, investments and most importantly, infrastructure. For instance, Nigerian market cities now sell Chinese products such as electronics, phones, textiles computers and among other items. On infrastructure, the partnership with the Chinese has impacted rail rehabilitation in Nigeria. Subsequently, as a result of the relations between the two countries, the railway rehabilitation contract was awarded to the Chinese state firm, China Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC). The execution of that contract agreement was later abandoned as a result of the non-disbursement of funds and inadequate funding on the part of the Nigerian government (Udeala, 2010; Osondu-Oti, 2016). Likewise, China designed, funded and built the Nigeria's communications satellite (Nwachukwu, 2017). In the recent economic reform, Nigeria's relations with China are mainly to bridge the gap in its infrastructure deficit, and were largely framed by the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) process, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), mainly to assist in the development of Nigeria's infrastructure deficit. The relationship is mainly based on infrastructure development in which about \$5 billion was invested by China through a loan from Chinese Exim-Bank in Nigeria to transform its economy, especially in the areas of resuscitating and modernizing the railway infrastructure in Nigeria.

Studies have shown that renewed progress in Sino-Nigerian relations was further cemented with the launch of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, a programme designed to boost economic and social development for Africa, which provided Nigeria with an important role. The FOCAC programme enabled that financial support of US\$60 billion was pledged to the African continent as part of a three-year (2016-2019) plan of China for Africa economic development (Utomi, 2008; Ehizuelen, 2017). Importantly, Sino-Nigerian relations in Nigeria infrastructure development is Nigerian government intentions of transforming the nation's economy via infrastructure development, especially through the Chinese rail infrastructure

development in Nigeria. Between the year 2001 and 2012, Nigeria signed numerous memoranda of understanding and contracts with Chinese companies either bilaterally or under the FOCAC. The central idea of these contracts was a resource-for-infrastructure framework, with special focus on rehabilitation of ports, refineries, and railways in exchange for Nigerian oil blocks. A case in point is the awarding of the modernization railway projects by the Nigerian government to Chinese companies in the years 1997, 2001, 2006, and 2010. Similarly, studies affirmed that Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on the establishment of a strategic partnership was signed between Nigeria and China in 2006 where natural resources for infrastructure development became the key defining component of the agreement (Taylor, 2007; Mthembu-Salter, 2009; Ajah & Onuoha, 2024).

Other infrastructures that were developed because of the bilateral relationship between the two governments such as the Lekki Deep Seaport in 2007, which was re-awarded in 2012 and the Abuja Light Rail project, and capital projects covered under the Belt Road Initiative. However, these projects suffered delays due to poor implementation, lack of funding from creditors and issues of policy inconsistency of successive governments as well as poor implementation. In 2013, the launch of the Belt Road Initiative under President Xi Jinping's government has China has increased its overseas infrastructure development funding. The implementation of BRI has provided Nigeria and other developing countries, with infrastructure funding. From 2013 to 2022, Nigeria have signed numerous BRI loan contracts, for the development of port and railway infrastructure, during which period, the Export–Import Bank of China and the China Development Bank (CDB) has disbursed over 3.1 billion dollars' worth of infrastructure loans to Nigeria. Moreover, most (more than 95%) of the contracts on infrastructure have been largely awarded to Chinese state-owned construction companies, such as China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) and China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC), for the construction and rehabilitation of ports and railways in Nigeria (Ajah & Onuoha, 2024; Nwachukwu, 2017).

Several studies (Wang, Mao & Gou, 2014; Hurley, Morris & Portelance, 2018; Yunnan, 2018) have been on Chinese involvement in Nigeria and African infrastructural development and transportation refurbishment. A consensus of these studies is of the position that China's infrastructural development in Africa is controversial, and more of her own economic interest. However, these studies paid little attention to the socio-historic context of Sino-Nigerian economic relations in terms of transportation infrastructural development for long-term national development in Nigeria. Against this background, the paper assessed the context of transportation diplomacy that existed between China and Nigeria, and, examined the enthusiasm behind the Sino-Nigerian partnership in the transportation sector in Nigeria.

Consequently, despite the cooperation from China, through infrastructure development, there is uncertainty surrounding the level of economic relations between the two countries. This is due largely to the antecedent of the Chinese economic interactions in countries like Djibouti, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda, where most of the benefits were of advantageous to China than the

host countries. Thus, a Similar method is likely to be adopted on the transportation infrastructure in Nigeria. This implies that Chinese interest in the Sino-Nigerian partnership deserves special scrutiny, and as a matter of fact, questions about what China stands to gain in Nigerian investment require a critical standpoint. It is important to note that personal interest precedes the choice of any human social relations. In essence, Chinese interest in infrastructural development in Nigeria via investment in rail infrastructure modernization could be a platform for China to expropriate resources in Nigeria for the development of the Chinese economy. However, this may significantly impact on the interest of Nigeria, which aimed at achieving economic growth through the relationship with China in terms of infrastructure development. As a matter of fact, the agreement between the two countries should consider the benefit accrued to each party to maintain equilibrium in social relations.

Literature Review

Bukarambe, (2005) and Moghalu (2007) have shown that since the establishment of bilateral diplomatic links in early 1971, there has been a substantial expansion of Chinese exports, essentially conditioned by the demand of the economy and requirements to keep up economic growth. The relationship between the two countries further developed in the 21st century. In 2000, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation was established under the agreement between China and Nigeria, and by the year 2002, an agreement was signed to establish the Nigerian Trade Office in China, which took effect in 2006 which led to the creation the Nigeria-China investment forum intending to promote trade, technology, infrastructure, manufacturing, agriculture, investment, job creation, and improved livelihoods (Opusunju et al., 2020, Chukwudozie, 2025).

Furthermore, in 2006, China signed the first strategic partnership Memorandum of Understanding for trade promotion center and investment development in Nigeria, likewise, there was the inauguration of the first railway in Nigeria which ran from Abuja to Kaduna railway line as part of the country's initiative towards railway renovation and develop alternative to roadways in Nigeria. Also, Chinese infrastructural development includes the signing of the Lekki Port Lagos Free Trade Zone Enterprise Limited which is responsible for the Lekki Deep Water Port, and is part of the concession agreement with the Nigeria Ports Authority (NPA).

Still on infrastructure, Nigeria has received over \$3.1billion in infrastructure loans from the China Development Bank, with more than 95% of the building contracts of the ports and railroads going to Chinese state-owned construction firms, such as China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) and China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) (Ajah & Onuoha, 2024). China has increased its investment for infrastructure development, while Nigeria on the other hand contributes less but benefit from the infrastructure and implementation of this plan and also the access infrastructural funds, which has led the country to sign several BRI credit facilities and loan agreements such as the \$500million contract for the Abuja Light Rail Project with an \$100million contract for the establishment of four airport terminals (Lagos, Kano, Abuja

and Port Harcourt) throughout, yet this project initiated in Nigeria with China's investment has placed Nigeria under a loan of \$1.5 billion for project execution in 2025 (Chukwudozie, 2025).

China and Nigeria's railway investment record shows several major joint railway projects across the country, with China consistently contributing the larger share of funding. For the Abuja–Kaduna railway line, China invested \$1.5 billion, while Nigeria contributed \$500 million, covering a distance of 186.5 km. The Kaduna–Kano line received \$254.76 million from China and \$917 million from Nigeria for 203 km of rail. The Port Harcourt–Maiduguri project is one of the largest, with China providing \$2.55 billion and Nigeria \$450 million, spanning 1,443 km. For the Ibadan–Kano line, China invested \$3.975 billion, compared to Nigeria's \$795 million, covering 2,733 km. The Lagos–Calabar coastal rail received \$1.3 billion from China and \$200 million from Nigeria for 1,400 km. On the Lagos–Ibadan route, China contributed \$1.6 billion, while Nigeria added \$182 million for 156 km. Lastly, the Abuja–Warri rail line saw China investing \$2.925 billion and Nigeria \$390 million, covering a route of 549.2 km.

Similarly, Vivienne (2005) revealed that presently, China is building a 5 billion dollar free trade zone in Nigeria's commercial capital, Lagos, with a total of 16500 hectares of land bordered by the Atlantic Ocean. Similarly, it has been argued in the literature that a trade imbalance exists in the relationship between China and Nigeria. This is due to the fact that China's trade relation with Nigeria is perceived to be exploitative and detrimental to Nigeria (Ogunsanwo, 2008). Conversely, it has been argued in some quarters that the relationship between China and African states depicts new colonialism in Africa: Chinese were alleged to be perpetrating exploitation without transparency or good corporate citizenship (Chintu & Williamson, 2013; Zelesa, 2014).

In a study on understanding the emerging relationship between China and Africa with reference to Nigeria, it was revealed that China's total investment in Nigeria rose to US\$15 billion, which cut across communication technology, road development, infrastructure development, and construction. Importantly, China invested over \$3 billion in economic growth in areas like rail transportation, housing infrastructure, agriculture, power-sector development, and solid minerals in Nigeria. In a bid to strengthen and formalize the trade relations, Nigeria and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding for investment in Mambilla hydro-electric project, railways, refineries, and agri-industrialization. Similarly, in November 2014, China signed a contract for a \$12 billion Nigeria railway project. Also, Nigeria and China signed a whopping \$23 billion deal for three refineries in Bayelsa, Kogi, and Lagos states on September 15, 2016. In all, Chinese investment in Nigeria has reached over \$80 billion (Kimairis, 2016). It was also argued by Ehizuelen (2017) that the Lekki free trade zone in the Western part of Nigeria made China-Nigeria economic relations possible as the zone possesses some economic significance.

In context, Chinese investment in infrastructure development in Africa might be considered laudable due to the fact that such huge investment may increase national spending and opportunities for indigenous people in Africa. Consequently, this relationship is surrounded by

uncertainty as it has been perceived as skewed in the literature. Thus, the investment has not reflected state improvement in Nigeria, especially on issues relating to physical infrastructure and economic development. Therefore, it seems something is wrong somewhere, or the relationship is marked with unequal benefits. Similarly, the Nigerian government seems to be enjoying the unhealthy relationship that characterized Sino-Nigerian infrastructure development, which is advantageous to China at the detriment of Nigeria economic development. This unwholesome situation continues unabated without any cogent measures by the Nigerian government to review the relationship.

In the context of China's strategic interest and economic growth in Nigeria, Vines, Lillian, Markus, and Indira (2009) asserted that China's strategy of gaining access into African markets for its own benefit is pervasive in Nigeria's economy. This was done through establishing China-Nigeria relations, which allowed China to exchange of small aid package, such as education and trade, for the completion of its infrastructure deficiency in Nigeria, and also, to access Nigeria's oil sector with ease, where many oil blocks were attached to China for the completion of Nigeria's infrastructure. Studies have shown that Africa is a new and interesting market with excellent conditions for the Chinese, with its many potential customers for cheap Chinese products. Thus, export from Africa to China is based on natural resources, with about 25% of Chinese oil imports from Africa, with its major sources being in Sudan, Angola, Nigeria, and Chad (Van de Looy, 2009; Vines, Lillian, Markus & Indira, 2009; Verma, 2017). Other schemes include cultural integration where China has signed a reciprocal establishment of cultural centers agreement with Nigeria to establish the Confucius Institute in 2012 at the University of Lagos and Nnamdi Azikiwe University. This act has been reciprocated in 2013, with the establishment of the Nigerian cultural center in Beijing to serve topromotion Nigerian arts and culture in China, to improve cultural interaction and understanding between the two countries (Chukwudozie, 2025)

More importantly, Chinese intervention in African infrastructure development was timely for her economic development. It is believed such gestures will facilitate easy connectivity of rural communities to the urban centres, and open up inter-countries in terms of economic possibilities. However, there have been questions on the sustainability of the railway projects embarked upon by the Chinese in Africa. This is more pronounced on issues of increasing debt portfolio, skill transfers, funding, and, more importantly, a sustainable regulatory framework towards long-term management of the railway transportation sub-sectors in Africa. Omondi (2017) contended that the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) project in Kenya is one of the big infrastructure projects handled by the Chinese company in Africa. This project was financed largely through Chinese loans, and by far the most strategic and politically salient investment, with Mombasa ports carrying 22 million tons of cargo in 2013 at a snail's pace. In contrast, it was affirmed that China's infrastructure project in Kenya has been laced with controversies as Kenya's debt level rises as a result of the rail project.

In Djibouti, Downs & Becker (2017) contended that China, through Exim-Bank, has provided nearly 1.4 billion dollars of funding for Djibouti's major infrastructure investment projects, while the first phase of Uganda Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) project has been fully funded with a Chinese loan amounting to 2.8 billion dollars. Also, the remaining three phases of Uganda SGR are expected to be completed by the end of 2020 at a tune of 12.8 billion through China's Exim-bank (Musisi, 2017). Also, in Angola, China gave Angola preferential credit for infrastructural development through the Export-Import Bank of China and the China Development Bank, which in turn is guaranteed with oil. Xinhua (2017) affirmed that the 1,344-kilometer railway project spanning Angola was built and completed, and put into operation in February 2015 by China Railway Construction Corporation Limited, which was the fastest traveling speed in Angola, and serves as a significant economic corridor in the country. Findings (Xinhua, 2017; Renwick, Gu & Gong, 2018) have shown that infrastructure capacity building features prominently in Ethiopia's bilateral development relationship with China, which is characterized by a number of high-profile infrastructural projects funded by Chinese investment. This includes about 3.4 billion dollars spent on the Addis Ababa urban rail project. The infrastructure development in Ethiopia was made possible through a loan from the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), which financed 60% of the cost, while the balance of the project was covered by the Ethiopian Government.

Theoretical Explanation

The dependency theory was developed by Raul Prebisch, an Argentine economist who through his various works propounded the theory in 1950s and 1960s, but the theory gained prominence in 1960s and 1970s. At first, he worked on the core periphery model, which was later expounded to become the dependency theory. The theory also was a counter to the postulations of the modernization theory. The basic tenets of the dependency theory posits that the developed countries exploit developing countries and thus make them economically reliant for infrastructure, capital, technology and finished goods. The theory explains that the growth and development of the Third World countries is determined by the developed countries. Infact, the theory further posits that economic dependence, poor standards of living, high birth rates, poverty, poor governance are common features of the developing economies while high industrial activity, high standard of living, high income, high GDP and high life expectancy rate are the characteristics of developed economies. The third world countries are also The Global south which are countries that are economically disadvantaged in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Oceania, of which Nigeria is a member

The theory of dependency as it applies to Sino-Nigeria diplomatic relationship clearly explains that Nigeria has been dependent on China for infrastructure funding, loans, investments and other framework projects and that have have resulted in reduced ability of the country to oversee its development and economic sustainability. In Sino-Nigeria ties, the theory frames China as a rising core power extracting Nigeria's oil and resources through loans-for-infrastructure deals, mirroring unequal exchange as Nigeria exports crude oil while importing Chinese manufactured goods and substandard products.

However, the trade imbalances benefits China while Nigeria bear the costs in importation as it undermine industrial development, debts traps, neocolonial control over infrastructure like railways and ports, and limited technology transfer or local job creation. This theory posits that developing economies should reduce reliance on developed countries through the adoption of import-substitution industrialization to promote local production of consumer goods while rejecting export-oriented industrialization as a means of economic development. Moreover, the theory has been criticized because it refutes the possibility of mutual benefits in infrastructure amid Western alternatives.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative design and was carried out in Oyo and Lagos states, and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria. The areas were selected for the study using a purposive sampling technique based on the fact that the Sino-Nigerian railway infrastructure was currently being executed in these areas. The data were sourced through primary and secondary data sources. The interview sessions were conducted for 20 participants [Principal Officers of Nigeria Railway Corporation (NRC) and Officials of the Ministry of Transportation in charge of the Railway sub-sector) through purposive sampling technique in Abuja (Federal Capital Territory), Lagos, and Oyo States, totalling 20 participants. Secondary materials were sourced from relevant published journals, the internet, and research books related to the focus of the study. The participants were limited in number largely due to the sensitive nature of the study, data management constraints, and the unavailability of the participants, which made it not possible to use a large sample for the study. The data collected were subjected to content analysis using a thematic approach. Interview transcripts were read and reread carefully to gain a general familiarity with the participants' narratives. Next, codes/nodes were generated using a deductive approach. This involves generating codes/nodes from the transcripts in line with the study objectives. Ethical considerations were assured in the study in terms of verbal consent from the participants, voluntary participation, and the mandate that no participants come to any harm as a result of their participation in the study.

Findings

Findings were thematically presented in line with the focus of the paper and discussed with previous findings.

China -Nigeria Relations: Historical Context of Transportation Diplomacy

Findings indicated that China's level of economic relations with Nigeria, which is one of its biggest trading partners in Africa and globally, dates back over a decade, where partnership, mutual benefit, and cooperation were the major defining components of the relations between the two countries. As expounded by Ogunsanwo, Nigeria commenced diplomatic relations with China in 1971, but it took a year (1972) for the Nigerian delegation led by top government officials to sign an open-ended agreement with China in Beijing. He stated:

Nigeria and China have been enjoying cordial relations since the bilateral relations agreement was signed in 1972. The agreement was based on economic, technical, and trade cooperation. After the agreement was signed, high-profile Nigerians, including

General Yakubu Gowon, visited China to seal the deal between the two countries (Ogunsanwo, 2008:14).

Thus, the relationship was further strengthened as a result of a conflict of interest that arose between the Nigerian military government and the Western world. This relationship was also explained by the renowned political economist Pat Utomi, who described the relationship between Nigeria and China as diplomatic. According to him:

There were visits to Nigeria by the Chinese leaders, while Nigerian leaders also visited China. The essence of the visitation is to sign several protocols and agreements related to trade relations. As a matter of fact, the volume of trade between Nigeria and China continued to grow at a low level until rapid growth transformed China into the second largest importer of crude oil in the world. Nigeria, as one of the countries blessed with oil, became attractive to the Chinese. China secured several contracts with Nigeria, exchanging oil for low-interest loans and targeted development projects. As of 1996, the volume of trade had increased to 8.6 billion compared to 1.3 billion naira in 1990. Most of this growth was attributed to the oil sector (Utomi, 2011:40).

The breakdown in relations with the Western world enables the military government in Nigeria to look East, and especially, seek China's assistance in salvaging the Nigerian economy in terms of railway transportation revival, which has progressively deteriorated due to a lack of funds. One of the participants, a government official, contends that although the relations between both countries in transportation infrastructure development were later abandoned, it was during the current administration in Nigeria that Sino-Nigerian relations, especially in the rail transportation sector, started progressing faster through rail infrastructure modernization, which has a multiplier effect on trade and youth employment. He reiterated further that:

Previous and current engagement of China with Nigeria has been of help to the Nigerian economy, especially in the transportation sector. For instance, the financial assistance received from China can be seen in the construction of the Abuja-Kaduna SGR lines, which has helped the Nigerian economy positively. Also, it has also aided in the provision of employment for unemployed youth, especially with the on-going Lagos-Ibadan SGR line handled by China CCECC, which has provided mass employment to Nigerians (IDI, Male, 58years, Principal Officer, NRC, Lagos).

Relatedly, as reported by Mthembu-Salter (2013), China capitalized on the political instability in Nigeria to extend its relationship with Nigeria, which had become a pariah nation during this period. The reason for China's interest in the Sino-Nigerian partnership is to emerge as an economic superpower in the world. He stated thus:

China was emerging as an economic power when Nigeria was thrown into a political crisis in 1994. The regime of General Sanni Abacha improved on Sino-Nigerian economic relations. The economic relations also led to the establishment of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Nigeria in 1994. The China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) won US\$529 million contract to rehabilitate Nigeria's railway system in 1995,

and of course Premier of the China State Council, Li Ping, visited Nigeria in 1997 on signed protocols for power generation, steel, and oil (Mthembu-Salter, 2013:6).

These results show that Nigeria-Chinese relations date back to the 1970s, but from the look of things, they did not yield much fruit because they were not sustained. However, the recent Sino-Nigerian partnership shows some promise of improving Nigerian development, which is yet to be seen as far as the paper is concerned. The Socio-historical context of Sino-Nigerian partnership in the railway sector has brought to the fore the issue of lack of sustainability, which looks as if it has become part of the sociology of Nigerian society and part of our political economy.

Findings further showed that Sino-Nigerian relations have been of benefit to the Nigerian economy because of historical and embedded cordial relations between China and Nigeria. Meanwhile, Mthembu-Salter (2013) also emphasizes the prospect inherent in relating with China. He pointed out that the essence of a relationship is to ensure self-benefits since the guiding principle of social relations is self-interest. He believed that for Nigeria to enter into trade relations with China, it should ensure elements of inclusive growth for both parties. According to him:

The nation enters into relationships with one another because of the expected mutual benefits. Therefore, Sino-Nigerian investment relations have a tendency to yield many opportunities for both countries. Some of the benefits of investment relations to Nigeria include: availability of funds, improvement of the country's infrastructure development, and affordability of imports from China. In all, with all these benefits, particularly the availability of funds, the Chinese have been of help (Mthembu-Salter, 2013:11-23).

It was also argued that the cordial relations that existed between both countries have enabled the Nigerian government to insert local content and skills transfer to the agreements reached with China on railway infrastructure development. The Principal Officer of the Ministry of Transportation in Nigeria acknowledges further that:

Previous and current agreements between China and Nigeria have been of good help to the Nigerian economy because of the cordial bilateral relationship Nigeria has with China. The loan from China is a concessionary loan with a very low interest rate, unlike the commercial loan from other foreign partners, which is attached with conditions. The agreement we had with China has allowed us to insert a local content and skill transfers clause into the agreement with the Chinese (KII, Male, 49years, Principal Rail Officer, Min. of Transportation, Abuja FCT).

These assertions are indications that China's renewed interest in Nigeria's transportation sub-sector is a shift away from the Western conventional model of aid relations to partnership relations through infrastructure financing with Nigeria. Apparently, it is an indication that the Nigerian government sees the loan from China as highly beneficial, with little interest, and the insertion of local content as part of the partnership package. This local content becomes very important for the railway infrastructure development as it depicts sustainability.

Conversely, findings indicated that Sino-Nigerian economic relations are beyond government agencies or MDAs but strictly between the Nigerian government and China. Thus, the Principal Officer of Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC) contends that the terms and conditions of the Sino-Nigerian relations, especially in railway transportation, were within the confines of the two governments. It is believed that Sino-Nigerian relations in the transportation sector play a vital role in the formulation of the Nigerian government's 25-year transportation plan, approved in 2002 for a systematic and modern railway development in the country:

The previous agreement entered into by China-Nigeria on the Nigerian economy is between the FGN and the Chinese. This is not between the NRC and the CCECC, but FG brought the Chinese to the country...We know the Government has a 25-year transportation plan, but we (NRC) did not know the terms and conditions of the Nigeria and China relations (IDI, Male, 54years, Principal Officer, NRC, Ibadan).

To substantiate this view, Egbula and Zheng affirmed that the diplomatic relations between Nigeria and China are overwhelmed with several protocols and agreements that exist between the governments of the two countries, with little knowledge of the rules of engagement available to various designated agencies in Nigeria. Egbula and Zheng note that:

All the governments in Nigeria, since civilian administration took over, except former president Yaradua have reaffirmed the friendship between Nigeria and China, and it has been agreed that there will be increased involvement of Chinese enterprises in railway and other infrastructural improvement and economic development in Nigeria, which is classified within the Nigerian government's purview (Egbula & Zheng, 2011:3-11).

These responses serve as an indication of a lack of transparency on the part of the Nigerian government, based on the fact that highly placed Nigerian officials from successive governments to the present governments have no first-hand knowledge of the terms and conditions of China-Nigeria relations, especially in railway-related matters. Apparently, this is a reflection of the political economy of the country in which the government is not transparent in its approach to the people. By implication, if these officials in charge of railway infrastructure management lack access to first-hand information on the details of the relationship, how will the generality of Nigerians know? This knowledge is essential to the generality of Nigerians and transparency in terms of foreign agreements that border on public resources with foreign countries.

Underlying motives of the Sino-Nigerian partnership in the transportation sector in Nigeria

The insights from interview sessions confirmed that infrastructure connectivity of the rail network across major cities and seaports in Nigeria for easy access to export agricultural products, improve trade and business transactions, and increase youth employment in the country motivated the emergence of Sino-Nigerian railway modernization. Arguably, these are laudable objectives, but the ability of this relation to deliver these benefits may depend on how it is implemented; that is, the reality detail, which may be different from what is on paper.

A participant indicated that Sino-Nigerian relations are of added advantage to Nigeria because modernized railway infrastructure will open Nigeria's economy to the world through rail

connectivity to the seaports, and will also address youth unemployment that has been a challenge for the Nigerian government. This is made clear by one of the principal officials of the Ministry of Transportation:

The Sino-Nigerian relations in rail infrastructure development will improve the economy through easy and faster transfer of goods from the seaport to the cities for economic growth and development. It will also address youth unemployment in the country (KII, Male, 49years, Principal Rail Officer, Ministry of Transportation, Abuja FCT).

This assertion shows that Sino-Nigerian partnership in the railway sector is intended to solve a very important problem in the Nigerian economy, a pointer to the fact that if this project is completed and sustained, it will go a long way in boosting the Nigerian economy. This positive picture of the Sino-Nigerian partnership in the railway sector has not been validated by any empirical evidence. This is in the face of concerns being raised about this relationship.

As such, in spite of the cordial relations that existed between the two countries, there are apprehensions about China's economic relations with other countries, especially in terms of infrastructure connectivity, which were seen as being exploitative in nature. A participant contends that China has been of assistance to Nigeria's transportation system, but assumes there may be clandestine motives behind China's assistance to Nigeria, especially in the transportation sub-sector. He narrates further that:

In the Abuja-Kaduna SGR, the Chinese are assisting in terms of technicality, but Chinese relations with many countries in the world have been viewed in terms of being exploitative. What they are doing with SGR in Nigeria is a good development for the country, but their intention for Nigeria is what we do not know... There might be something that the Chinese might be hiding from us in terms of their motives in Nigeria (IDI, Male, 54years, Principal Officer, NRC, Ibadan).

This argument is in line with the view of Mthembu-Salter, where the one-sided pattern of Sino-Nigerian investment was queried as reflecting a greater imbalance in favour of the Chinese. He considered this development as worrisome as he believed that the relationship had not yielded the desired outcome for Nigeria. He opined that:

Findings have exposed various challenges of Sino-Nigerian investment relations, especially Chinese investment in Nigeria. Some of these problems include the unidirectional nature of Sino-Nigerian investment relations, concentration of Chinese investment in oil and minerals resources, low level of technology transfer, inferior goods from China, and discouraging local creativity (Mthembu-Salter, 2013:11-21).

These responses have brought to the fore a very important lapse in the political economy of the country because, as a people and a nation, we are supposed to think about possible motives before entering into a relationship with other countries, especially relationships that may have long-term implications for the development of the country. As such, in preparation to enter into such a relationship, Nigeria as a country should have done the groundwork of checking out such motives and then using the experiences of other countries with the country it wants to start a

relationship with. The availability of all these will place Nigeria as a country in a vantage position to have foresight of what its partner is capable of doing, and from there, the country will have first-hand knowledge towards approaching the relationship. In view of the above comments, it shows that there is a problem in the Nigerian political economic system.

Conclusion

The socio-historic contexts of Sino-Nigerian relations in infrastructure development illustrate a partnership that is both laudable and transformative, particularly in addressing Nigeria's long-standing infrastructural deficits. China's active role in financing and constructing critical projects, such as railways and other infrastructure development in Nigeria, emphasizes the strategic value of this relationship for both nations. However, while the outcomes appear promising, sustainability remains a major concern. Historical antecedents of diplomatic disruptions between Nigeria and China highlight the fragility of such cooperation and raise questions about its long-term stability. Issues of debt sustainability, transparency in contractual agreements, and equitable benefit-sharing may complicate the narrative of progress. Likewise, given the wide disparity in commitment from the two countries, arguments have ensued that there are power differentials in the Sino-Nigerian relationship, with potential problems for the Nigerian state. Thus, while Sino-Nigerian relations in transportation and broader infrastructure development offer tangible gains, the durability of this partnership will ultimately depend on deliberate policy safeguards, mutual trust, and lessons drawn from past experiences to ensure continuity, accountability, and sustainable development outcomes.

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