Studie

Contemporary China-Nigeria Economic Relations: Chinese Imperialism or South-South Mutual Partnership?

Olukoya Ogen

Abstract

This study examines the vicissitudes of contemporary Sino-Nigerian trade relations by articulating and contextualising the phenomenal upsurge in China's trade with Nigeria within the purview of the undercurrents of neo-liberalism. It further explores the diversified nature of Chinese investments in Nigeria especially in the areas of transportation, oil and gas, agriculture, communication and distribution. The work submits that while China has been feasting on Nigeria's natural resources to propel its massive industrial complex, it has also been pursuing a policy of de-industrialisation in some strategic sectors of the Nigerian economy. The paper concludes that though Chinese investments in the areas of infrastructural development may appear crucial to Nigeria's socio-economic development, at the same time the skewed trading relationship that has turned Nigeria into a dumping ground for Chinese manufactured goods has wrecked havoc on Nigeria's infant industries and stifled the development of the Nigeria's indigenous enterprise.

(Manuscript received March 01, 2008; accepted for publication April 22, 2008)

Keywords: China, Nigeria, neo-liberalism, globalisation, de-industrialisation, crude oil

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Studie

Die gegenwärtigen Beziehungen zwischen China und Nigeria: Chinesischer Imperialismus oder Süd-Süd-Partnerschaft?

Olukoya Ogen

Abstract

Diese Studie untersucht die Wechselfälle der gegenwärtigen sino-nigerianischen Handelsbeziehungen, indem der phänomenale Aufschwung des chinesischen Handels mit Nigeria im Bereich der Strömungen des Neoliberalismus artikuliert und kontextualisiert wird. Weiterhin wird die diversifizierte Natur der chinesischen Investitionen in Nigeria in den Bereichen Transport, Öl und Gas, Landwirtschaft, Kommunikation und Vertrieb erkundet. Die Arbeit legt dar, dass China sich an Nigerias natürlichen Ressourcen gütlich tut, um den massiven industriellen Komplex Chinas anzutreiben, während es gleichzeitig eine Politik der De-Industrialisierung in strategischen Teilen der nigerianischen Wirtschaft verfolgt. Der Aufsatz kommt zu dem Schluss, dass chinesische Investitionen im Bereich der Infrastrukturentwicklung zwar zentral für Nigerias sozio-ökonomische Entwicklung scheinen mögen, dass gleichzeitig aber die verzerrten Handelsbeziehungen, die Nigeria in einen Abladeplatz für chinesische Industriegüter verwandelt haben, Nigerias junge Industrien verwüstet und die Entwicklung von Nigerias einheimischen Unternehmen im Keim erstickt haben.
(Manuskript eingereicht am 01.03.2008; zur Veröffentlichung angenommen am 22.04.2008)

Keywords: China, Nigeria, Neo-Liberalismus, Globalisierung, De-Industrialisierung, Rohöl

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Introduction

> Nigeria is at the take-off point in its journey to the year 2020 when we expect to join the league of the 20 most industrialised nations in the world. We need this strategic partnership with China which we are very sure will be mutually beneficial to the two countries. We are looking at the role China can play in critical areas such as power, energy and transportation. I am also sure you are looking at what role Nigeria can play in providing energy security for the Peoples Republic of China [...]. (Yar'Adua cited in Onuorah 2008b)

The emergence of China as an economic superpower continues to shape the political economy of the world in several significant ways. For instance, Africa is currently experiencing an unprecedented upsurge in Chinese economic influence and investment. Whereas, in the 1980s the value of China's trade with Africa was less than 10 million USD, by 2006 this figure has climbed up to more than 55 billion USD (French & Polgreen 2007). As a leading economic power in Africa and being the most populous Black nation on earth, there seems to be no better country to assess the nature and impact of China's economic ties with Africa than Nigeria. The Chinese Ambassador to Nigeria, Xu Jianguo, recently underscored this point when he stated that the volume of bilateral trade between China and Nigeria within the first eight months of 2007 was over 3.1 billion USD (*The Guardian* 2007b). By the end of 2007, trade between China and Nigeria eventually climaxed at 4.4 billion USD (Onuorah 2008a). Indeed, Guo Kun, the new Chinese Consul General to Nigeria was the only representative of a foreign government that graced the 2007 edition of the annual Lagos International Trade Fair. Moreover, the retinue of Nigerian security officials and the overriding officialdom associated with Guo Kun's visit had the underpinning of a friend well-cherished and held in high esteem (Adeloye & Adenekan 2007).

It is interesting to note that in spite of the remarkable volume and strategic implications of Sino-Nigerian trade in recent times, there is relatively little scholarly literature on China-Nigeria economic relations (Large 2008). The few available works on this theme are mostly general works on Chinese economic activities in Africa (Oche 1997; Manji & Marks 2007; Idun-Arkhurst & Laing 2007; Melber 2007; McCormick 2008). Almost, lost in the cacophony of this extant literature is the nature and impact of the march of Chinese neo-liberalism on specific African countries. Consequently, there has been the tendency to treat Africa as a homogenous economic unit that could be lumped together in contemporary socio-economic analysis. Yet, it seems that there are variations and peculiarities with regard to the nature of, and reactions to Chinese economic enterprise from one African country to another. This present work is of the opinion that an assessment of China's economic relations with Africa can only be realistic after weighing the evidence from individual African countries, an approach which many analysts seem to be wary of employing. Indeed, national case studies are critical preconditions for works of synthesis (Akinrinade & Ogen 2008:2). Such an approach will enable scholars to shy away from making sweeping and misleading generalisations.

It is against this backdrop that this study examines the dynamics of Sino-Nigerian socio-economic relations with particular emphasis on the last 15 years. This emphasis is predicated on the fact that though Nigeria established diplomatic relations with China in 1971, Chinese developmental efforts were diverted inwards especially in the 1980s and not outwards to countries like Nigeria (Melville & Owen 2005:1). As a matter of fact, significant economic relations between China and Nigeria did commence until 1993, when China due to its booming industrial sector turned to Nigeria for the supply of crude oil. It is important to reiterate the fact that the central question which the study seeks to answer is: To what extent is China's economic relationship with Nigeria that of a win-win situation that is based on mutual respect, joint prosperity and free of overtures of exploitation and paternalism that critics worldwide say have characterised much of the West's post-colonial relationship with Africa? In seeking a definite answer to this fundamental question, the study situates its analysis within the theoretical trajectories of the open economy model and the economic theory of imperialism.

By relying on the specific sectoral studies, the paper concludes that while Chinese investments in the areas of infrastructural development may appear crucial to Nigeria's socio-economic development, at the same time the skewed trading relationship that has turned Nigeria into a dumping ground for Chinese manufactured goods has wrecked havoc on Nigeria's infant industries and stifled the development of the nation's indigenous enterprise.

Theoretical Assumptions

The open economy theory of international trade seems germane to this study. This model states that countries in the open economy category export agricultural and mineral products in exchange for consumable goods. Foreign interests which usually pre-dominate in such an economy would be targeted at assisting the flow of primary products and to keep the door open for the sale of manufactured goods (Agbodike 1998:164; Hobson 1914:vii). Applied to our context, it could be observed that China has drawn great inspiration from the open economy model in its trade relations with Nigeria. Like other capitalists, China deliberately encourages the free flow of raw-materials and mineral resources from Nigeria to service its industries while at the same time ensuring that the large and dynamic Nigerian market remains open for the sale of Chinese manufactured goods.

Another useful theory that is closely related to the open economy model is the modern theory of international trade. It is also known as the Heckscher-Ohlin theory because its principles were first canalised by Bertin Ohlin and Eli Heckscher. In spite of the fact that there seems to be several dimensions to the Heckscher-Ohlin theory, the aspect that is most suitable for our purpose states that the immediate cause of international trade is that some commodities can be produced and bought more cheaply from other regions, whereas in other areas their production is only possible at high prices. To the authors, the main cause of trade between regions is the difference between the prices of commodities. Thus, commodities which use large quantities of scarce factors are imported because their prices are high, while those using abundant factors are exported because their prices are low (Jhingan 2003:1043-1044). This theory becomes useful when we realise the fact that due to the relatively low cost of production of manufactured goods from China, Chinese products have flooded Nigerian markets. The present situation is such that Nigeria's harsh operating environment coupled with the high cost of manufacturing in the country have placed the Nigerian productive sector at a disadvantaged position to the extent that the sector eventually became vulnerable to external predators and was quickly consumed by the forces of exploitative Chinese neo-liberalism masquerading as globalised South-South cooperation.

Another approach adopted in this work is that of the economic theory of imperialism (Toyo 1988; Falola 1978:10). Economic imperialism is a potent weapon of gaining and maintaining domination by one nation over another, not through military conquest, but by economic control (Morgenthau 1993:71). More often than not, it is more lethal and less messy than military imperialism. This approach does not intend to disregard the vital political, military as well as the strategic significance of China's interest in Nigeria, it only accords primacy to economic factors as the primary determinants of social change. To liberal, neo-classical scholars, all economic theories of imperialism fail the test of historic experience (Morgenthau 1993:61-63). This argument is buttressed with the fact that historical evidence points to the primacy of politics over economics. Apparently, this line of thinking continues to emanate from the vigorous intellectual campaigns to rationalise and underplay the inherent exploitative and expansionist tendencies of international capitalism.

Chinese imperialism in Nigeria as in other parts of Africa is primarily driven by China's guest for sources of energy and raw-materials. It is also characterized by China's commercial dominance and the need to secure safe territories for re-investment. In this respect, this work is of the opinion that there is no fundamental difference between Chinese and Western economic imperialism in Africa.

The concept of South-South cooperation also needs some elucidation. The idea started to influence the field of development studies in the 1990s. It was fueled by a growing realisation that poor nations might find appropriate, low-cost and sustainable solution to their developmental problems in other developing countries rather than in the rich developed countries of the North. This realisation was informed by the fact that countries of the South share similar developmental challenges such as high population, poverty and environmental degradation, and so on (Melville & Owen 2005:1-2). The United Nations started using the term, South-South cooperation, in 2003 to describe the cooperation among developing countries in promoting investments, expanding trade and facilitating development (UNIDO 2008; UNCTAD 2005).

Again, in 2003, the Asian-African Sub-regional Organisation Conference (AASROC) re-affirmed the fact that South-South cooperation was not an option but an imperative to complement North-South cooperation for the facilitation of the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. Interestingly, China's Africa Policy, adopted in early 2006, is also predicated on the concept of South-South cooperation. The policy states that the pattern of China-Africa relations would be based on the following pillars: sincerity, equality, political non-interference, mutually beneficial cooperation and common development (McCormick 2008:11; Naidu 2007:42). Thus, though the Nigerian economy has always been vulnerable to Western capitalism, it is currently been consumed by the forces of exploitative Chinese capitalism masquerading as globalised South-South cooperation.

China-Nigeria Economic Relations in Historical Perspective, 1999-2007

In the last two decades China has consistently and vigorously pursued free market principles as ably espoused in the prevailing global economic strategy. Key components of this strategy include the opening up of opportunities for foreign investments in China as well as the creation of new markets for Chinese products abroad (Rocha 2007:17). Interestingly, the result for China has been phenomenal. The Chinese economy has grown by an average of 9 percent over the last 25 years. The current annual growth rate is put at 11.5 percent, the fastest growth rate for any major economy in recorded history (*The Punch* 2007). Industrial output has also increased by about 50 percent, creating industrial overproduction in sectors like electronics, textiles and footwear. Thus, rapid economic expansion has created the need for both import markets for energy and raw materials, and export markets for Chinese surplus industrial products (Idun-Arkhurst & Laing 2007:8). China is the world's fourth largest economy and has a population of over one billion people (Oche 1997:64; Manji & Marks 2007:12). China has over 1 trillion USD in its foreign reserve, and its export volume of goods and services is second only to that of the United States of America. China's oil giant, PetroChina, is the world's most capitalised company (Lantsman 2007:42-43). China's stupendous economic growth has made it the fastest growing economy in the world. All these have ensured that, first, China acts with increasing confidence in its external relations and, second, that the country becomes a significant participant in the global economy as well as a major determinant of the economic fortunes of many nations.

Nigeria on the other hand, with its over 140 million inhabitants is Africa's largest growing market for finished products. It also has Africa's and one of the world's largest hydrocarbon deposits of over 35.2 billion barrels. Nigeria currently produces about 2.5 million barrels of crude oil per day. The country is equally one of the fastest growing telecommunication markets in the world (Pan 2007:2). Nigeria's oil is particularly attractive because of its low sulphur content, which makes it highly desirable for environmental and economic purposes. It can also be readily transported to the eastern United States Seaboard and easily processed by Chinese refineries (Naidu & Davies 2006:70).

Thus, China's growing remarkable economic interest in Nigeria is not fortuitous, it is basically predicated on China's industrial demand for Nigeria's crude oil and raw materials. The huge Nigerian market is also an irresistible market for the disposal of Chinese manufactured goods, and Nigeria's poorly developed infrastructure offers a rich terrain for the re-investment of Chinese capital. To underscore China's thirst and insatiable appetite for oil, it is interesting to note that, with the exception of South Africa, a quick perusal of China's top 10 trading partners in Africa would reveal that China's trading and investment activities are with African oil and mineral producing states (Taylor 2007:10). According to the World Trade Organisation statistics figures for April 2007, China has risen to become Nigeria's third leading trading partner after the European Union and the United States of America. Also, Nigeria is currently the largest trading partner of China in Africa after South Africa. In fact it appears that Nigeria is now strategically positioned to become China's most valuable trading partner on the African continent (WTO 2007).

The effective beginning of Chinese trade relations with Nigeria started in the 1950s when Chinese business people mainly from Hong Kong and Taiwan as well as those from the Chinese Diaspora in Southeast Asia established trading contacts especially with Igbo traders from southeastern Nigeria. Taiwan and Hong Kong were widely known in Nigeria for the supply of relatively cheap consumer items up till the early 1970s (Obiorah 2007:37-38).

The establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Nigeria on 10 February 1971 witnessed the consummation of friendly relations. This relationship was characterised by very negligible economic cooperation. However, this scenario was radically altered in the early 1990s for two major reasons. In the first instance, the Abacha's military regime which happened to be Nigeria's most repressive regime in recorded history came into being in 1993. General Sani Abacha who succeeded General Ibrahim Babangida in 1993 turned out to be Nigeria's most corrupt and worst dictator. He ruled out a de-annulment of the June 12 1993 elections or any immediate return to civilian rule. The Western world responded with a wave of sanctions. An oil embargo was even threatened. In the ensuing Nigeria-Western diplomatic row, Abacha turned to the East to seek an alternative development partner to the "nosy" and "arrogant" West. Expectedly, China welcomed the Abacha regime with open arms because of its own long-term economic objectives.

Interestingly, it was also in 1993, that China who was hitherto the largest oil exporter in Asia became a net importer of the commodity due to its booming industrial sector (Taylor 2007:14). Invariably, China's thirst for oil perfectly fitted into Abacha's game plan. The Abacha's government – with its bankrupt democratic credentials, lack of accountability and transparency, disdain for fundamental human rights and environmental concerns – found China's "non-interference policy" a welcome relief from the West's principled insistence on the ideals of good governance. By providing a diplomatic lifeline to Abacha's repressive regime, China succeeded in blunting the effects of international sanctions against the Nigerian military junta.

A major outcome of this new wave of Sino-Nigerian relations was the formation of the Nigeria-China Friendship Association (NICAF) in April 1994 with the objective of promoting socio-economic, cultural, scientific and sporting relations between the two countries. It was during this period that Chinese companies won several infrastructural contracts in Nigeria. The emergence of the Obasanjo's administration in 1999 further gave fillip to the vibrancy of China-Nigeria economic relations. The magnitude and significance of Chinese trade and the significance of its investments will be better appreciated through a sector-by-sector analysis of China's remarkable economic penetration of Nigeria. Of course, this will be followed by a general assessment of the nature and impact of Chinese economic interests in Nigeria.

China and Nigeria's Oil

As the world's fastest growing industrial economy, China's rapacious craving for crude oil to feed its booming industrial complex is understandable. The US Energy Information Administration says China accounted for 40 percent of total growth in global demand for oil in the last four years, and that in 2003, China surpassed Japan as the world's second largest consumer after the United States of America (Pan 2007). This has led it to seek oil supplies from Nigeria and other oil producing countries in Africa. Oil sales accounted for a large chunk of the phenomenal increase in the volume of trade between China and Nigeria from a modest 1.78 million USD in 1996 to 3.13 billion USD in the first eight months of 2007 (*The Guardian* 2007b).

The first significant breakthrough for China in its quest for Nigeria's oil was the widely celebrated 800 million USD crude oil deal between PetroChina and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation for the supply of 30,000 barrels of crude oil per day to China. The boldest move in this sector was, however, made in December 2005 when the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) bought a 45 percent stake in an offshore Nigerian oil field at a whopping sum of 2.27 billion USD (Corkin 2007). To date, this singular investment represents China's largest foreign acquisition in Africa, and perhaps, throughout the world. Again, in 2006, Beijing obtained a 4 billion USD oil-drilling licence in Nigeria shortly after former President Obasanjo agreed to increase crude oil sales to China from 30,000 barrels to 50,000 barrels of crude oil per day. The China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) has also invested millions of dollars in the Port Harcourt refinery while PetroChina is investing in the Kaduna refinery. Apart from the 2.27 billion USD acquisition by CNOOC, the company is currently bidding to purchase Shell's 49.8 percent stake in two offshore oil mining licences, OML 125 and 134 valued at 1 billion USD (Alden & Davies 2006:91; Taylor 2007:15; Rocha 2007:21; Adeleye 2007). To underscore China's voracious appetite for Nigeria's crude oil, the then Chinese Ambassador to Nigeria in 2004, Wang Yongqiu at a press conference in Abuja shortly after Nigeria's decision to sell 50,000 barrels of crude oil per day to China remarked thus, "We appreciate President Obasanjo's decision to sell China 50,000 barrels per day (BPD) crude oil and hope this quota will increase" (Obayuwana et al. 2004).

Table 1 Chinese Imports of Crude Oil from Nigeria, 2002-2005

Year	Trade value (million USD)	Quantity (in barrels)
2002	6.8	487.8 million
2003	27.2	122.0 million
2004	411.9	1.488 billion
2005	503.8	1.31 billion

Source: United Nations 2007.

Chinese Investments in the Nigerian Telecommunication Sector

China's stake in the Nigerian telecommunication sector is also considerable. For instance, Chinese firm Huawei Technologies has invested about 10 million USD in the sector since it began operations in the country in 1999. The money was spent on the installation of training equipment at a technical centre in Abuja. The company also started the production of mobile handsets in Nigeria (Mbendi 2007). In addition, Huawei Technologies secured an 800 million USD contract to build the infrastructure for Nigeria's lucrative mobile phone market (Alden & Davies 2006:92).

A consortium of Chinese firms namely, Alcatel Shanghai Bell Company, China National Machinery Equipment Corporation, Zhong Xing Telecommunication Equipment Company Limited (ZTE), and Huawei Technologies also won the multi-billion NGN rural telephony project of the Nigerian government in 2005. The project was meant to provide telephone and Internet access to the headquarters of the 774 local government areas of the country. It is being financed from a 200 million USD concessionary loan from China. The Nigerian government agreed to provide counterpart funding of 20 percent (Nwankwo 2007).

It is significant to note that in 2004, China was given the task of designing and building a communication satellite for Nigeria. The Nigerian communication satellite (NIGCOMSAT) was launched in May 2007 with pomp and pageantry. NIGCOMSAT is Nigeria's first man-made telecommunication satellite and the first four-frequency band geo-stationary satellite for Africa (Chang 2007).

China and the Nigerian Railway Sector

In spite of the strategic importance of an efficient rail transport to national development, over the years, the performance of the Nigeria Railway Corporation has nose-dived considerably. Passengers' volume which was as high as 11.2 million in 1964 has declined drastically to 1.6 million in 2003 (Agha 2007). In a bid to arrest this decline, the Abacha regime signed an agreement with Chinese Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) in 1995 for the rehabilitation of the nation's rail network. The deal was to cost the government the sum of 528.7 million USD out of which the sum of 426.6 million USD was paid (Abuah 2004).

Again, in 2006, CCECC and the Guangdong Xinguang International Group were awarded another contract for the construction of a railway line. The 8 billion USD contract was to be part financed with a loan of 2.5 billion USD from the Chinese government. The project includes a fast rail system between Lagos and Abuja (Idun-Arkhurst & Laing 2007:8-12).

Agriculture, Water Resources and Power

As part of its quest for agricultural commodities in Nigeria, China has increased its volume of agricultural raw-materials imports, especially cassava chips from Nigeria. Specifically, the country has agreed to import one million tons of cassava chips annually from Nigeria (Mbendi 2007). The quality of Nigeria's cassava is adjudged to be the best in the world and Nigeria is currently the largest producer in the continent. Chinese firms continue to jostle for Nigerian cassava and a number of these firms have been processing and exporting cassava chips (*The China Monitor* 2006d).

Moreover, Nigeria's 324 million USD National Programme for Food Security (NPFS) is being executed under a tripartite arrangement between Nigeria and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) with China providing the much-needed technical assistance. The NPFS package includes access to technology, land, water, market and finance (*The Guardian* 2007a). There are currently over 400 Chinese agricultural experts in Nigeria involved in the construction of small earth dams to support agricultural production. On October 13, 2005, Nigeria and China signed a contract agreement for the construction of 598 water schemes for 19 states and the Federal Capital Territory at a cost of 695 million NGN. Yongqiu Beijing G&M Engineering Construction Limited was commissioned by the Chinese government to handle the water projects (Mbendi 2007).

The quantum of Chinese investments in the Nigerian power sector is also significant. The China Export-Import Bank is partly funding five thermal power stations in Nigeria at Ughelli, Geregu, Papallanto, Alaoji, and Omotosho through a credit facility of 500 million USD, repayable in 12 years. China is also providing financial and technical support to the two hydropower plants at Zungeru and Mambilla in Northern Nigeria. China's Gezhouba Group Corporation (CGGC) won the contract to build the 2,600 Megawatts Mambilla hydropower station at the cost of 2.5 billion USD. On completion, the project would be Nigeria's largest hydroelectric plants as well as China's largest hydroelectric project in Africa (*The China Monitor* 2007). The Nigerian government and a Chinese company, the North China Power Engineering Company, also signed a 110 million USD agreement for the expansion of power transmission lines from Jos to Makurdi. The 268 kilometre close circuit and 330KV transmission lines would also include a substation and a reactor installation for Jos and Makurdi respectively.

Free Trade and Export Processing Zones

China is also set to build a Free Trade Zone (FTZ) in Lagos. It plans to invest 267 million USD in the first phase of the project. It has been estimated that the first phase will generate about 3,000 employment opportunities. Essentially, the FTZ will be a manufacturing and assembly outfit for Chinese firms. Goods produced will be sold domestically and re-exported to the West African sub-region (*The China Monitor* 2006b; Davies 2007:5). A total of 21 Chinese corporations are also funding an industrial park in the southwestern part of Nigeria. The 500 acre industrial park would handle the production of tiles, pipes, rubber products for tyres, and footwear (*The China Monitor* 2006a).

General Finance and Banking

China has also registered its presence in the Nigerian banking and financial sector. In 2006, the China Export-Import Bank granted a 500 million USD concessionary export grants to Nigeria to support the development of infrastructure. In October 2007, one of the Nigeria's largest banks, United Bank of Africa (UBA), entered into a partnership arrangement with the China Development Bank (CDB), the largest state-owned bank in China. With 281 billion USD of loans outstanding by the end of June 2007, CDB has more assets than the World Bank and Asian Development Bank combined. The deal with UBA has expanded the Chinese bank's ability to finance infrastructure projects not only in Nigeria but also in the whole of Africa. The UBA-CDB deal, according to Tony Elumelu, UBA's Chief Executive:

> [...] provides us with an almost infinite amount of capital to execute projects [...] it is no longer a question of funding capability, but about our ability to identify good projects. (Gabriel 2007)

The *Financial Times* also describes the deal as a realisation of CDB's dream of taking a shot at Africa's financial services sector. Meanwhile, China has proposed a 15 billion USD investment package for Nigeria's mineral sector. Apart from oil and gas, other areas that would benefit from the 15 billion USD facility include coal, copper, zinc and lead mining (*The China Monitor* 2006c).

The Export Credit Guarantee Agency of China, otherwise known as SINOSURE recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the African Finance Corporation and three Nigerian Banks, First Bank Plc, Zenith Bank Plc, Oceanic Bank Plc, to commit a staggering 50 billion USD for the financing of Nigeria's infrastructure projects (Aderinokun 2008). The deal has been hailed as President Yar'Adua's "flashy souvenir of his first state visit to Beijing" (*Africa-Asia Confidential* 2008a).

Sale of Military Hardware

Recently, China-Nigeria security cooperation has equally received a big boost. The Nigerian government is increasingly turning to China for weapons to deal with the worsening insurgency in the oil-rich Niger Delta region. In 2005, the

Nigerian Air Force purchased 15 combat and multi-role military aircraft at the cost of 251.3 million USD from China. The navy has also ordered special patrol boats to secure the swamps and creeks of the Niger Delta from the rampaging militants operating in the area (Mbendi 2007; Obiorah 2007:47).

Provincial Trade Links

The Chinese economic offensive is also ably reflected in the presence of Chinese provincial governments and business associations in Nigeria. The Shandong Province which is one of the key economic provinces in China has established trade relations with Nigeria. The Shandong China Export Commodities Exhibition organised a four-day provincial trade fair in 2002 in Nigeria, where 19 Chinese firms exhibited various products such as building materials, household appliances, foodstuff, tyres, ceramics, hardware tools, agricultural machinery and textile materials. Currently, Nigeria is Shandong's second biggest trading partner in Africa after South Africa (*People's Daily* 2002).

Table 2 Value of Sino-Nigerian Trade, 1999-2007

Year	Value (USD in millions)
1999	570
2000	860
2001	1.444
2002	1.768
2003	1.858
2004	2.831
2005	3.033
2006	N.A.
2007	*3.131

** Figure for 2007 covers only the first eight months of 2007.*
Source: Chinese Embassy 2007.

China Investment International (CII), an umbrella organisation for 260 Chinese business organisations, is also active in the country. The CII president, Ti Wong, has expressed the desire of CII to partner with the Edo State government of Nigeria to establish warehouses for Chinese finished products in order to make the state one of the trading hubs of China in Africa (Obe 2007). Moreover, Minghong Group Corporation from the Zhuhai area of China is also building a modern cement factory at the cost of 75 billion NGN in Enugu State of Nigeria (Ugwoke 2007). Similarly, with an initial investment of 1 billion NGN, the Shanghai based Yantai Non-Ferrous Metal Company has commenced the exploration and mining of the substantial gold deposits in Osun State of Nigeria (Kolawole 2008).

The Nigerian private sector has also benefited from the Chinese investment drive in Nigeria. In what has generally been regarded as China's biggest private sector in Africa, China's Sinoma International Engineering Company signed an agreement with Dangote Industries of Nigeria to build 13 cement factories across Africa at a cost of 2.8 billion USD (*Africa-Asia Confidential* 2008b).

Table 3 Nigeria's Trade with China (Products)

	Nigeria's Major Exports to China	Nigeria's Major Imports from China
1	Crude oil	Electrical, electronic and telecom equipment
2	Cassava chips	Clothing, textile and footwear
3	Sesame seeds	Toys, handbags, suitcases
4	Ores and concentrates of non-ferrous base	Construction equipment/materials
5	Cotton	Motorcycles
6	Timber / processed wood	Batteries and accumulators

Source: Idun-Arkhurst & Laing 2007:33.

Thus, it could be observed that there is a high level of coordination of Chinese economic interests in Nigeria. Both the central and provincial governments work in tandem with the Chinese private sector for the achievement of China's corporate strategic economic objectives. Apparently, China's expansive economic relations with Nigeria have worked tremendously well in securing the vast Nigerian market for Chinese manufactured products, Nigeria also serves as a viable investment arena for the re-investment of Chinese capital and most significantly, China has been able to secure considerable access to Nigeria's crude oil. However, from a Nigerian perspective, the central questions are: What has Nigeria benefited from this economic relationship? Is China's interest different from the motives of Nigeria's traditional trading partners in the West? What are the long-term implications of China's current economic engagement with

Nigeria? And finally, to what extent is China's economic association with Nigeria that of a mutually beneficial win-win situation?

An Assessment of Contemporary China-Nigeria Economic Relations

As noted earlier, China's current engagement with Nigeria is primarily driven by three major factors: first, China needs to secure unfettered access to Nigeria's oil and natural resources to sustain its economic boom. Second, there is the quest for new markets for the disposal of surplus manufactured products, and third, the fervent search for re-investment opportunities in Nigeria is also critical. The overall philosophy underlying this drive is not remarkably different from the principle that has governed the economic relationship between Nigeria and the Western world since the nineteenth century. Interestingly, China's economic imperialism and its voracious appetite for Nigeria's natural resources are accompanied by a seeming willingness to develop Nigeria's infrastructure. Though an effective and adequate infrastructure base is very crucial to Nigeria's development trajectory, it is the opinion of this work, that for Nigeria to integrate itself to the global economy, it will have to shift its current reliance on revenues from the exportation of natural resources towards secondary and tertiary production. The nature of China's economic engagement with Nigeria is further deepening Nigeria's dependency and peripheral status in the international division of labour. A few examples will suffice at this juncture. The influential Nigerian newspaper, *The Guardian,* in its editorial of 23 October 2007 reports:

> [...] about 40 percent of the 40 million metres of wax and other fabrics imported monthly from China to Africa find their way to Nigeria through smuggling. Reports also show that the imported Asian textiles have captured about 80 percent of Nigeria's textile market as they are 20 percent cheaper than local products. (*The Guardian* 2007a)

Prior to the incursion of Chinese fabrics, the Nigerian textile industry was the largest single private sector of the economy in terms of investments, output, turnover and the second largest employer of labour after the federal government. The textile industry also successfully coped with local demands and even exported its surplus products (Akinrinade & Ogen 2008:9). While it is true that Chinese textile exports provide cheaper access to a variety of fabrics, which is good for the immediate well being of the average Nigerian, in the long term, this is suicidal for the Nigerian textile sector and the overall economy because it destroys local manufacturing capacity and competitiveness. Indeed, China's growing global competitiveness and its offensives in the Nigerian textile market have damaging impacts on the Nigerian economy. The rate of unemployment, social dislocation and financial losses within the local textile industry have resulted in severe national socio-economic, distributional and poverty impacts (Akinrinade & Ogen 2008:10-11).

Furthermore, the introduction by the former President of the United States of America, Bill Clinton, of preferential textile quotas for Africa under the African Growth Opportunities Act (AGOA) further encouraged some Chinese firms to establish trading operations in Nigeria to exploit the opportunities offered by the US-American government under AGOA (Obiorah 2007:38). Indeed, AGOA's preferential textile quota for Africa was one of the basic reasons for establishing China Town, an ultra modern Chinese shopping mall in Lagos. Textile workers in Nigeria and the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria have also complained vehemently about the activities of Chinese textile traders and their local collaborators in China Town. In fact, local designs are fraudulently copied and taken to China for mass production. Thus, fabrics from China now come in with stolen Nigerian labels and designs for distribution not only in Nigeria but also in the United States of America in order to derive optimum benefit from the US preferential textile quota for Africa (Idun-Arkhurst & Laing 2007:18-19). China Town has acquired a notoriety for textile smuggling, textile counterfeiting, and for the stocking of low quality and cheap Chinese textiles (Obiorah 2007:38; TMC 2006). There is no doubt that as far as the Nigerian textile industry is concerned, China has been pursuing a policy of de-industrialisation.

Similarly, Nigeria's much-acclaimed multi-billion NGN rural telephone and Internet project has hit the rocks. To date there is no single functioning telephone line in the rural telephone project in spite of the fact that the government has invested 200 million USD in the project with another commitment of 300 million USD. Regrettably, the project was financed with funds borrowed from China. It is not surprising in the least that the contracts for the project were awarded to four Chinese companies: ZTE, Alcatel Shanghai Bell, Huawei Technologies and China National Machinery Import Export Corporation. More worrisome is the fact that the contract sum was disbursed to these afore-mentioned companies without authorisation from the Nigerian National Assembly. A whooping sum of 5.3 billion NGN was released without parliamentary approval to finance what has turned out to be a phantom project (Nwankwo 2007).

A careful analysis of China's seeming avowed commitment to the provision of infrastructure in Nigeria also reveals some frightening dimensions. China Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC) that was awarded the contract for the revitalisation of the Nigeria Railway Corporation in 1995 left the corporation worse than it met it. Curiously enough, former President Obasanjo waived all claims to the 462 million USD that was paid to the company during his official visit to China in 2004 with a warning that CCECC should not repeat the "mistakes" it made in the handling of the railway contract. CCECC was to later win the bid for the construction of a games village in Abuja (Abuah 2004). Recently, the Nigerian government started complaining about the 2.5 billion USD Chinese loan granted in 2006 for the reconstruction of the country railways. In fact, the Nigerian Minister of finance Usman Shamsudeen was quoted to have said that a full interpretation of the conditions attached to the loan by the Chinese would reveal that the facility was not as concessionary as it sounded and that the Nigerian government would want a review of the conditions attached to loan (Ogbu 2007).

Furthermore, it has to be pointed out in clear terms that the large windfall from Chinese investments in the Nigerian oil industry is yet to positively impact on the lives of the rural poor in the Niger Delta. Huge payments for oil blocks may end up providing extra cash for corrupt officials instead of benefiting local communities. Rather than trying to help in addressing the developmental needs and environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, China is actively cooperating with the Nigerian state to forcefully muzzle local opposition and bring an end to the endemic militancy in the Niger Delta. In this respect, China has been selling weapons to the Nigerian government to deal with the insurgency in the Niger Delta. Available evidence, however, suggests that the Niger Delta crisis cannot be resolved by force. In fact, the International Crisis Group (ICG) warns that "Any attempt at a military solution would be disastrous for residents and risky for the oil industry" (Idun-Arkhurst & Laing 2007:20). Already there have been bomb attacks on Chinese oil interests in the Delta and Chinese expatriate workers have been kidnapped and ransomed by aggrieved local militia. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) has criticised China for grabbing 2.2 billion USD stake in an oil field located in the Niger Delta in 2006 (Obiorah 2007:52). According to MEND:

> We wish to warn the Chinese government and its oil companies to steer well clear of the Niger Delta [...] Chinese citizens found in oil installations

> will be treated as thieves. The Chinese government by investing in stolen crude places its citizens in our line of fire. (Taylor 2007:21)

This paper avers that the Nigerian masses should be the principal beneficiaries of China's massive investment in the Nigerian oil industry and not a clique within the ruling elite. Again, China's propensity to keep downstream operations and processing activities within China while only importing crude oil from Nigeria could only result in Nigeria's further underdevelopment and marginalisation in the international economic system.

Table 4 Major Chinese Firms Operating in Nigeria

Company	Area of Operation
China National Offshore Oil Corporation	Oil and gas
China National Petroleum Corporation	Oil and gas
PetroChina	Oil and gas
China Civil Engineering and Construction Company	Railway and civil engineering
Guangdong Xinguang International Group	Railway
Huawei Technologies	Telecommunication
ZTE Telecommunication Company	Telecommunication
Alcatel Shanghai Bell	Telecommunication
China National Machinery Equipment Company	Telecommunication and power generation
Yongqiu Beijing G&M Engineering Construction	Water projects
Gezhouba Group Corporation	Power generation
North China Power Engineering Company	Power transmission
Minghong Group Corporation	Cement
China Geological Engineering Company	Geological surveys and mining
Industrial and Commercial Bank of China	Banking and finance
China Export-Import Bank	Banking and finance

Source: Idun-Arkhurst & Laing 2007:32.

Apart from its pre-occupation with crude oil, even more disturbing is the nature of China's all encompassing commercial dominance of Nigeria. It would seem that China has little or no intention of stopping its citizens who daily engage in criminal and harmful practices such as smuggling and counterfeiting all in the name of neo-liberalism. The Nigerian government is increasingly concerned about the alarming rate at which counterfeit and smuggled Chinese products are entering the country. In 2006, China Town in Lagos was closed down because it was discovered to be haven for smuggled and fake textile materials from China. It is also sad to note that early in 2007, some Chinese brought into the country truckloads of toothpaste. It was a brand of a popular toothpaste manufactured in Nigeria with a strong market share. But it was not the real thing. It was a harmful imitation because the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) found out that the toothpaste contained ethel glycol, an anti-freeze that causes cancer. Consequently, a ban on all imported toothpaste especially those from China was announced (*Sunday Tribune* 2007). China has also been accused of exporting expired, adulterated and harmful drugs to Nigeria (Olayinka 2007). Some Chinese who have been pirating compact disks for years in their large factories in Lagos were also arrested in 2006. This was the same period when 30-trailer loads of contraband goods mostly textile materials were smuggled into the country by Chinese businessmen. The consignment was quickly seized by men of the Nigerian Customs Service (Akinrinade & Ogen 2008:12).

Again, on 20 March 2008, a Nigerian company, Banquo Addidas Investment Limited, dragged three Chinese firms, Henan Light Industrial Products Import and Export Group, Xinjiang Battery Factory and Shangqiu Sanhe Battery Company, before the China International Economic and Trade Arbitration Commission. The Nigerian company alleged that the Chinese firms supplied sub-standard dry cell batteries to it contrary to the agreed terms of agreement thereby incurring losses to the tune of 747 million NGN (Umahi 2008).

Non-governmental organisations in Nigeria are of the opinion that some specific Chinese firms have been violating the environments where they operate. The Chinese logging company, WEMCO, has been accused of discharging untreated effluents into the Cross River in southeastern Nigeria, thereby damaging the health and livelihoods of the local fishing population, causing water pollution and depleting Nigeria's marine resources. Similarly, the Lagos-based Chinese metalworking firm, WAHUM, has also been accused of discharging noxious substances into the air and violating the occupational safety and health standards of its workers (Obiorah 2007:48).

As a matter of fact, by hobnobbing with the obnoxious and corrupt Abacha regime and given the disappointing outcomes of Chinese forays into the railway, rural telephony and textile sectors of the Nigerian economy, it appears that transparency, accountability democracy and good governance are not paramount to China in its economic relations with Nigeria. China's casual stance towards the liberal norms of environmental protection and human rights in the Niger Delta region is also problematic. He Wenping, the Director of the African Studies section at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing was quoted to have said that: "We [China] don't believe that human rights should stand above sovereignty [...] we have a different view on this, and African countries share our view" (Taylor 2007:11-12). It is unfortunate that China does not realise that the greatest impediments to Nigeria's development are the twin evil of corruption and lack of good governance.

Conclusion

The current burgeoning of Sino-Nigerian economic relations represents a classical example of South-South cooperation and the effects of the new wave of neo-liberalism in the South. This study has examined the historical dynamics of Sino-Nigerian trade relations by articulating and contextualising the phenomenal upsurge in China's trade with Nigeria within the purview of the undercurrents of neo-liberalism and the inherent competitive nature of international capitalism. The study further explores the diversified nature of Chinese investments in Nigeria especially in the areas of transportation, oil and gas, agriculture, aviation, communication and distribution. Of particular importance is the establishment of Chinese trading enclaves or Chinese specialised goods' markets such as the famous China Town in Lagos.

Indeed, China has succeeded in fostering an all-encompassing commercial dominance in Nigeria. The work contends that while China has been feasting on Nigeria's natural resources to propel its massive industrial complex, at the same time, it has also been pursuing a policy of de-industrialisation in some strategic sectors of the Nigerian economy. China has benefited immensely from this skewed economic relationship while Nigeria is apparently at a disadvantage. The Chinese invasion is simply a case of an old wine in a new bottle. Balance of trade between the two countries has consistently been in China's favour. Chinese loans for the development of Nigeria's infrastructure are usually given to Chinese contractors. More often than not they have failed to deliver.

As rightly argued by Moeletsi Mbeki of the South African Institute of International Affairs, China is merely reproducing the dangerous equation between Africa and its former colonial powers. This equation was characterised by the rape of Africa's natural resources and raw materials by the Western powers and the sale of European manufactured products to Africa (Marks 2007:5). Thus, Nigeria can never make appreciable progress in its developmental strides if it continues to rely heavily on the exportation of primary products. The diversification of the economy through the rapid development of secondary and tertiary industries should be a key priority of government. Indeed, the present pattern of Sino-Nigerian trade has further reinforced Nigeria's underdevelopment and continued peripheralisation in the global economic arrangement.

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