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# ASSESSMENT OF ECONOMIC STATECRAFT IN CHINA-NIGERIA COOPERATION AND ENGAGEMENT

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**Abstract**

*The drive for development, strategic opening of national boundaries through globalization, and the internationalization of national economies has greatly increased relations between states in the contemporary international system. The growing relationship between China and Africa in general, and Nigeria in particular, is predicated upon the deployment of individual state economic advantage through collaboration. This paper examines the growing influences and engagement that commenced in 1971 between Nigeria and China, which currently cuts across various sectors of the Nigerian state. The paper adopts dependency theory as developed by Raul Prebisch (1950), Celso Furtado (1963), Osvaldo Sunkel (1969), and Andre Gunder Frank (1967) as its primary theoretical lens. The theory is applied to interrogate whether Chinese engagement with Nigeria constitutes a new form of dependency or represents a systemic balanced cooperation framework. The study employs systematic documentary analysis of secondary sources, with data selected from peer-reviewed journals, policy documents, official trade statistics, and institutional reports. The paper discovers that China's engagement with Nigeria is largely determined by the former's economic advantage, especially within the diplomatic use of economic statecraft and infrastructure-for-loan arrangements in conducting bilateral agreements. The paper recommends, amongst other things, that Nigeria in its dealings and engagement with the external world and development partners should identify its areas of strength and approach negotiation from a position of informed leverage in order to fully explore all options available in its march towards development.*

**Keywords:** *Bilateral; Cooperation; Development; Economic; Sino-Nigeria.*

## Introduction

The most daunting challenges confronting nations across the world are amongst other things proffering solutions to their various economic challenges with the primary aim of meeting the various needs of all categories of their citizens. This position is however more prevalent amongst third world, developing or less-developed or countries in the global south where their economic status places a large percentage of their citizens below poverty line.

Corroborating the above, Ubi (2013) notes that, in recapitulating history, it is discernable that countries in the international system are labelled in the following categories i.e. developed and developing; rich and poor; industrialized and non-industrialized; the North and South; the haves and have-nots, with the aim of establishing the status and progress attained by these countries. The implications of these distinctions are to display the internal inequality, disparities and contradictions of these states in the global economy. These categorizations especially between the South and North depict level of poverty, underdevelopment, industrialization and levels of poverty.

The forgoing, explicitly explains internal economic capabilities of states and the terms of reference in their dealing, engagement and cooperation with the outside world. Basically, the countries of the South because of their low level of industrialization, mono-economic status, level of poverty, illiteracy and poverty amongst majority of their population and compounded by underdevelopment often seek investment cooperation and bilateral engagement with countries in the global North who possess advantages that they do not have.

Countries of the South with inherent attributes of inequality, poverty, economic woes and underdevelopment such as Nigeria have established comprehensive bilateral relations and cooperative engagement with rich countries across Europe such United State of America, France, Germany, Britain whose economic, political, technological and social advantages. The enormous advantages possessed by developed economies leaves their less developed or developing counterparts and partners with much to be desired especially in furthering their vast development needs and within the same window actualize the growing demands of the current international system driven by the forces of globalization.

With the growing disparities between the countries of the South such as Nigeria and its traditional partners occasioned by internal economic disadvantages, leadership failure and mass of unproductive citizens, the contradictions in relations and developmental engagement subjects third world states to gross dependencies despite the availability of human and large deposit of natural resources which is supposed to be the major driver of development across the world.

Given the forgoing, the need to establish alternative development partnership especially outside the core of developed countries of Europe has birth the growing wave of South-South cooperation premised on Win-Win relations and engagement as evident in Chinese expanding relations especially multilateral through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) established in 2000 with the countries on the African continent and also, specifically with respective countries such as China-Nigeria relations and engagement.

Nigeria with a population estimate of about 200 million and a large population below the poverty line, abundance of human and natural resources, large market for the sale of finished goods, fastest growing economy in Africa and projected to amongst top 20 economy by 2050 holds strategic advantage for a country with expansionist and global aspiration such as China with its vast economic, leadership and technological advantage, therefore, huge financial investment and economic engagement will not only profit the Nigerian government but will further the interest of Beijing, this and many more have fundamentally influenced the use of economic instrument and statecraft in the execution of China-Nigeria relations especially within the last 20 years of growing interaction and engagement between the two countries.

In contemporary international relations and notably in the conduct of multilateral and bilateral engagement between nations, nations often deploy instrument that will suit and engender the actualization of the national interest and within the same vein establish foreign relations with countries of the world considering its area of strength and strategically position its home and foreign mission to drive these overt and covert agenda. These instruments include war, propaganda, diplomacy, cultural instrument and most strategically economic instrument.

Given the forgoing position, this paper interrogates the growing prospects or otherwise of China-Nigeria relations within the body of existing literature, dissects the various issues and forces especially Chinese policy on trade and economic development that have become the driver for China-Nigeria cooperation and engagement, underscores the place of dependency as evident in the Chinese increasing presence across all sector of the Nigerian development landscape and establish the implication of Chinese economic instrument on Nigeria’s development trajectory.

Importantly, it further maintains a critical analytical posture; while some scholars see China-Nigeria cooperation as a 'win-win' arrangement, this paper interrogates the extent to which this perspective may obscure the persistence of structural dependency in a new guise.

**Theoretical Framework**

Dependency theory was developed by Raul Prebisch (1950), Celso Furtado (1963), Oslvaldo Sunkel (1969) and Gunder Frank (1967). Dependency theory is primarily focused on the overall condition of developing and Third World countries of Africa and Latin America. The theory basically explains the unfavorable economic condition of these states which has placed them perpetually dependent on the most developed economies of the world such as USA, France and Britain.Dependency theory defines the relationship between developed and underdeveloped countries; it is founded upon Lenin's theory of imperialism and focused upon the economic penetration of less developed Third World countries, particularly Latin America and recently African states.

Dos Santos (1971) analyzed the historical dimension of dependency relationships between the developed societies and less-developed societies. In his elaborate definition, he avers that:

> Dependency is…an historical condition which shapes a certain structure of the world economy such that it favours some nations to the detriment of others and limits the development possibilities of the subordinate economies…a situation in which the economy of a certain group of nations is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy, to which their own is subjected, (pg. 226).

Dependency has basic features which are particular to the definition often discussed by its theorists. Firstly, dependency divides the world system into two sets of nations, which are dominant/dependent, centre/periphery or metropolitan/satellite. The dominate nations are developed, advanced and industrialized nations of the world while the dependent nations are those nations/states of Latin America, Asia and Africa characterized by low per capital income, GNP and which rely on the export of a commodity for foreign exchange earnings (Cardoso, 1972).

Constructively, the theory emerged as a critique of the neoclassical economic theory which states that economic growth results in benefits for all; though these benefits are not always equal (Ferraro, 1996). Neoclassical economist expected that trading relations between nations would automatically have a positive effect on participant economy. However, dependency theorist contradict this position by noting that although developed nations records economic growth, underdeveloped and developing does not have equal advantage of economic growth (Prebisch, 1950; Ferraro, 1996).

The argument of dependency theorist is that, for the Third World countries (underdeveloped Countries) to experience development, they must break loose from authoritarian international economic world order by coming up with decidedly illiberal policies which seek to bypass Western multinational corporations and to encourage local industries by erecting high tariff walls against external manipulations (Fukuyama, 1992). According to Snyder (1980), underdevelopment and dependency theorist do not subscribe to an empirical approach to social science, but they rather followed the logic presented in Marxian political economy by employing the notion of successive approximation, which consist in moving from more abstract to the more concrete in a step-to-step fashion, removing simplifying assumptions at successive stages of the investigation so that they may take account of and proffer explanation to wide range of phenomena (Sweezy, 2008).

Okeke (2018) notes also that, the dependency theory as a means of interpreting international relations and/or explaining economic relationship has lost flavour in the academic community, and has for the most part been abandoned. While it has been neglected as a tool for rigorous academic analysis, its influence has notwithstanding remained strong and the theory relevant. The most important contribution of the theory is its normative stance on international economic relations and influence on nation's political process. These influences are clearly evident in Chinese relations and engagement with Nigeria. It is quite apposite to see the expected of China's engagement in the areas of trade, investment and infrastructural development in Nigeria within the postulations and logic of dependency theory.The relationship of dependency is created and maintained by a coalition of individuals in both dominate and subordinate states who are beneficiaries of the flawed system and who act to perpetuate these situations in their states. The overall system, however, provides good benefits for the economically advantaged states as compared to those on the other side of the divide.

This paper situates dependency theory not as a rigid ideological frame but as an analytical framework for identifying structural asymmetries in Sino-Nigeria relations. Its basic assumption is that, the global economy is structured to favour dominant states, that trade imbalances reinforce subordination, and that infrastructure investments by powerful states can create new forms of conditionality, provide a perspective through which Nigeria's engagement with China can be evaluated. Importantly, the paper views the position raised by Brautigam (2009), that, the tendency to either romanticize or demonize Chinese engagement; rather, the analytical task is to examine whether the structural conditions identified by dependency theorists (trade deficits, resource extraction, infrastructure-for-resource swaps, and technological asymmetry) are observable in the Sino-Nigeria bilateral relationship.

The paper therefore does not adopt dependency theory to reach a predetermined conclusion that Chinese relations with Nigeria is 'exploitative' in nature. Rather, it uses the theory to pose critical questions; who benefits more from the bilateral arrangement? Do trade and investment patterns reproduce structural subordination? Does Nigerian agency genuinely shape the terms of engagement? These questions are addressed in the analysis sections below.

Though the theory has failed the test of rigorous academic analysis, its influence has remained quite strong. The importance however is evident in its normative stance on international economic influence on politics and cooperation between nations. These influences are evident on the literature on Chinese engagement and cooperation with Africa on all fronts and specifically with Nigeria. This position presents the easy of framing and use of language and logic of dependency theory.

**Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research design. The paper employs systematic documentary analysis, relying on secondary source of data to examine the structure, dynamics, and implications of Sino-Nigeria economic relations. The research is built on the interpretivist tradition, which holds that social and political phenomena are best understood through the meanings, frameworks, and structures that actors bring to them (Bryman, 2012). This approach is appropriate for a study that seeks to analyse the framework of bilateral relations as 'win-win' cooperation rather than merely describing observable trade flows.

data were selected on the basis of two criteria, relevance, and credibility. Relevant data for the study are those that address issues that concern China-Nigeria relations, Sino-Africa engagement, trade and investment data, and the theoretical debates around dependency and South-South cooperation. Credibility was measured by prioritizing peer-reviewed academic articles, books from established academic presses, official documents from institutions such as FOCAC, and the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics. Content analysis was used to the selected materials. This method is appropriate for identifying patterns, themes, and discursive frames across a body of textual data (Krippendorff, 2004).

To enhance the credibility and reliability of the analysis, triangulation was applied through two strategies. First, data source triangulation involved drawing on multiple independent sources like academic literature, official statistics, media commentary, and policy documents to corroborate or contest key claims. Second, theoretical triangulation was applied by interrogating Sino-Nigeria relations not only through the perspective of dependency theory, but also through the competing framework of South-South cooperation and win-win rhetoric, ensuring that alternative explanations were rigorously engaged rather than dismissed.

## Literature Review

The literature on China-Nigeria and Sino-Africa relations broadly falls into three broad categories; first, those who identify neo-colonial or dependency-reproducing patterns, second, proponents who celebrate China-Africa cooperation as a transformative South-South partnership, and lastly, those who adopt more analyse positions that acknowledge both dimensions.

Sanusi (2013), argues that the Sino-Africa relationship, as structured, replicates the classical colonial economic pattern where Africa exports raw materials and imports manufactured goods. He states that China takes African primary products and sells manufactured ones in return, noting that this is a pattern that has historically placed the continent economies at a disadvantaged position. His argument draws implicitly on the structural concerns of dependency school, particularly the notion of unequal exchange advanced by Prebisch (1950). Critically, Sanusi's argument is grounded in observable trade data; Nigeria's exports to China are overwhelmingly dominated by petroleum and other primary commodities, while Chinese exports to Nigeria are manufactured and processed goods, reflecting a classical centre-periphery division of labour.

Utomi (2008) similarly raises concerns about Chinese engagement in Nigeria, warning of the risks of a new form of economic colonialism. He cautions that Nigeria's negotiating weakness rooted in fiscal desperation, infrastructure deficits, and governance challenges, leaves it ill-positioned to extract genuinely beneficial terms from Chinese investors and lenders. Utomi's concerns are consistent with the dependency theorists' observation that the terms of engagement between dominant and subordinate economies are shaped by structural power differentials rather than voluntary bargaining between equals.

On the other side, Brautigam (2009) offers one of the most empirically grounded defences of Chinese engagement in Africa. it argues that much of the Western critique of China in Africa is driven by fear of competition rather than evidence. Chinese financing, it contends, has filled critical infrastructure gaps that Western donors and lenders have been unwilling or unable to address. Similarly, Moyo (as cited in Vincent, 2018) argues that Chinese engagement follows a business-like tone without political interference, allowing African states more autonomy than Western conditionality-laden aid.

Agwu (2013) occupies a middle position, acknowledging both the potential benefits and the structural risks of Chinese engagement. He critiques what he describes as the uncritical romanticization of China-Africa relations by some African elites, while also warning against the Western tendency to demonize Chinese involvement as inherently exploitative. Alden (2007) and Brautigam (2009) similarly acknowledge that African governments are not passive recipients but active agents who can shape the terms of Chinese engagement to their advantage, a point that qualifies, though does not negate, dependency theory's focus on structural inequality.

Within the specifically Nigerian context, Alli (2018) traces the evolution of China-Nigeria economic relations from the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1971 to the present, documenting the rapid escalation of trade volumes and Chinese investment in Nigerian infrastructure. Rindap (2015) notes that despite this growth, the benefits of the relationship have consistently favoured China, a finding consistent with dependency theory's expectations. Odeh (2011) and Ogunsanwo (2008) provide longitudinal trade data that support the observation of persistent trade imbalances in China's favour.

**Sino-Nigeria Relation: Development, Dependency or Disguised Dependence?**

**Evaluating the Dependency and Neo-colonialism Debate**

The position of Samir Amin echoes the growing tendency of dependence between Africa and other developed economies of the world. Evans (2009) further states that imperialism remains the frame for the analysis of dependent development. No empirical research or evidence, but postulations and assumptions, has depicted the recent Chinese engagement with Nigeria as exhibiting imperialistic tendencies per se. Nonetheless, Sanusi (2013) and Utomi (2008) insist that China is pursuing a neo-colonialist agenda in Nigeria.

This paper engages these positions more substantively than has typically been done in the literature. Sanusi's (2013) argument is not merely rhetorical: the trade data consistently supports the observation that Nigeria exports primary commodities and imports manufactured goods from China, a pattern that Prebisch (1950) identified as structurally disadvantaging to developing economies through deteriorating terms of trade. The fact that over 90% of Nigeria's exports to China in 2017 were mineral fuels (OEC, 2018) while China exports manufactured goods and electrical products to Nigeria is structurally consistent with the centre-periphery division of labour that dependency theory describes.

Utomi's (2008) concern about neo-colonialism is grounded in the observation that Chinese companies often bring their own labour for construction projects, thereby limiting the employment and technology transfer benefits to the host country. Moreover, infrastructure-for-loan agreements, where Chinese loans for infrastructure development are secured against future resource access or repayment obligations often comes with a form of conditionality that, while structurally different from Western political conditionality, nonetheless constrains Nigerian sovereignty. The African Development Bank's concerns about debt sustainability in Chinese-financed infrastructure projects further support the view that Sino-Africa engagement can generate dependency dynamics under a different name.

However, this paper also recognizes the limitations of a purely dependency-based reading. Unlike classical colonial extraction, Chinese engagement has introduced new capital into Nigeria's economy. Projects such as the Lekki Free Zone and the Ogun-Guangdong Free Trade Zone have generated employment and investment. Brautigam's (2009) argument that Chinese financing fills infrastructure gaps that Western donors have ignored is empirically supported. Furthermore, the Agency of the Nigerian state, evidenced by the Obasanjo administration's active diplomatic outreach to China in 2003 and 2007, and Nigeria's ability to leverage the Chinese relationship in its negotiations with Western partners — suggests that Nigeria is not entirely without bargaining power.

This paper therefore argues that Sino-Nigeria relations occupy an analytically complex position. The structural conditions described by dependency theory like trade imbalances, resource extraction, asymmetric bargaining power, and limited technology transfer, are observable and empirically documented. Yet these conditions coexist with genuine developmental benefits and Nigerian agency, suggesting that the relationship is better characterized as 'asymmetric interdependence' than as straightforward dependency or as an unqualified win-win. The dependency is not identical to classical colonialism, but nor is it absent: it persists in a disguised form, embedded in trade structures, loan conditionalities, and the political economy of infrastructure financing.

**Structural Dependency in Trade Relations**

China's relations with Nigeria at the aggregate level reflect significant structural asymmetry. According to the OEC report of 2018 trade data, China exports more to Nigeria, resulting in huge trade imbalances in its favour. China's cumulative exports to Nigeria in 2017 were valued at US$12.3 billion, in contrast to Nigeria's exports to China, which stood at US$600 million that same year, with mineral fuel accounting for about 90% of Nigeria's total exports (OEC, 2018).

According to Ogunsanwo (2008), from the early days of China-Nigeria engagement in 1971, Nigerian imports from China already exceeded exports significantly. Chibundu (2000) notes that trade statistics between China and Nigeria showed that the balance had been heavily weighted in favour of China throughout the late 1990s. According to Odeh (2011), between 1996 and 2001, the trade volume between Nigeria and China grew from US$178 million to US$144 billion by 2001, and China-Nigeria bilateral trade volume soared to 15.3 billion dollars in 2018, 10.8% higher than the previous year (Yong, 2019).

These data patterns are structurally significant from a dependency theory perspective. Prebisch's (1950) argument about deteriorating terms of trade, a situation whereby peripheral economies face falling prices for their primary commodity exports relative to the manufactured goods they import from the centre — finds empirical resonance in Nigeria's trade profile with China. Nigeria effectively functions as a raw material supplier and consumer market for Chinese manufactured goods, a division of labour that reproduces rather than transforms its peripheral economic status. Rindap (2015) captures this dynamic when noting that the benefits accruing from the relations have consistently favoured China, despite decades of growing trade volumes.

**Infrastructure-for-Loan and Conditionality**

A critical dimension of China's economic statecraft in Nigeria that demands closer analytical attention is the infrastructure-for-loan mechanism. Unlike traditional bilateral aid that comes with political conditionality, China's preferred model involves concessional loans for large-scale infrastructure projects such as railways, roads, airports, with repayment structured in terms of future revenue streams or natural resource access. While Chinese officials consistently frame this as 'non-interference', the structural dynamics of these arrangements warrant scrutiny through the lens of dependency theory.

Akindele (in Alli, 2018) notes that economic strength is the most important component of a nation's power, and China's deployment of its economic advantage through infrastructure financing gives it significant structural leverage over borrowing states. When Nigeria cannot meet its repayment obligations, the collateral implications, whether formal or informal might constrain Nigerian sovereignty. The case of Kenya's Port of Mombasa, where Chinese creditors sought to invoke collateral clauses following repayment difficulties, illustrates the structural risk embedded in infrastructure-for-loan arrangements. This is not classical colonialism, but it is a form of structural conditionality that dependency theory would identify as a mechanism through which dominant economies exercise control over dependent ones that are desirous of attracting development.

It should be noted that the evidence for such outcomes in the Nigerian context remains contested. Brautigam (2009) argues that fears about Chinese debt traps in Africa are often exaggerated and that Chinese lenders have generally been willing to renegotiate terms. This paper acknowledges that ambiguity while maintaining that the structural risk is analytically real and consistent with the dependency framework. The absence of transparency in many Sino-Nigeria loan agreements, a point raised by civil society organizations and parliamentary critics in Nigeria makes independent assessment difficult, further supporting the case for greater Nigerian negotiating capacity and institutional oversight.

**Nigerian Agency and the Limits of Dependency Theory**

Dependency theory has been criticized for underestimating the agency of peripheral states. In the Sino-Nigeria context, Nigerian agency is discernible in several ways. The Obasanjo administration's diplomatic initiative of 2003-2007 was a deliberate strategic choice to diversify Nigeria's development partnerships beyond traditional Western donors. The establishment of the Nigerian-Chinese Chamber of Commerce in 1994 and Nigeria's active participation in FOCAC summit processes indicate that Nigeria is not a passive recipient of Chinese-determined terms, but an active, if asymmetrically positioned, negotiating partner.

Alden (2007) and Brautigam (2009) are correct to emphasize that Nigeria's approval and agency is fundamental to the relationship. The question, however, is whether that agency is exercised with adequate information, institutional capacity, and strategic coherence to secure genuinely beneficial terms. Utomi's (2008) concern, that Nigerian negotiating weakness, rooted in fiscal desperation and governance challenges, is precisely that this agency is structurally constrained by the country's development deficits. Dependency, in its contemporary form, does not require the absence of African agency; it requires only that the structural conditions of the global economy systematically disadvantage African negotiating positions. This is the more sophisticated reading of dependency theory that this paper advances.

**Chinese Economic Strength and Policy on Trade and Economic Development in Africa**

**China's Economic Rise and Strategic Objectives**

The emergence of China as a powerful and influential state in the world, especially within the present international system, is due largely to its technological, trade, and investment capabilities and its economic impact across the world and specifically in Africa, where it has emerged as the second-largest trading partner.

China's economic growth rate was placed at 6.1% in 2019 compared with 6.6% in 2018. The 2019 rate was described as the lowest in the country's growth pace since 1990 (NBS). According to Pan (2007), the Chinese development model consists of four subsystems: a unique way of social organisation, a unique way of developing its national economy, a unique way of government functions, and a unique outlook and interaction with the outside world.

Chuntoa (2012) notes that, from the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the nation's economic system was under the control of the Communist Party of China (CPC). The country experienced a significant turnaround after 1978 when the policy of modernisation, reform, and economic opening was adopted. The opening-up policy began with the establishment of Special Economic Zones. With the reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, China's astronomical economic growth and modernisation necessitated the country's expanding engagement with the African continent (Utomi, 2009).

From a dependency theory perspective, China's economic rise and its engagement with Africa must be contextualized within the global political economy. China's need for raw materials particularly petroleum, minerals, and agricultural commodities, to fuel its industrial growth drives its engagement with resource-rich African states. This resource imperative means that Chinese investment in African infrastructure is not purely altruistic; it is strategically designed to secure access to the natural resources that sustain Chinese economic growth. Zafar (2008) notes explicitly that China's primary interest in Nigeria from the late 1990s was to secure access to Nigeria's abundant human and natural resources to fuel its expanding economy. This structural dynamic in which Nigeria's resources drive Chinese engagement, is precisely the kind of asymmetric relationship that dependency theory identifies as characteristic of centre-periphery relations.

**Chinese Policy Framework: FOCAC and the Win-Win Narrative**

The driving force of Chinese policy in its engagement with the outside world is its non-interference or non-interventionist policy in the domestic affairs of its partners. There are varying contestations on the presence of China in Africa; Agwu (2013) notes these are a mix of facts and fiction, believed to be powered by a Western media fearful that China is displacing Western influence in the continent.

Since the establishment of FOCAC in 2000, China-Africa relations have consistently experienced an all-time high, with an expanded agenda for Win-Win cooperation and engagement, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and significant construction activities across the continent. Ubi and Ibonye (2017) aver that China, having attained prominence both in economic terms and extensive reach, deemed it imperative to solidify its relationship with the developing world, especially with the African continent given its strategic resources and market.

However, the 'win-win' framing of FOCAC and related bilateral arrangements merits critical scrutiny. As this paper has argued, the structural conditions of Sino-Nigeria trade present, persistent imbalances, resource extraction, and infrastructure-for-loan mechanisms which suggest that the benefits of cooperation are not equally distributed. The 'win-win' narrative, while not entirely false, Chinese investment has generated genuine developmental benefits in Nigeria and continue to functions discursively to foreclose critical interrogation of structural asymmetries. This is consistent with what Sunkel (1969) described as the ideological legitimation of dependency: the production of narratives that naturalize unequal exchange and discourage structural reform of the relationship. Scholarly engagement with Sino-Nigeria relations therefore requires maintaining analytical distance from the official framing of both parties and subjecting the empirical record of the relationship to rigorous structural analysis.

**Discussion**

The analysis presented above allows for a more theoretically consistent and empirically grounded assessment of China-Nigeria relations than has typically appeared in the literature. Three key findings emerge from the analysis, each with implications for the theoretical framework and for Nigerian policy.

First, the structural conditions described by dependency theory are observable in the Sino-Nigeria bilateral relationship. Persistent trade imbalances, in which Nigeria consistently runs significant deficits with China, the overwhelming dominance of primary commodities in Nigerian exports, the use of infrastructure-for-loan mechanisms that create structural conditionality, and the limited transfer of technology from Chinese projects to Nigerian workers and institutions — all of these are consistent with the dependency framework's characterisation of centre-periphery relations. This does not mean that China is engaged in deliberate exploitation of Nigeria; structural dependency can be reproduced through the ordinary operation of market forces without any malicious intent from the dominant party.

Second, the relationship is not one of simple or unqualified dependency. Nigerian agency is real, and the developmental benefits of Chinese engagement often seen in infrastructure construction, employment generation in special economic zones, and diversification of development partnerships— are genuine. The analytical error would be to adopt either the extreme dependency position (China is neo-colonialist and the relationship is wholly harmful to Nigeria) or the extreme cooperation position (the relationship is mutually beneficial and criticism is simply a product of Western bias). The empirical record supports a more nuanced conclusion: the relationship is asymmetrically structured in China's favour but is not without benefit to Nigeria, and Nigerian agency can, in principle, be deployed more effectively to improve the terms of engagement.

Third, the persistence of dependency in a disguised form, embedded in trade structures, loan conditionalities, and the political economy of infrastructure financing, also suggests that the 'win-win' rhetoric of FOCAC and bilateral agreements should be understood as an ideological framing that requires critical interrogation rather than uncritical acceptance. Sunkel's (1969) insight that dependency can be reproduced in new institutional forms is directly applicable here: contemporary Sino-Nigeria relations do not resemble classical colonialism, but they do reproduce some of its key structural features under the language of cooperation, partnership, and mutual benefit.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The paper has focused on the main trust of China’s engagement with developing countries especially the continent of Africa and Nigeria in particular, and has established the position that, Chinese presence and main instrument of engaging its partners is economic instrument. Therefore, all activities within the web of this interactions has position the many Chinese companies and investors at vantage position which is led to the recurring trade disparities between Nigeria and China in terms of import-export commodities and volumes. Given the forgoing position, the paper makes the following recommendations for enhanced and two-way beneficial engagement and cooperation as against the multiple benefits of one party in the relations.

At the same time, the paper has argued against a simplistic or determinist application of dependency theory. Nigerian agency is real; Chinese investment has generated genuine developmental benefits; and the relationship is better characterised as 'asymmetric interdependence' than as straightforward neo-colonialism. The key analytical contribution of this paper is the argument that dependency can persist in disguised forms, embedded in trade structures, infrastructure-for-loan conditionality, and technological asymmetry, even as both parties deploy the language of win-win cooperation;

- The terms and process of engaging development partners especially considering deployment of economic instrument should be critically juxtaposed within national economic realities and need of developing countries especially Nigeria where internal economic needs tends to place the country at disadvantage position when negotiating with more developed countries especially ambitious country like China.
- The foreign policy machinery of Nigeria should deploy more focused diplomacy of economic development which will allow for right standing when negotiating its various bilateral agreements with Chinese government and investors for the development of its economy.
- Also, the diplomats representing the country should address national issues from more realistic perspective and avoid presenting the country as desperate and dependent which has greatly affected many Africa countries that have negative experience in dealing with Chinese investors as the case with the control of national asset such as the Port of Mombasa, Kenya Port etc where China is having total control because of inability to fulfil contractual agreement by the parties involved.
- Nigeria in its dealings and engagement with the external world and development partners should identify its areas of strength and approach negotiation with same in order to fully explore all options available in its march towards development.
- Nigerian civil society, parliament, and independent institutions should advocate for greater transparency in Sino-Nigeria loan agreements and investment contracts. The absence of public access to the terms of infrastructure-for-loan arrangements undermines democratic accountability and limits the country's ability to assess and manage the risks of structural conditionality embedded in Chinese financing.
- Future research should complement the documentary analysis employed here with primary fieldwork, including interviews with Nigerian policymakers, Chinese investors, and civil society organisations, to provide a more granular understanding of how the terms of Sino-Nigeria engagement are actually negotiated and implemented.

- Finally, the country should have a clearly defined and workable development agenda which will drive her negotiation, cooperation and economic engagement with China and within this set in motion viable internal machineries that will aid the actualization of these agendas without been positioned as a dependent country despite the availability of human and natural resources which is the main attraction of its partners.

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