

Oscillation of Two Giants: Sino-Nigeria Relations and the Global South

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Abstract China is considered as a significant development partner in Nigeria; yet relations between the two countries have been marked by episodes of oscillations. This paper engages three interconnected questions: (i) What is the history of Sino-Nigeria relations? (ii) How has Nigeria's political elites and ordinary Nigerians reacted to Chinese presence? (iii) To what extent is Sino-Nigeria relations beneficial to Nigeria? This paper while identifying and discussing the benefits and underbellies of Sino-Nigeria relations, draws attention to aspects of the relations less discussed in the literature. It concludes that beyond the more popular yet simplistic Janus-headed explication of Sino-Nigeria relations as positive or negative, significant focus is needed to understand the instabilities capable of impacting on the developmental potential of China in Nigeria.

Keywords Nigeria · China · Sino-Nigeria relations · Infrastructure · Development

Introduction

On April 9, 2016, when Mr. Femi Adesina, the special adviser to Nigeria's new President, Muhammadu Buhari, announced that the country's leader will be travelling to China on a working visit, he, even if he had wished for huge media coverage, probably, would not have imagined that the announcement – within a week – will generate a threat of legal action against the new government by a renowned human right activist and two strong letters, one in opposition by a serving state governor and the other in support by a member of parliament both addressed to China's President Xi Jinping. This episode, in some sense and as will be highlighted in this paper,

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underscores the complexities and dynamism in China and Nigeria relations, two countries holding significant position in the global south. Both countries, given their pivotal role and considering their populations relative to those of other countries in their respective continents, qualify as giants. China is the most populated country in the world, Nigeria is the most populated in Africa; as Udeala [134] puts it “one of every three Asians is Chinese, so also one in every four persons in Africa is a Nigerian.” The Chinese economy is the biggest in Asia, Nigeria’s economy became the biggest in Africa in 2014, only losing the position to South Africa, the country it earlier surpassed. While China has risen to become the second largest economy in the world, Nigeria’s resource endowment and potential leadership role or “manifest destiny” [16] in (West)Africa have been noted, an expectation sometimes encapsulated in what is referred to as *Pax Nigeriana* [11, 106]. It is therefore a combination of China’s contemporary rise and Nigeria’s pivotal role in Africa that make Sino-Nigeria relations an interesting but crucial component of the global south as expatiated in the next section.

Yet, beyond population size, if China’s recent economic development and increasing global influence comes into the picture, it qualifies as a supergiant when compared to Nigeria; a country that had been depicted as a “crippled giant” [103] or a “sleeping giant” [53]. While Akinterinwa had noted in the 1990s that Sino-Nigeria relations was “between a big giant and a bigger giant” ([10] p. 136), China has grown to become the second largest economy in the world, lifting over 800 million people out of poverty [144]. The supergiant’s influence has grown to encompass Africa, creating renewed economic drives and interest in the continent [25]; and Nigeria – like other African countries – have seemingly viewed China as a development partner.

China’s interaction with countries of the South manifest in different forms and categories such as Beijing providing aid, forgiving debt, supporting social programmes, involvement in infrastructure and construction projects and promotion of overseas factories and special economic zones, Chinese traders and distributors, Chinese exports, and encouraging Chinese tourists to visit countries [26]. These categories of interactions have attracted significant interest in the South; and in the case of China’s presence in Africa, for instance, besides research into communities and social networks that have characterised Sino-Africa engagement, scholars have also been interested in issues of language, ethnicity and racialized identities and the expression of contemporary art [78]. In terms of the development potentials in Sino-Africa relations however, commentators broadly fall into three categories that centers on pessimism, optimism and caution [104]; these categories are also discernible in Sino-Nigeria relations [106].

This paper – while highlighting the Janus-headed nature of Sino-Nigeria engagement – historicises and draws attention to other (largely) ignored realities in the relationship. Specifically, it interrogates three questions: (i) What is the history of Sino-Nigeria relations? (ii) How has Nigeria’s political elites and ordinary Nigerians reacted to Chinese presence? (iii) To what extent is Sino-Nigeria relations beneficial to Nigeria? In engaging the last two questions, the paper discusses contemporary (i.e. post-1999) Sino-Nigeria relations under four sub-headings: ‘win-win smiles,’ ‘behind the smiles,’ ‘China and local narratives,’ and ‘statist and non-statist incongruities.’ Structurally, the rest of this paper is divided into four parts. [Sino-Nigeria Relations as a Subject Matter: a Brief Comment](#) section is a short discourse on Sino-Nigeria relations.

China (and the West) in Nigeria's International Relations before 1999 section discusses the history of Sino-Nigerian relations within the context of an international economic relations dominated by the West. *Highlights and Underbelly of Sino-Nigerian Relations, 1999-2016* section highlights and interrogates the benefits and underbellies of Sino-Nigeria relations in the Fourth Republic, 1999–2016, while presenting those less captured aspects of the relations. This is followed by a conclusion.

Sino-Nigeria Relations as a Subject Matter: a Brief Comment

Sino-African Relations as South-South Relations

Though a contested concept, especially in terms of utility and composition [48, 77, 114, 121, 126], South-South relations, or 'South-South cooperation' as it is sometimes referred to, has grown to become a significant component of contemporary study of international political economy especially with the rise of countries like China and India. The 'South' has therefore not only become an identity but it is also a strategy [14]. It is a national and transnational identity for state and non-state actors that depicts their shared experience of colonialism, imperialism and the subsequent challenge of nation-building and development within an international system dominated by countries of the North ([14], p. 4). As a strategy, it is a critique and mobilisation against "the patent and persistent inequities of the international system, underpinned by asymmetries in power wealth and resources" ([14], p. 4). In both sense, it thus a "partnership based on common historical trajectories, structural positioning and values among developing nations, especially in terms of the desire for sovereignty and equality" ([39], p. 1367). But South-South relations does not only manifest in the (post)colonial binaries of global inequality [113], it also defines the practices that construct and reconstruct the 'north' and 'south' as discursive identities [45].

Sino-Africa (and by implication, Sino-Nigeria) relations falls, and have been situated within South-South relations since it is defined as "the political and particularly the commercial contacts between the economies in the South" ([29] p. 10). For instance, Jackson [65] in his critique of modernisation, post-colonial and dependency theories to explain Sino-African relations insist on a more nuanced approach that empirically reflects on the interaction, at organizational and community levels, as a specific type of South-South relations. Some other scholars have been attracted to the rise of China and the other 'BRICS' states (i.e. Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa) and how these rise is impacting Africa [30]. For sure, locating China's international relations within the context of South-South relations is not restricted to Africa. For instance, China's rise has political and economic implications for other Southern countries in Latin America (see [39, 66]).

Nonetheless, the South-South framework has been challenged on a number of grounds. The representation of divides such as 'North-South' (and by implication, South-South relations) do not command universal acceptance among scholars; to this extent, some have suggested abandoning such "state-centric view" ([48], p. 18). Some scholars have questioned the inclusion of China in the category of 'South' considering the country's pace and level of development [48, 121]. This article argues that China is unquestionably an economic super power and locates Sino-Africa relations within

ambit of South-South relations for three main reasons. First, the South-South cooperation is beyond development cooperation and should be understood within the historical and overarching agenda and global reality that contributed to mobilising the developing world (or Third World, as it was once popularly known) towards increased political and economic collaboration on the basis of the Bandung conference in 1955, the call for a new international economic order, and the rise and spread in Latin America's *dependentia* scholarship which had stemmed from the perceived unfavourable North-South relations [32, 79, 142]. From the aforementioned historical perspective, non-membership of the South is not determined by the growth and development of countries; rather, the ultimate goal remains the collective improvement in the lives of the peoples of these countries. As such, that China is economically more developed today does not necessarily presuppose that it officially denounced its membership of the South or assume a seat in the North. In any case, the UN Office for South-South Cooperation, sets out to among other things (emphasis is ours), "enables countries of the South – emerging, *middle income* and least developed – to work together to use their wealth of resources, tangible and intangible, in support of national, regional and global development efforts." [137]. When the World Bank classifies China as a middle income country [143], making it qualify for being considered as a country in the South, why "exclude China" ([121], p. 245)?

Second, South-South relations operate or at least claim to operate within the doctrine of non-interference wherein there is equality and mutual respect for sovereignty among members [14]. Sino-Africa relations, especially when viewed through Beijing's official non-interference policy (we will return to this policy in the fourth section), fits into the South-South frame. This differs from the North-South relations of the post-Washington Consensus type that is hinged on economic and political conditionalities [65]. Conversely, Sino-Africa relations is based on five principles, "friendship, sovereign equality, non-intervention, mutually beneficial development and international cooperation" ([13] p. 147). China's 2006 African Policy re-echoes non-interference, stating respect for "African countries' independent choice of the road of development" [56]. With this, it becomes understandable that some in Beijing considers the idea of a 'China Model' concept as a Western attempt to extrapolate China's domestic political and economic governance in the country's interaction with countries of the South, preferring the term 'South-South cooperation' to describe the relations [39]. On their part, African countries in most cases have acknowledged the fact that China is the official representative of the Chinese people despite the continuous existence of Taiwan [119, 132].

Third, the South-South relations is not necessarily state-centric, it also encapsulates non-state actors [14]. More so, contemporary international relations transcends state-state interaction to include non-state actors [141]. While some non-state actors have canvassed peace and development around the world, others have threatened global peace and security [27]. In some sense, therefore, the epistemological implication of this broader understanding of international relations is that, alongside states, non-state actors such as local and international NGOs, labour union, news media, social movements, terrorist groups, and individuals – ranging from the charismatic state leader to the "private individuals" ([76] p. 155) – have all become subject matters in the field.

In our case, and bearing in mind the significant position of both China and Nigeria as mentioned in the introduction, a South-South framework is useful to understanding Sino-Nigeria relations for three reasons. First, the framework, when it is assumed to be a strategy devised by countries to advance the welfare of their peoples, does not in itself foreclose exploitation by parties, rather it merely provides an alternative option from the hitherto globally dominant North-South cooperation. For one, China has its own – political, economic and strategic – interests when relating with other countries in the South [26]. So, that there is Chinese presence in Nigeria does not foreclose that such reality in some instances are injurious to both Chinese and Nigerians [1, 105, 134]. It is perhaps this realisation that led some to argue that rather than valorizing non-Western development perspectives or assuming that relating with China is the naturally preferred option to Africa, Beijing's proclamations “are treated as any more legitimate than claims by rival governments vying for African resources” ([112], p. 14).

Second, the South-South framework, and as noted above, is amenable to both state and non-state levels of analysis. As Alden et al. [14], p. 1–2) puts it: “the notion of the South is deeply wrapped up in the concerns of states, be they questions of security, autonomy or territorial integrity, but at the same time it is also intensely concerned with the peoples, communities and livelihoods that make up the developing world.” The reality of non-state actors is discernible in Sino-Nigeria commentaries, as, for instance, Agbu earlier notes that “increasingly positive roles are being played by informal groups” ([4] p. 216). For one, non-state actors like the Nigeria-China Friendship Association (NICAF), Nigeria-China Business Council, and Association of Nigerian Students in China (ANSIC) contributes to deepening Sino-Nigeria relations (see for instance [134]). Yet, by the same token and given that Sino-Nigeria relations – like elsewhere [38, 66, 122] – does not foreclose competition and conflicts (as would be highlighted below), some local interest groups like labour union and the media have viewed certain manifestations of Sino-Nigeria relations in negative terms [105]. We will return to the positive-negative perspective of Sino-Nigeria relations shortly. The South-South framework is useful because this paper highlights state relations and some of the manifestations and implications of China in Nigeria and how the ‘ordinary’ people relate to it.

Third, a South-South framework is useful because Sino-Nigeria relations does not only have implication for both countries but, given the significant positions of both countries in the South, it could also have some implications for other countries in the global south. By this, it is hypothesized that if Sino-Nigeria relations is positive in terms of promoting economic development in the most populous African country, then that could positively impact and trickle down to neighboring countries, especially bearing in mind Nigeria's resource endowment, military, population, and its historical and pivotal role in the struggle for decolonization and peacemaking in Africa [106].

Perspectives on Sino-Nigeria Engagement

Sino-Nigeria engagement have attracted a number of academic interest, with different aspects of the phenomenon being investigated by scholars. In terms of scope, the literature can be broadly divided into two groups. First, there are those with generalised, national, macro focus. Here, there is a tendency to interrogate Sino-Nigeria relations in

terms of positives, negatives and landmarks (see for instance [50, 106, 128, 134, 136]). In several instances, some assume that not only can China support the development of Nigeria but that the latter could learn a few lessons from China's development, as Emordi and Osiki [50] puts it "emulating China's drive and determination." Yet, the negative manifestations or challenges of China-Nigeria relations have not been lost in existing works [128, 134].

A second perspective to the study of Sino-Nigeria relations looks at more micro, specific aspects of the engagement. Here, scholars focus on people-to-people relations, for instance Adebayo's study of the availability of low-end Chinese products popularly referred to as *Chinco* in local parlance [1]. Xiao on his part focused on how Chinese petty entrepreneurs navigate the Nigerian legal and economic space [145]. Haugen's study on 'immobility' appraises the experience of Nigerian migrants based in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province of China, highlighting how they navigate the Chinese system after their visa's expire [61]. Apart from academic interests in issues such as the impact of Chinese businesses in electronics and consumer goods [1] or textiles [115], expectedly, given the rentier nature of Nigeria's economy, China-Nigeria relations in the oil sector have also generated a number of works some of which have highlighted the implications of domestic instability in policy, production, and demand [88, 89, 129]. Yet, suffice to mention that China is not the top destination of Nigerian crude oil (see Table 2 and the discussion of Sino-Nigeria oil relations below).

This article largely falls within the group of macro Sino-Nigeria commentaries. In addition to popular Janus-headed discourse of Sino-Nigeria relations (see for instance [134, 138]), we highlight instances of oscillations at micro levels. Specifically, rather than a simplistic positive-negative manifestation, Sino-Nigeria relations is understood as an oscillating phenomenon that manifests at different levels. Highlighting these incongruities both at state-state and people-to-people levels allow us to appreciate the complexities in Sino-Nigeria relations. In the following sections, we will highlight the point that not only has the relations between Nigeria and China been one of fluctuations but we will also draw attention to a lesser highlighted dimension of Sino-Nigeria relations represented in the surfacing of China in contemporary local contestations. To, however, understand contemporary nature of Sino-Nigeria relations it suffice to highlight pre-1999 China and Nigeria engagement.

China (and the West) in Nigeria's International Relations before 1999

There is no agreement in the literature on how best to periodize Sino-Nigeria relations. For instance, while Akinterinwa highlighted "two main periods in Sino-Nigerian relations: 1960–1971 and 1971–1994" ([10] p. 138), others identify 1967–1970s and 1980–2000 phases [50]. For our purpose, we periodize Sino-Nigeria relations into four overflowing periods: the early independence era, the civil war era (1967–1970), the post-war era (1971–1998), and the post-pariah era 1999–2016.

The Early Independence Era

Like most countries in Africa, Nigeria is an inherited territory; an inheritance of British colonialism characterised by the merging of numerous distinctive pre-colonial

territories and kingdoms. During colonialism, Britain dominated the international economic relations and the foreign affairs of their colonies, including Nigeria [7, 62, 120]. Apart from exploiting and appropriating the resources of its colonies well documented by scholars like Ake and Rodney above, young men from colonies were also drafted into the army to fight in support of Britain and its allies in the World Wars [69, 70]. Through colonial domination, therefore, Nigeria along with other colonies were introduced into the international Western capitalist system as producers of primary commodities [7, 120]. With this foundation, and because the primary commodities produced in Nigeria were essentially meant for Western markets [7], Nigeria was setup to pursue a pro-West international relations from independence in 1960; a setup that reflected in the foreign policy of Tafawa Balewa, the country's first Prime Minister [91]. Nigeria favoured a pro-capitalist policy, and this limited its relationship with communist countries such as the Soviet Union and China. Though there were trade contacts since 1953, though economic delegations from China and Nigeria met in Beijing and signed a cooperation communique in 1961, and though Nigeria's Finance Minister, Festus Okotie-Eboh, led a trade delegation to China in 1961 while the Chinese Deputy Minister of Trade, Lu Htsu Chang, visited Nigeria in 1964 [10, 42], yet the "Balewa administration held tenaciously to the Western values it had inherited from Britain" ([91] p. 748). Diplomatic relations with China was established in 1971 after Nigeria's independence in 1960 (see below), albeit the presence since the 1960s of Taiwanese traders in the south-eastern region especially Nnewi [24]. Nonetheless, Nigeria's pro-West posture continued after the bloody overthrow of Balewa in 1966 till 1967, an event that was to be followed by series of military intervention in politics (see Table 1) leading to four republics: the First Republic (1963–1966), the Second Republic (1979–1983), the aborted Third Republic following the annulment of the June 12 1993 presidential election, and the Fourth Republic (1999 till date).

Balewa was overthrown in a coup on 15 January, 1966 and General Aguiyi Ironsi who emerged as Head of State following the coup was killed in a counter coup thereby resulting in the emergence of General Yakubu Gowon as Head of State in July, 1966. Gowon had to lead Nigeria through a bloody civil war.

The Civil War Era (1967–1970)

The Nigerian civil war – fought between the federal forces and the secessionist Biafran army based in the south-eastern part of the country, a territory then referred to as Biafra – led to a slight shift in Nigeria's international relations owing to the federal government's difficulty in getting certain calibre of arms from the West. For instance, while Britain provided the federal government a few weapons, it refused to supply the Nigerian air force the needed bombs and aircraft, the United States and France did not provide any weapon; though some maintain that while the US essentially stayed off supporting any of the warring parties, France supported the Biafran secessionists [90]. With Western sympathy and (sometimes) support for Biafra [28, 107], Nigeria began to turn to the East; but rather than China, looking East meant turning to the Soviet Union. China on its part supported Biafra [44, 90].

Nevertheless, while China's support for Biafra meant that it clearly went against the decision of the then umbrella body of countries on the continent, the Organisation for Africa's Unity (OAU), conversely, the Soviet Union, few months into the war in 1967,

Table 1 Heads of state and their tenure in Nigeria

Head of state	Regime type	Duration of tenure
Tafawa Balewa	Civilian	October 1960–January 1966
Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi	Military	January 1966–July 1966
Yakubu Gowon	Military	July 1966–July 1975
Muritala Muhammed	Military	July 1975–February 1975
Olusegun Obasanjo	Military	February 1976–October 1979
Shehu Shagari	Civilian	October 1979–December 1983
Muhammadu Buhari	Military	December 1983–August 1985
Ibrahim Babangida	Military	August 1985–August 1993
Ernest Shonekan	Civilian	August 1993–November 1993
Sani Abacha	Military	November 1993–June 1998
Abdulsalami Abubakar	Military	June 1998–May 1999
Olusegun Obasanjo	Civilian	May 1999–May 2007
Umaru Yar Adua	Civilian	May 2007–May 2010
Goodluck Jonathan	Civilian	May 2010–May 2015
Muhammadu Buhari	Civilian	May 2015 till date

Source: Authors

sent Soviet planes to the Nigerian government [90]. An American scholar, late Stanley Diamond, that visited Biafra during the war reported that Chinese small arms and ammunition were made available to Biafra via Tanzania, a country that also supported the break-way region [44]. For Ogunbadejo, five reasons account for China's support for Biafra: first is the pro-West foreign policy of Nigeria after independence; second is the bourgeois nature of the administration; third is the non-recognition of Peking by the Nigerian administration prior to the war; four is the support of Biafra by some radical countries such as Tanzania and Zambia; and five and perhaps the most important reason was the global Sino-Soviet rivalry ([90] p. 27–28).

Broadly speaking, the aforementioned five reasons could be located within the context of the world politics at that time, and how that influenced the relations of world powers with African countries. On the one hand, the cold war was on, and it saw the East and the West jostling for support and proxies in the newly independent African countries. Given that the Nigerian federal government was initially pro-West, China would have contradicted its communist ideology by providing support to the ruling pro-West government. On the other hand, it must be stressed that the late 1950s and 1960s marked the start of a period of conflict in Sino-Soviet relations [149], a situation that made China “eager to find a new ally in the international community” ([125], p. 49). Thus, bearing in mind that, “[F]rom 1963 onwards it is impossible to separate Chinese policy in Africa from the ideological dispute within the Communist world” ([64] p. 512), and given that China aims to bolster its international standing in the face of its conflict with the Soviet, providing support for the secessionist Biafra forces in anticipation of an independent Biafran country goes in line with expanding China's

allies. In any case, Sino-Soviet competition for influence in Africa also manifested in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan. In a similar episode to the secessionist conflict in Nigeria, “China began to supply arms to the Eritrean Liberation Front in 1968 but cut this off completely as part of the agreement which established diplomatic relations with Ethiopia in 1971” ([74] p. 10).

The Post-War Era (1971–1998)

At the end of the bloody civil war which saw the federal forces retaining the south-eastern region as a part of Nigeria and a surrender of the Biafran forces, the government of General Yakubu Gowon initiated a peacebuilding policy; popularly referred to as a policy of reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation (3Rs). During this period, Gowon and other senior members of his regime visited Western and Eastern capitals. It is however interesting to note that even with reports of Chinese support for Biafra, the Nigerian government failed “to mention the... Chinese as sources of arms for Biafra” ([44] p. 344). This denial might have been a result of any of two possible reasons. First, it could be that Gowon decided to internationalise the post-war policy of reconciliation, thereby reconciling not only with Biafran leaders and fighters but also with countries that supported the secessionist army. Given the significant role of foreign countries and groups in the war, the need to re-establish or strengthen relations with both capitalist and communist countries cannot be understated in this sense. Second and in a different vein from the first possible reason, it could be that the Gowon government truly did not find any evidence to buttress a Chinese support for Biafra. For instance, Olusegun Obasanjo, a military officer during the war and later military (and two decades later, civilian) Head of State, noted in his memoir: “Although some Marxist socialists in ‘Biafra’ appealed to China for help, we have no tangible evidence of any material support or assistance to Biafra by the Chinese” ([87], p. 219).

Nevertheless, in February 1971, Nigeria established diplomatic relations with China and by 1972 a Chinese economic and trade exhibition was held in Lagos [42]. By 1974, not only did Gowon travel on an eight-day visit to China but he also had an audience with the revered Chairman Mao Tse-Tung [90]. Having established diplomatic relations with China in 1971, Nigeria joined other African and non-African countries to support the UN resolution to admit China as the legitimate representative of the Chinese people, granting China a permanent membership of the UN’s Security Council in October 1971. With collective support, the Peoples Republic of China officially replaced Taiwan as the representative of the Chinese people at the UN. To further deepen Sino-Nigeria relations, in 1978, the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), an organisation considered as a “specialised instrument of foreign policy” according to its website [84], initiated a Dialogue Series with Chinese officials [101].

In the two decades following the official establishment of Sino-Nigeria diplomatic relations in 1971, relations between Nigeria and China achieved least economic gains. Having been introduced into the international capitalist system originally as a primary producer, Nigeria’s post-colonial ruling elites – both military and civilian – couldn’t fundamentally diversify the largely rentier economy that developed around the country’s vast crude oil base; a product mainly sold to Western countries (see Table 2). Meanwhile, when China was emerging as a regional and global economic power in the last century, the Nigerian economy especially in the 1980s and 1990s was characterized by social and

Table 2 Nigeria crude oil exports by destination (in million barrels)

Country	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14
China	6	5	7	2	3	8	9	1	5	0.9	8	12	4	7	7	11
Taiwan	5	12	10	7	8	7	-	0.9	3	-	0.9	-	9	0.9	0.9	0.9
US	243	311	309	230	304	381	382	383	416	318	246	313	227	147	73	24
India	104	86	81	86	79	92	94	100	75	74	87	110	98	93	108	136
Netherlands	4	5	14	8	18	6	20	15	9	33	23	44	58	92	84	101
France	50	40	51	41	43	25	31	45	23	36	30	25	43	36	42	49
Spain	61	67	64	40	50	41	44	44	34	36	36	41	50	57	50	79
UK	0.7	0.9	0.9	-	0.9	1	3	0.9	7	9	15	11	24	42	41	31

Source: Compiled from Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) Annual Statistical Bulletin from 1999 to 2014

economic crises [3]. The collapse of Second Republic in 1983 was linked to the perversion of the electoral process, corruption, oil glut, and the inability of the governing elite to manage the attendant economic vulnerabilities [67]; a situation that was inherited by the subsequent military regimes and eventually led to exogenous adjustment reform measures championed by Western international financial institutions [3].

While Muhammadu Buhari's military regime had some conflictive episodes with the West, chief of which was the 1984 failed abduction of Umaru Dikko, a former minister in the preceding Shehu Shagari civilian administration, from Britain coupled with its human rights record [9], the successor military regime of Ibrahim Babangida that displaced Buhari in a palace coup was more slanted to the West; particularly with its adoption of the Western-backed structural adjustment program or 'SAP' [3]. The negative impacts of SAP on Nigeria's political economy however led critics to canvass for alternative economic agenda that would enhance the country's sovereignty and external relations. For a critical analysis of the impact of SAP on Nigeria, see the compendium by Adejumbi and Momoh [3]. Though the policy did not achieve the much envisaged improvements in the economy and living standard, its adoption – which operated within the context of the 'Washington consensus' (a context where loans and aid from Western governments and institutions were tied to certain conditions such as liberalisation, privatisation, devaluation, and removal of subsidy, among other neo-liberal reforms) – meant that Western international financial institutions became powerful in Nigeria [3]. Meanwhile, because Nigeria was indebted to Western countries and institutions (i.e. the London and Paris Clubs, as they were known), there was little Nigerian leaders could do to extricate the country from Western influence.

Nevertheless, the emergence of 'post-Washington consensus' – which essentially acknowledges the role of good governance in the economic recovery of adjusting countries [102] – meant that with time Nigeria, with the military in office, was to face some criticisms from the West. For one, the General Ibrahim Babangida regime that embraced SAP as an economic transition programme (ETP) failed to pursue the attendant political transition programme (PTP) to an expected end; that is, it failed to organise an election-based transition to civil rule. The emergence of Sani Abacha as military Head of State following the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential

election (i.e. an election that was annulled by the Babangida regime despite being adjudged by observers to be one of the freest and fairest in the country's history and coupled with the dictatorial actions of the new regime) meant that Nigeria was further isolated and sanctioned by the West and its allies [55].

As a consequence of the pariah state of the country and to therefore mediate the attendant backlash of the sanctions imposed by Western countries, there was a significant shift in Nigeria's international relations under Abacha towards a closer relations with China [134]. It was during this period that the Nigerian-Chinese Chamber of Commerce was formed to improve bi-lateral relations. In 1995, the Abacha regime signed an agreement with the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC), a company that will become a major player in the Nigerian construction sector, for the rehabilitation of the Nigerian Railways and the supply of coaches at a cost of US\$529 million [134]. In May 1997, Abacha also played host to the highest ranking Chinese official to visit in recent times, Li Peng, a former Premier of the State Council [83]. However, the death of Abacha in June 1998 provided the opportunity for his successor, Abdulsalami Abubakar, to warm the country back into the hearts of Western powers. Promising a transition to democracy in 1999 and keeping to that promise, Nigeria repaired relations with the West. Nigeria's relations with the West and China have continued since. At this juncture, it is pertinent to highlight some of the drivers of contemporary Sino-Nigeria relations. What is the nature and character of the relations? How do we understand the underlining currents in the relations? This is the focus of the next section.

Highlights and Underbelly of Sino-Nigerian Relations, 1999–2016

The 'win-win' Smiles

Given China's go-global policy, an idea unveiled in 1999 but incorporated into the Tenth Five-Year Plan for 2001–2005 [57], Chinese companies expanded into Africa just as they did elsewhere. With the policy, which provides additional "drive for Chinese companies to invest abroad" ([41] p. 76), Chinese companies began to internationalise, acquiring Western brands like Swedish Volvo, Rover of the UK, and Italian Cifa and many others, while Huawei, ZTE, and state-owned oil and construction companies clinch multi-million dollars contracts and investments in African markets [104]. Coincidentally, Nigeria's Fourth Republic which began in 1999 marked a transition from military to civilian rule. Like most countries in Africa, Chinese investment and presence – often publicised by Beijing as 'win-win partnerships' – have witnessed a significant leap [13, 25]. In the case of Nigeria, unlike earlier patterns where a transition to civil rule almost translates to a pro-West foreign policy, the 1999 transition ushered in an era of expansion in Sino-Nigerian relations; from the China Town in Lagos, to computer villages, to Chinese restaurants and construction companies, 'made in China' or 'made by Chinese' have remained a feature of this expansion. This expansion is not only marked by increases in Sino-Nigeria trade figures but the existence of several organisations and platforms that often seek to deepen the relations between both countries; examples include: Nigeria-China Trade and Investment Forum established in 2009, Confucius Institutes at Nnamdi Azikiwe University in 2008 and

University of Lagos in 2009, Nigeria-China Business Council in 2009, and Association of Nigerian Students in China (ANSIC), and establishment of Culture Centres by both countries. These organisations existed alongside older platforms like Nigeria-China Friendship Association (NICAF) established in the 1994, and the Nigeria-China Dialogue Series established in 1978.

Though accurate data on Sino-Nigeria trade volume remains difficult to access, with about 300 Chinese companies, Sino-Nigerian trade has witnessed increases from about \$2 billion in 1999, to \$3 billion in 2006, to \$16–18 billion in 2014 [34, 97]. Chinese investment in Nigeria galloped from \$4.14 billion by December 2006 to \$7.55 billion in June 2010 [42]. China's go-global policy, it would seem, is positively accepted by Nigeria's political class; and their favourable disposition have been central to the expansion in Sino-Nigerian relations. The rise of China and its willingness to provide economic support (i.e. in terms of provision of infrastructure, aid, and other development assistance) with no political strings attached, "particularly in the face of the retreat of the Washington Consensus and its rather poor record in Africa" ([33], p. 1), seem to promote closer relations between Beijing and African capitals [46]; Abuja has particularly been interested in expanding its relationship with China. Obasanjo's remark during former President Hu Jintao's visit to Nigeria in 2006 aptly captures this point when he stated: "From our assessment, this twenty-first century is the century for China to lead the world. And when you are leading the world, we want to be close behind you. When you are going to the moon, we don't want to be left behind" ([86] p. 46).

Meanwhile, the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), launched in 2000, soon became the highest level of engagement between African governments and Chinese governments. Using its summit diplomacy, China's soft power approach serves as an advantage to Beijing as it periodically meets a large number of Africa's leaders at each summit [104]. Routinely, it uses this platform to boost its influence in Africa while often promising huge funds for the continent on each occasion. For sure, African countries often jostled for these funds. It was therefore not unexpected that in April 2005, China and Nigeria established a strategic partnership [42]. Interestingly, if responses to polls truly represent the views of Nigerians, then it appears that ordinary Nigerians similarly view China's presence in positive light. For instance, this aforementioned favourable disposition seems to be supported in the BBC and Pew polls.

In a poll conducted between October 2005 and January 2006 for the BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan in conjunction with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland, 68% of Nigerians polled viewed China positively while 11% viewed it negatively [17]. Of the 33 countries polled, only Senegal had a higher positive percentage than Nigeria; Senegal had 73%. In another survey conducted between December 2009 and January 2010 among 1000 Nigerians, 73% viewed China's influence positively while 17% thinks it is mainly negative [18]. In another poll conducted among 1000 Nigerians in December 2010, 82% viewed China's rise as an economic power positively, 86% considers economic relations with China as important, and 88% think that China deals fairly with other countries [19]. Yet in another poll conducted in March 2013 among 800 Nigerians, 78% viewed China's influence as positive and only 10% viewed it as negative [20].

Results in a 2013 Pew poll also appears to buttress the BBC polls on Nigerians' seemingly positive view of China. For instance, when asked if they considered China as more of a partner or more of an enemy of Nigeria, or neither, 71% of those polled

viewed China as a partner, 4% viewed China as an enemy, and 9% were indifferent [111]. China in the same poll and on the same question ranked higher than the US: 60% of polled Nigerians viewed US as a partner, 8% viewed it as an enemy, and 15% indifferent [111]. In another poll conducted in February 2014, 85% of the 800 Nigerians polled had a positive view of China's influence; the same percentage as that of Chinese respondents to the same issue in the poll [21]. Interestingly, in the same poll the number of those that had a negative view in China itself about China's influence is 7%, only slightly lesser than Nigeria's 10%. These seemingly favourable feelings of Nigerians towards China is obviously not lost to Chinese officials in Nigeria, as a Chinese ambassador to Nigeria noted: "what makes me so proud is that, despite the geographic distance between us, the hearts of our two peoples are linked. The most recent BBC survey shows, 78% of Nigerians hold positive views of China, which underlines a solid foundation of our longstanding friendship" [43].

Nevertheless, while results from these polls tend to suggest that Nigerians view China and Chinese presence in Nigeria positively, it must be stressed that the methodologies of these polls are not fully publicised, especially in terms of representativeness. For instance, these polls often does not mention the demographic and geographical spread of their sample. But given the presence of China in strategic sectors of the Nigerian economy, positive feelings towards China may not be a surprise. Several Sino-Nigeria bilateral agreements have been signed across diverse areas ranging from infrastructure, agriculture, education, healthcare, to cultural exchanges. In spite of the diversity in Sino-Nigeria engagements, four crucial areas stand out: infrastructure, crude oil, cultural and symbolic gestures, and political issues.

On infrastructure, Chinese companies are particularly visible in telecommunications, power, road and railway construction. Reports of several gargantuan infrastructural projects abound, especially in railway construction. From the \$12 billion 1402 km coastal Lagos-Calabar railway line, to the \$8.3 billion 1124 km Lagos-Kano line, to the \$1.5 billion 313 km double track Lagos-Ibadan railway project, and to the \$850 million 186 km Abuja-Kaduna high-speed railway [15, 109], China's conspicuous presence in the development of rail systems in Nigeria is undebatable. Aside from gifts such as primary schools buildings in Abuja the federal capital territory, Katsina State, Kaduna State and Ogun State [42] and clinching contracts to construct buildings in universities, China is also involved in the \$500 million loan deal for the construction of four new international terminals at the airport in Abuja, Lagos, Port Harcourt and Kano [12, 52]. In most cases, funding for the projects is provided by the China Exim Bank. The CCECC – which is considered to be "the biggest Chinese company doing business in Nigeria, with local staff strength of about 20, 000 and an expatriate of 1000 Chinese citizens" [12] – operates in construction while Huawei and Zhongxing Telecommunications Equipment Corporation (ZTE) operate in telecommunications, these are among the biggest Chinese multinational companies operating in Nigeria [75]. Sino-Nigeria cooperation also led to the launch of NigcomSat-1R; making "Nigeria the first African country to own a communications satellite and the seventh in the world to have satellite navigation capacity" [43]. Sino-Nigeria relations has also led to the establishment of Free trade zones (FTZs), a project predicted to generate 300,000 direct and 600,000 indirect jobs [98].

Meanwhile, China's presence in Nigeria's oil sector has expectedly attracted a few academic interests (see for instance [88, 89, 127, 128]). Given that China require energy to keep its industrialisation going, its thirst for crude oil flows into Nigeria's historical economic mainstay, crude oil export. In other words, given Nigeria's rentier nature (i.e. dominance and dependence on crude oil as source of revenue) and the declining crude oil demand from the US (see for instance Table 2), China becomes an important country to Nigeria's governing elites. Nonetheless, Nigeria's oil export to China since 1999 is less compared, for instance, to what goes to the US, India, France, Spain, or the Netherlands (See Table 2). Aside, while state-owned companies like Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), Chinese National Offshore Corporation (CNOOC) and Sinopec operate in Nigeria, the sector is still dominated by Western oil multinational companies like Shell, Chevron Texaco, Exxon Mobil, Total and Agip-ENI [88, 150]. Interestingly, oil export to Taiwan was higher than oil export to China from 2000 to 2003. Meanwhile, in Africa China imports most of its oil from Angola, Sudan, and Republic of Congo [150].

But China's presence in Nigeria's oil sector goes beyond buying crude oil. For instance, during Obasanjo's era (i.e. 1999–2007) Nigeria operated an "oil for infrastructure" policy, which meant that Chinese companies had access to oil blocs in return for Chinese commitment to, for example, construct the Lagos-Kano railway, build Mambilla hydroelectric power station, and rehabilitate the Kaduna oil refinery [80]. Also, in June 2016, Nigeria and China signed oil and gas infrastructure agreement worth US\$80 billion for pipelines, refineries, power, facility refurbishments and upstream [118]. Hence, though export of crude oil to China is relatively low when compared to those sold to Western countries, Beijing remains a crucial player in Nigeria's oil sector. Sino-Nigeria oil engagement has however witnessed its share of policy instability as will be highlighted below in the case of the 'oil for infrastructure'.

Sino-Nigeria relations is also marked by cultural and symbolic gestures (i.e. initiatives that are not explicitly economic but have a potential of improving ordinary people-to-people contact through language and other cultural events). Both countries promote each other's culture. Lagos State, a sub-national level of government but the centre for commerce in Nigeria's federation of 36 states, announced plans to introduce the teaching of Mandarin in public schools in 2012 [49]. A pilot programme to teach Mandarin at public schools in Lagos was launched in 2014 [139]. On the part of China, like elsewhere, there is the establishment of Confucius Institutes, first at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University in 2008, and another one at University of Lagos in 2009, "to meet the needs of Chinese learning in Nigeria, to promote local people's understanding of Chinese language and culture, to enhance the educational and cultural exchange between the two countries, to develop the friendly relations of both countries" [22]. Both countries have also established cultural centres, with Nigeria as at 2014, being "the only African country that has set up a cultural center in China, showcasing Nigerian culture to Chinese people" [43]. The China Cultural Centre was commissioned in Abuja, as a Chinese ambassador to Nigeria puts it, to offer "our Nigerian friends opportunities to get a glimpse of Chinese culture" [43]. In a somewhat unique gesture, for his company's contributions to road construction, in August 2015, a monarch in Lagos, honoured the Managing Director of CCECC in Nigeria, Li Qingyong, with a traditional chieftaincy title; the *Babasona* of Ikorodu Land, which simply translates to 'Royal road builder' [93].

But cordiality in Sino-African relations goes beyond the aforementioned economic and cultural dimensions. The expanding economic relations is in fact nourished by the support of the two countries' political class; buttressed by the periodic exchange of top level visits. Some of the notable visits in this regards, for instance, include those of President Obasanjo to China in April 1999, April 2005, and November 2006. President Umaru Yar' Adua visited in February 2008, and President Goodluck Jonathan visited in July 2013. The current President who was earlier a military Head of State (i.e. December 1983–August 1985), Muhammadiu Buhari, visited China in April 2016. On the Chinese side, President Jiang Zemin visited Nigeria in April 2002. Mr. Wu Bangguo, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China, visited in November, 2004. President Hu Jintao visited in April 2006. In January 2010, Chinese Foreign Minister, Yang Jiechi, visited. As a Chinese ambassador to Nigeria, Deng Boqing, puts it: "Visits between our ministers and other officials almost became a matter of routine" [43]. Meanwhile, FOCAC provides additional platform for engagement between Nigerian and Chinese officials.

Favourable disposition of Nigeria's political class to China is further buttressed by the tendency of ruling political parties in both countries to seek some sort of relationship often labelled 'partnership' or 'cooperation.' For instance, during a visit to China in 2013, Chairman of the then ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), a party that then controlled the central and most of the subnational levels of government, Bamanga Tukur, was reported to have "approached the Communist Party in China to train its political public office holders" [92]; and "the Communist Party would be expected to deploy Chinese experts in Nigeria to train PDP members on party supremacy, governance and management of the economy" [92]. Notably, Chinese official media while not reporting that PDP was willing to have its members trained by the Communist Party noted that Zhang Dejiang – chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee – said: "As the CPC and the PDP are ruling parties and shoulder the task of national development, it is important for them to learn from each other and share experience on state governance" [146]. Similarly, in less than a year after it succeeded the PDP in May 2015 as the ruling party, the new All Progressives Congress (APC) has itself been reported to favour some sort of partnership with the CPC. The APC is reported to have "expressed its intention to enter into partnership with the Communist Party of China in its effort to deliver on its promise on the change agenda" [37]. Like Zhang, Qin Jian – who is Chinese chargé d'affaires – had reportedly told members of the APC that, "The Chinese CPC and Nigeria's ruling APC will pursue better cooperation which will be of benefit to both nations" [140]; but he added that, "Both parties can share experiences on how to develop the economy and protect the environment as well as technical support and capacity building where necessary" [140].

Now, while relations between the political class in Nigeria and China remains cordial, it seems to be contradictory for political parties in a democratic civilian administration to advocate closer relations with a single party structure. Yet, this 'partnership' talks seem more for publicity; for instance, none of the parties have sent delegates to each other's country to be specifically trained since the idea was reported. Nevertheless, given that it is not in all cases that the CPC engages the ruling parties in other countries, the fact that ruling parties in both countries feel that they can cooperate, in itself, suggest a cordial relationship. It is however interesting to note that the CPC's openness to possible collaboration with, and training of ruling political parties in

Nigeria presents two conflicting set-ups that speaks to Beijing's non-interference policy. On the one hand it questions China's fundamental policy of non-interference in that the CPC, in collaborating with one of many contesting political parties fix it in a situation of possible clash with opposition parties. Why, for instance should PDP consider the CPC as a partner when the Chinese party seeks to collaborate with its chief competitor in the Nigerian political space, the APC? On the other hand, it could be argued that the fact that the CPC was open to collaborating with both PDP and APC in itself does not say anything except that Beijing is willing to do business with any government in Nigeria, and given that governments in Nigeria are formed by ruling parties, it then follows that there should be some level of cordiality between those that form the government (i.e. the ruling political party in Nigeria) and the Chinese political elites who are also members of the CPC. In doing this, Beijing and its CPC considers ruling political parties as government in Nigeria. Thus, Beijing and the CPC will also be open to collaborating with the Alliance for Democracy (AD), a party that has not yet produced a President in Nigeria if, and only if, there is a political change that transfers power to the now less popular party.

In both conflicting set-ups in Sino-Nigeria party-to-party relations, China's non-interference will remain open to questions. Already, and as we will discussed below, a Presidential state visit to China can easily generate controversy between stalwarts of PDP and APC. As Large [71] explains China's non-interference policy in Sudan, "The notion that non-interference allows for 'business, not politics', a formula bearing artificially neat connotations of separate domains, clearly depends on an ability to navigate political waters." He adds: "Nor is it static and will necessarily be progressively enmeshed in politics as business develops, and in the process entails an informal but integral logic of political negotiation" ([71], p. 98). The ability of China to navigate the Nigerian political waters will thus depend on the extent to which China or Chinese people manage their exposure to sensitive matters.

All in all, given that expanding trade and infrastructural projects favours Beijing as it expands the market for Chinese goods and expertise on the one hand and given that Nigeria needs infrastructure to develop and needs to sell its oil to Beijing to generate revenue on the other hand, the deepening of Sino-Nigeria relations appears to favour both countries and their peoples. This is however not to say that there have not been negative episodes in this relationship as will be highlighted below.

Behind the Smiles

While Sino-Nigeria engagement hold huge promises for both Nigeria and China, there have also been negative episodes. Some of these negative episodes have been met by both civil and uncivil local responses [105]. In terms of civil responses, there have been protests, police arrest and closures of Chinese businesses. With reference to uncivil responses, there have been instances of kidnapping and threats of attack on Chinese citizens (as highlighted in "China and Local Narratives" sub-section). Though China's approach to relating with Africa is viewed as susceptible to promoting corruption owing to its lack of attention to transparency issues [148] and though Nigeria's law-makers have reportedly found that a railway contract awarded to a Chinese company "which stood at 60.67 km, was inflated by \$10 million (about N2 billion at N200 per dollar) per kilometre even as the length was later reduced to 45 km without the refund

of the cost for the 15.67 km dropped” [99] suggest corruption, we will focus on three issues: labour conflict, impact of Chinese importation on infant industries, and counterfeit, adulterated and substandard (CAS) products.

At this juncture, it must be stressed that the news (both traditional and new) media plays a significant role in Sino-Africa engagements [105], not only do they report events but – especially, in an internet era – they sustain narratives; narratives that range from reality to rumours [147]. Yet, discourse on Sino-Africa economic engagements, especially in terms of labour conflicts, is sometimes “dominated by racial stereotypes informed by politicized media reporting that often reflects particular agendas related to election campaigns, the call for protectionist measures or social distribution conflicts” ([58] p. 1102). Nevertheless, the fact that there have been real negative episodes in some Chinese businesses provide journalists with stories; whether these news stories fit into ‘election campaigns, the call for protectionist measures or social distribution conflicts’ as Giese and Thiel notes is another thing entirely. In the case of Nigeria, poor and inhumane labour practices in some Chinese companies have been reported, as for instance buttressed by such news headlines like: “Man accuses Chinese boss of brutality” [8], “We’re treated like slaves but we’re afraid of losing our jobs –Nigerians in Chinese, Indian companies” [54], and “Chinese expats threat Nigerian employees as punching bags” (Sahara [116]). These reports by no means represent the norm in Chinese companies, but they underscore the poor treatment of local workers in the identified companies; a scenario that has led to criticisms from labour unions. For instance, in a trilateral conference in November 2013, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and others advanced that “Africa should re-examine its relationship with China as China is not interested in Africa’s industrialization but only in its raw material to drive China’s industrialization” [85]. From protests and picketing (Sahara [117]) to issuing communique [85], the NLC has not hidden its position against casualisation, victimisation of workers, expatriate quota abuse, non-adherence to safety standards and refusal of workers to organize at Chinese companies. The President of the National Union of Civil Engineering, Construction, Furniture and Wood Workers (NUCECFWW), Mr. Amechi Asugwuni, for instance at a press conference where labour had given the federal government a 14-day ultimatum to address these practices in July 2014 reportedly said:

The attitude of Chinese companies towards Nigerians is something that urgently needs to be addressed. Government has failed in the area of monitoring project sites and curtailing the activities of the Chinese companies. The above action of the management of Chinese companies is not just a violation of the fundamental rights of the workers but a clear violation of the Nigerian labour laws, constitution and international conventions and standards [51].

In addition, though – unlike in Zambia where there was the instrumentalisation of anti-Chinese sentiments in the 2006 national election [82] – Sino-Nigeria relations remain cordial, a former labour leader and a serving governor of Edo State, Adams Oshiomole, reportedly told the labour union that, “You are fighting for jobs, you want jobs to be created in the Nigerian economy, and you allow Chinese prisoners to operate in Nigeria and I have never heard a complaint from NLC” [5]. While Oshiomole’s claim of Chinese convict labour have been debunked and lacks evidence [147], he

added that “[I]n Nigeria now, you will see Chinese working in small cafe, you will see them carrying head pan in construction sites and other places... So, how are we going to get jobs where Chinese employees have taken the jobs, of course we have relationship with Chinese union” [5]. He added that “[B]ut if you are caught working in China, you will be bundled and put in prison” [5].

A second issue is the ‘struggle’ between Nigeria’s infant industries and their Chinese competitors [128]. In Nigeria, the infant industries are faced with numerous challenges some of which include power, capital, technology, etc. [95]. This limits their ability to compete against their Chinese counterpart who tend to have better technology that aid cheaper and mass production. While the multiple dimensions and scale of this struggle is largely understudied, the textile sector provides an interesting case; interesting for two dialectical reasons. On the one hand, there is a long history of intersection and collaboration in Sino-Nigeria textile production. This is encapsulated in Nigeria’s United Nigerian Textiles Ltd. (UNTL) collaboration with the Hong Kong-based textile conglomerate, the CHA Group, and other collaboration between Nigerian-owned trading companies and Chinese companies producing popular brands like Sunstar, ABC, and MBTX textiles [115].

On the other hand, the presence of Chinese textiles in the Nigerian market negatively impact the local market [115] and there have been local protest against Chinese traders; an example is the May 2015 Kano protest. Kano is located in north-west Nigeria and the history of its textile industry predates the 1804 Jihad that brought large part of northern Nigeria under the Sokoto Caliphate [124]. The importation of Chinese textile materials and engagement of expatriate in the retail sale of fabrics led thousands of local fabric dryers in Kano to protest; carrying placards with such inscriptions like: “We don’t want China products in Kano again,” “Government should stop China from exploiting us,” and “Chinese textile is killing our market” [81]. Interestingly, the protesters marched to the palace of Emir of Kano, Sanusi Lamido, to inform the monarch of their opposition to unrestricted Chinese importation. While Sanusi, a former Central Bank governor who had written a piece in the *Financial Times* in March 2011 drawing attention to similar issues that the fabric dryers protested about, cautioned the protesters “to resist any attempt that would lead to untold attack on the Chinese in Kano” [123] stressing – as he did four years ago – the failure of the Nigerian government. A quote of some parts of his 2011 article suffice:

Three decades ago, China had a significant advantage over Africa in its cheap labour costs. It is losing that advantage as its economy grows and prosperity spreads. Africa must seize the moment. We must encourage a shift from consuming Chinese-made goods to making and consuming our own. We must add value to our own agricultural products. Nigeria and other oil producers need to refine crude; build petrochemical industries and use gas reserves – at present often squandered in flaring at oil wells – for power generation and gas-based industries such as fertiliser production [123].

While Sanusi’s call for ‘shifting from Chinese-made goods to making and consuming our own’ seem to suggest that the Nigerian government, among other things, initiates some sort of protectionist policy for the local industries, another down side

of Sino-Nigeria engagement is marked by counterfeit, adulterated and substandard (CAS) products [134]. Asked about Chinese CAS products, a Chinese ambassador, Gu Xiaojie, responded thus:

Often I have been asked this question and I try to explain. Of course, China is very famous for its products. “Made in China” is all over the world, in the United States and different markets and all range of products, high ranks low ranks. Low rank doesn’t mean it’s a bad quality; it is just price wise. It is competitive, cheap. China is exporting to different markets in the United States and Europe [31].

Yet the ambassador’s position that ‘low rank doesn’t mean it’s a bad quality’ doesn’t hide the substandard perception of Chinese products especially as represented in the concept of *Chinco* which in its negative sense is noted to “invoke words such as ‘cheap,’ ‘fake,’ ‘not durable,’ and ‘low class’” ([1] p. 88). While the *Chinco* economy covers an array of different products such as electronics, mobile phones, solar panels, and textiles, it also entails fake drugs. While fake drugs in Nigeria come from a variety of sources, China is one [6, 72]. It is also noteworthy to point out that Chinese CAS products are imported into African countries with the collaboration of African traders; traders with relatively small capital [59], and who probably use “established regional smuggling networks” ([60] p. 159).

But Sino-Nigeria engagement goes beyond the Janus-headed manifestation which tends to consider the extent to which it supports Nigeria’s development drive; that is, a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ perspective. Indeed, beyond this Janus-headed perspective, Sino-Nigeria beneficiality can only be situated within a context, and rather than a stable and linear context, Sino-Nigeria relations exists within a changing local politics and narrative. It also exist within a context of reversals and inconsistencies. The next subsection highlights instances where China was drawn to domestic contestations.

China and Local Narratives

China, even as we have highlighted above the implication of Sino-Nigeria party-to-party relations, officially projects a policy of non-interference in other countries’ domestic affairs. The non-interference policy – unlike those of Western powers where aid and other assistance are hinged on meeting certain local conditionalities – entails that Beijing relates with countries with no political strings attached, and therefore regardless of the nature of local politics [110]. Though Beijing’s non-interference policy in principle forecloses China’s involvement in countries local politics, this does not however mean that it cannot be affected by, or that it cannot be drawn into local narratives marked by politics and struggles existing within national and sub-national (e.g. in regions, states, and local government) levels of government in host countries [82, 89]. It is perhaps this realisation that explains Taylor’s position that, “China is in danger of being associated in the local populations’ eyes with subjugation and exploitation, which may come back to trouble Beijing if there is ever a regime change in such countries” ([127] p. 955). In the case of Nigeria, China has not always been unaffected by local narratives such as the conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta region where Chinese citizens were kidnapped during the armed militancy. While it could be argued – and Cyril Obi seems to share this position – that the kidnapping of the Chinese was not

necessarily a targeted attack on China [88] or that the car bomb claimed by Niger Delta militants to be a warning to Chinese companies in the oil-rich region [128] were negligible occurrences, this does not erase the possibility of entangling China and Chinese interest in Nigeria's existing local political and socio-economic situations.

Protests against Chinese competition and labour practices has not yet become a political issue in Nigeria, but the possibility that such issues could have an impact on Sino-Nigeria relations thereby becoming a basis for future political campaign or even future conflict should not be overlooked. And though China largely enjoys the support of the Nigerian ruling elites, there have been rumblings among a few. For instance, while a serving Edo State Governor from the national ruling party, Adams Oshiomole, in August 2015 lamented the silence of the labour union in the face of Chinese citizens taking Nigerian jobs [5], Emir Sanusi, a former Central Bank governor and currently a monarch, fears for an even more dangerous possibility. The Emir, who had urged the Kano protesters against Chinese textile importation to be peaceful, while positing that the activities of Chinese traders generates unemployment in Kano State, said: "I worry about what could happen to Kano when we have a large number of youths and large numbers of industries are down" [23].

Another instance of connecting China to local contestations revolves around President Muhammadu Buhari's visit to China in April 2016. Though all Presidents in Nigeria have visited China at least once since 1999, Buhari's visit attracted criticisms especially from those that believed it was meant to raise \$2 billion loan to implement the 2016 budget. This criticism was led by a state governor, Mr. Ayo Fayose. Though others like Femi Falana, a renowned human right activist, had also written to Nigerian Finance Minister, Mrs. Kemi Adeosun, opposing loan from China stressing that the budget should be funded from stolen and recovered funds and noting that he would "have no alternative than to initiate legal proceedings at the federal high court, with a view to restraining the Federal Government from further plunging the nation into external indebtedness" [131], but by far Fayose, who belonged to the opposition PDP and led the Ekiti State government, had been a major critic of the Buhari APC government [100]. Given that Nigeria retained its federal structure in the Fourth Republic, a system which essentially allowed two levels of government (i.e. the national, and the subnational levels which were the state and local-governments) both in principle expected to operate within their respective constitutional limits [2], there is a certain possibility that different political parties, and therefore interests, hold sway at the national and state levels. This was the case with Fayose.

The federal government's decision to go to China not only led to criticisms but Fayose had in a letter dated April 12, 2016 addressed to President Xi Jinping of China conveyed his position. The letter – which was delivered to the Chinese Ambassador in Nigeria, Gu Xiaojie, by the Chief of Staff to the governor, Barrister Dipo Anisulowo, accompanied by the Governor's Special Assistant on Public Communications and New Media, Lere Olayinka, and members of the Ekiti State legislature including the Deputy Speaker, Segun Adewumi, Chairman House Committee on Information, Gboyega Aribisogan, and the Chairman House Committee on Health, Dr. Samuel Omotosho – implored the Chinese government not to grant any loan to the Nigerian government [47]. In addition to drawing the attention of the Chinese President to President Buhari's frequency of foreign trips and "autocratic nature," the letter notes: "[A]s a result of the government's bad economic policies, the middle class has been eliminated, power

supply is at its lowest ebb, petrol is not available and by the time fresh loans begin to pile up, 95% of Nigerians will definitely be pauperized" [47].

Though Fayose's letter could not stop the Chinese government from offering the Buhari government a \$6 billion loan [36], his letter certainly elicited responses from supporters of the Buhari government. Though most criticisms – such as Professor Itse Sagay, a renowned human right activist and Chairman of the Presidential Committee on Anti-Corruption (Tv [133]) and Chief John Odigie-Oyegun, the National Chairman of the President's APC party [96] – had been localized, Mr. Femi Gbajabiamila, a national legislator and member of the President's party, wrote a counter-letter to the Chinese President to "set the records straight" by citing the country's constitution that separates the powers and duties among the levels of government, that Fayose's delving into international agreements between Nigeria and China was illegal, and that there is a borrowing component in the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) 2016–2018, concluding that "[W]hat the state governor has done amounts to attempted economic sabotage and subversion. I ask therefore that you excuse the vituperations and exuberance of the governor as just that" [108]. The Fayose-Buhari issues is thus an example of how local contestations on aspects of Sino-Nigeria engagement can become internationalised; as captured in a national newspaper headline: "Buhari vs Fayose: As war of attrition shifts to Chinese capital" [130].

Statist and Non-Statist Incongruities

Sino-Nigeria engagement is also characterised by incongruities. These incongruities goes beyond the fact that China's presence has its positive and negative aspects; here, we contend that sometimes what is considered as being positive is somewhat dented by negative reports. For instance, while China supports the improvement of a better healthcare system in Nigeria as represented in the building of a \$12.5 million 150-bed Federal Staff Hospital in Abuja in 2013 [94], fake drugs are also imported from China in collaboration with Nigerian traders. Counterfeiting is a major challenge in China [35, 40, 73]. Obviously, though the Chinese state appears to frown against the sale of fake drugs and products [35], yet, that fake drugs are imported from China suggests that both governments still require some level of improvement in their monitoring and collaboration to stamp out fake drugs.

Incongruities is also discernible in government's policy. Even as the top echelon of Nigeria's ruling elites tend to favour Sino-Nigeria engagement (as noted above), there have been instances where policies have been changed and instances where some Chinese activities in the country have been criticised. One interesting example of policy instability was the 'oil for infrastructure' initiated under President Obasanjo. Obasanjo, having identified the lack of infrastructure as a hindrance to his country's development [63, 68], decided to enter into a strategic partnership with Beijing wherein Chinese companies had access to oil blocs in return for Chinese commitment to provide infrastructure, for instance, construct the Lagos-Kano railway, build Mambilla hydro-electric power station, and rehabilitate the Kaduna oil refinery [80]. The policy was however scrapped by his successor, Umaru Yar' Adua. Though Yar' Adua was a serving governor under the administration of Obasanjo and though he was hand-picked and was from the same political party as Obasanjo [68], Umaru Yar' Adua decided to discontinue the policy [80]. Aside the argument that Western oil companies

were concerned with Obasanjo's oil for infrastructure policy given that it offers Chinese companies right-of-first-refusal for oil processing licenses which potentially gives room to the expansion of Chinese interest in Nigeria's oil sector [135], two other interesting reasons have been identified to have influenced Yar' Adua's decision to discontinue the oil for infrastructure deal.

First, it is argued that a break from policies initiated under the Obasanjo administration was a response by Nigeria's political elites to his over domineering style; a style that had pitched him against some in his political party [63]. Yar' Adua was considered different because he won plaudits "for his modest demeanor, for his frankness regarding the conduct of the 2007 elections, and for his accommodating approach (so different from Obasanjo's autocratic style)" ([68], p. 167). Perhaps, the first signal showing the lack of support among majority of the political elite for Obasanjo was his failure to extend his constitutionally allowed maximum of two-terms in office to a third term [68]. It was thus easy, or at least acceptable, for Yar' Adua to present his regime as 'correcting' the 'mistakes' of the Obasanjo administration. Again, the foregoing speaks to the possibility of Sino-Nigeria relations being encapsulated in local contestations as discussed above. In addition to the oil for infrastructure policy, Obasanjo's privatisation policy was also suspended [63]. A second reason, espoused by Umejei, is that the oil for infrastructure deal was viewed as unfavourable by Nigeria's elites. Umejei opines that the elites "felt implementing the deal would cut them off profit from crude oil sales on the international market" [135]. In addition, the Yar' Adua administration considered the policy as unfavourable because, as a member of Nigeria's legislature puts it, "Nigeria prefers to sell her oil on the international market which is more lucrative than to adopt the Chinese model" [135].

The episode of the oil for infrastructure thus appears to suggest that even where a Nigerian government projects a favourable disposition towards Beijing it does not necessarily mean that all members of such government, or indeed those that would succeed that government, are on the same page. In other words, in spite of the cordial relationship between the ruling class in Beijing and Abuja, Lamido Sanusi – as a serving Central Bank governor – and Adams Oshiomole, a serving governor of Edo State and a member of the ruling APC, were both critical of Chinese presence in Nigeria. While the former had advocated that "We must not only produce locally goods in which we can build comparative advantage, but also actively fight off Chinese imports promoted by predatory policies" [123], the latter had charged the labour union to challenge Chinese labour practices in Nigeria.

Some Conclusions

In this paper we traced the relations between Nigeria and China, two significant countries in the global south, from the early 1960s till the post-1999 era. Unlike in the immediate years following Nigeria's independence when the country was politically and economically tied to Britain and the West in general, China, owing to contemporary global realities and Beijing's growing global influence, now holds a significant position in Nigeria's development project. We note that while contemporary Chinese presence in Nigeria remains significant, Sino-Nigeria engagement remains essentially shaped by the interests and visions of political elites, though this interests and vision are

dynamic. Even as China remains the bigger giant and the economically more buoyant partner, there is some level of agency in the relationship; there is no denying the agency of subnational and non-state actors as for instance typified by late President Yar'Adua's cancelation of the oil-for-infrastructure deal initiated by his predecessor, or how local unions or groups protest to draw attention to negative practices in some Chinese companies or businesses.

Nevertheless, though the paper acknowledges the developmental benefits accruable from Nigeria's relations with China especially in terms of the provision of infrastructure, it also highlights the underbellies of the relations in terms of CAS products, labour practices and the impact of cheap Chinese importation on local industries. However, beyond the popular Janus-headed interrogation of China's activities in Nigeria as either 'good' or 'bad', we draw attention to attempts at connecting China to local narratives and politics. We also draw attention to state and non-state incongruities in Sino-Nigeria relations. The last two areas of focus in this paper – that looks at China in local narratives as well as draw attention to incongruities – remain less understood aspects of Sino-Nigeria relations. In reality, on the Nigerian side there are twists and turns within governments, within political parties, and among political elites. Given the potentially disruptive yet dynamic nature of these elements of Sino-Nigeria relations, our paper in exposing these two largely ignored aspects of Sino-Nigeria engagement calls for a more nuanced research that digs deep into the underline currents that explains the curves in relations between these two giant countries.

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