

Interrogating Chinese going global policy in Nigeria: Implications for Neo-colonialism

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Abstract: The study sets out to examine Chinese going global policy in Nigeria in the context of the four key strategic objectives of the policy- resource seeking, market seeking, asset seeking and political gains- and how these have had some neo-colonial ramifications on the Nigerian state, based on the degree to which the Nigerian state asserts its agency in its relations with the Chinese State. By adopting a qualitative case study research design, documentary method of data collection, and theory of neo-colonialism, the study discovered that Chinese infrastructure aid and investment packages to Nigeria have aided the achievement of the Chinese strategic objectives in its going global policy to the detriment of Nigeria's political and economic independence in a neo-colonial fashion, with little or no remediation from the Nigerian state or its agency. The study concludes and recommends that China and other great powers will continue to have a neo-colonial experimentation with Nigeria if it fails to assert its agency with such powers.

Keywords: Agency, Chinese, Going global policy, Neo-colonialism, Nigeria, Political economy.

1. Introduction/Problematique

The Chinese “going global” or “going out” policy, popularly known as *zou chu qu* in China, is a policy by the Chinese government meant to encourage Chinese investors, businessmen and state-owned enterprises to invest abroad by providing them financial incentives and subsidies to help them thrive (Wang, 2016). This policy is borne out of domestic accumulation of capital and the need to seek for new territories to invest in and to market their excess products arising from overcapacity and overproduction (Jiang, 2009). More so, as China faces acute shortages of resources to sustain its massive economic growth and development, it became necessary for the Chinese state to fashion the going global policy as a means of scouting for resources to feed local industries and to support rapid urbanisation and industrialisation back home (Yeo, 2018). Beyond this, a now prosperous China who has the second largest economy in the world with an \$18trillion economy behind the United States (US) and might become the largest by 2040 (Chan & Wallace, 2024). With this, Beijing equally looks to assert itself in international relations as it aims to unite all of China under the People's Republic of China (PRC). To make all this happen the PRC crafted four key strategic objectives for its going global policy – resource seeking, market seeking, asset seeking and political gains (especially gaining support for its *One China Policy*) (Shen & Mantzopoulos, 2013).

Two key strategies were adopted to achieve the going global policy objectives in Nigeria and in other African countries. First was the establishment of Forum on China African Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 (Forum on China–Africa Cooperation, 2009) a year after the going global policy was launched. FOCAC is a triennial dialogic and negotiation forum created to discuss and frame political and economic policies

for the benefit and creation of a “win-win” outcome for Beijing and Addis Ababa. Second is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) created by President Xi Jinping in 2013 with a \$1 trillion endowment fund to support and provide infrastructure development finance for its current 148 countries globally (Green Finance and Development Centre, 2023) which include 53 out of 54 African countries. These two platforms have been highly instrumental for the achievement of the strategic objectives of the going global policy in Nigeria. The reason for this is because Abuja has what Beijing needs – resources, markets, assets and as the biggest country in Africa (both in economy and population) to lend its voice to its “One China Policy”. On the part of Nigeria, the government understands it has huge infrastructure deficit which its current revenue stream will not be able to address. For context, it has been estimated that Nigeria will need about \$150 billion annually for the next 30 years to be able to close its infrastructure deficit in the country (Federal Ministry of Finance Budget & National Planning, 2020). In Augusto (2021) view, Nigeria will require a combined \$3 trillion over the next 30 years to bridge its infrastructure gap. In the light of this, the government strongly believe that the Chinese going global policy through its aid, particularly directed at infrastructure development, will help improve the economy of the State, and also, close the infrastructure gap.

For asset seeking, China has acquired a number of assets in Africa for default in payments of its infrastructure aid packages through majority shareholding in key national asset, like Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC), Lekki Free Trade Zone (LFTZ) and Ogun-Guandong Free Trade Zone (OGFTZ) in Nigeria as cases in point (Ajayi, Iriekpen, Ifijeh, & Okocha, 2020). For resource seeking, China has had a number of oils for infrastructure deals signed in oil rich nations like Nigeria and Angola, as well dealing in illegal mining of resources like rosewood, pangolins, and gold in places like Zamfara and Osun states of Nigeria (Andolu Agency, 2020; Ikpoto, 2023). For market seeking, it has flooded Nigerian markets with its Chinese made goods, which has crowded its markets and undermined local production and entrepreneurs (Muhammad, Mukhtar, & Lola, 2017). Finally, for political gains, it has succeeded diplomatically, through its infrastructure aid and financing, to coerce Nigeria and other African countries to accept and help legitimise its “One China” policy (Aderole, 2017; Dollar, 2019) with only one exception, Eswatini as at the time of writing. The achievement of these objectives in Nigeria reflects the nature and character of Nigerian agency in its dealings with the Chinese state.

In view of the foregoing, Nigerian agency, the right of Nigeria as a sovereign state to make independent choices and act in an unconstrained manner will determine to a large extent whether or not China will exhibit neo-colonial tendencies in its relations with the country. While it is well within Beijing’s right as a sovereign state to craft its strategic objectives aptly laid out in its going global policy and the pursuit of the attainment of same, it is also a corresponding right of the Nigerian government to be assertive, circumspect and cautious in scrutinising agreements and engagements with external actors like China who are interested (and rightly so) in getting the most out of their international relations with Abuja to achieve their national interests and foreign policy objective.

Against this background, the study focuses on Chinese going global policy in Nigeria, with its neo-colonial implications. Section one laid out the introduction and problematized the study. Section two outlined the methodology used for the study. Section three focuses on the neo-colonial construct of Chinese going global policy in Nigeria. Section four examines Nigerian agency and Chinese going global policy in Nigeria. Section five examines Chinese going global policy as a neo-colonial experiment in Nigeria, while section six concludes the study and makes recommendations.

2. Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative ‘case-study’ research design. In understanding case study designs, Gerring (2004) conceptualises it as an intensive study of a unit having a specific spatially bounded construct, phenomenon or geography like a state, nation, political party, revolution or a person that are observed in a single point in time within a (de)limited period of time. In this regard, Nigeria was taken as a single case study because the study aims to analyse whether Chinese going global policy in Nigeria implemented through infrastructure aid packages has neo-colonial tendencies or ramifications of any kind.

To this end, documentary data from secondary sources were collected regarding Chinese infrastructure aid disbursements and other dealings with Nigeria. The researcher adopted a purposeful sampling of data for the study. Maxwell (2012) notes that qualitative researchers often make use of purposeful sampling, rather than probability sampling in their study because it helps them sieve rich and relevant text of documents that are germane to their research. Specifically, datasets from China Africa Research Initiative (2023) and American Enterprise Institute (2024) were used to analyse capital export, trade relations and investment and construction contracts in Nigeria. Others were from Journals, books and online sources written by renowned scholars on the subject matter of Chinese engagements in Africa and neo-colonialism.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopted theory of neo-colonialism. This theory has been widely attributed to the writings of the former President of Ghana, Nkrumah (1965) in his publication title: *Neo-colonialism: the last stage of imperialism*, as a follow up to Lenin's *Imperialism: the final stage of capitalism* (Ziai, 2020). The title of the works of both scholars cited above underscores the nexus between capitalism and neo-colonialism which describes the activities of the Chinese state in African economies. Although, the Chinese state has noted that it practices "socialism with Chinese characteristics" under President Xi. However, scholars like Pearson, Rithmire, and Tsai (2021) have described China's economy as "state capitalism" or "party-state capitalism". These are terms used to refer to a mixed economic system wherein the state retains a dominant role in a market driven economy.

According to Braidotti and Hlavajova (2018) there is a relationship between capitalism and neo-colonialism. Capitalism, characteristically known for its primitive accumulation of wealth and capital through overcapacity and overproduction, was embraced by China in 1978 under the then leader Deng Xiaoping, through his "open door" policy. He created a free market economy after observing the economic boom of its counterparts in Hongkong, South Korea, Singapore, etc. This free-market economy led to accumulation of wealth in Beijing (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2022). According to United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2022) China has posted an average annual GDP growth rate of 9% from 1990 to 2019. In order to preserve the robust growth back home, it needed new source of raw materials and resources, as well as outlet for its overproduction and capacity. Africa became one of the outlets and new markets identified by the Chinese state. It was this accumulation capital borne out of overproduction that led Beijing to formulate the going global policy (Xing, 2019).

Although neo-colonialism is usually understood to be the political and economic control exercised by former colonial masters over the territory of newly independent states; this is not always the case. Nkrumah referred to the United States (US), who never colonised any country, but yet, is one of the foremost neo-colonial states. This can be said of China too. China has always claimed that it is not a neo-colonial state in Africa since it was also a victim of colonialism, and thus meant well for Africa. This statement by China can equally be attributed to the case of the United States who also was once colonised by Britain before its independence in 1776.

Neo-colonialist, according to Nkrumah often employ economic and monetary means to exact control and influence over the neo-colonial states. Sometimes, they provide aid to help the neo-colonial state fund its budget. This assumption appears to characterise Chinese engagement, not just in Nigeria, but in Africa. Since the first Ministerial conference of FOCAC in 2000, China has consistently provided billions of dollars to African countries for the purpose of funding several infrastructure projects identified in its budgets. As at 2023, the Chinese state has made available a total of 170billion in 1,243 loan commitments to Africa, having implications for debt distress following default (China Africa Research Initiative, 2023) with Nigeria being one of the top five recipients accounting for \$8billion from 23 loan agreements. This appears to be quite humongous and unsustainable in an era of economic downturn brought about by Covid-19. In this regard, about 18 African countries are currently re-negotiating their loan agreements with Beijing; while 12 others are in talks to restructure \$28billion in loans through deferment of interest payments and suspension of non-viable projects (Economic Times, 2021; Wachira, 2022). Nkrumah also

notes that the aid given and investment undertaken by the neo-colonialists are not always in the interest of the neo-colonial state, but as a tool to further their exploitation.

To capture an incident of neo-colonial exploitation on the continent through aid infrastructure, mention must be made of Chinese non-human capital development project of US\$200m built AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, which was deliberately compromised by bugs and chips implanted in the building for the purpose of carrying out espionage activities for Beijing on African leaders who deliberate on sensitive continental issues. In this age of knowledge economy, information means advantage, exploitation and control, especially for national governments. For five years, Beijing transferred sensitive data from its gift of the AU headquarters to Shanghai between 12am – 2am from 2012 to 2017 (Financial Times, 2018). The continent's leader's dismissal of this act with the proverbial wave of the hand, speaks to the neo-colonial grip of Beijing on the continent caused by weak agency on the part of African leaders.

3.1. Nigerian Agency and Chinese Going Global Policy in Nigeria

According to Brown, agency simply means the “faculty of acting or exerting power” (Brown, 2012). Drawing from this, Coffie and Tiky (2021) conceptualised African agency as the ability of African actors to negotiate and bargain with their external counterparts for the benefit of Africans. For Chipaike and Knowledge (2018) it means the development of autochthonous African initiative to improve the continent's socio-economic wellbeing, create socio-economic solutions to continental problems, while projecting a posture of power and self-help in its international engagements. In the light of this, Nigerian agency will simply be the collective bargaining power of its state agents (state and non-state agents) in the conduct of negotiations and making of deals for the good and benefit of the Nigerian state, without interference. The category of persons or structure of Nigerian agency include but not limited to *Executive Office of the President or simply the Presidency*, which is the zenith and terminus of Nigerian agency having the President, Vice President, the Chief of Staff, Secretary to the Government of the Federation, National Security Adviser, Head of the Civil Service of the Federation and the State House Administrator, headed by a Permanent Secretary. There is also the *bureaucratic level agency* which consists of agents in the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) in Nigeria. The most important of these MDAs is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as all other MDAs are subordinated to it. This accounts for why it must be peopled by excellent personnel in all ramifications. The next is the *institutional level agency* comprising of members of Nigeria National Assembly (NASS) who make strategic policies through Parliamentary Enactments that agents are obliged to follow when engaging external actors. The last is the broad *non-state level agency* which includes prominent and accomplished citizens, influential and civil society organisations. Others in this category are big private corporations and enterprises. These non-state level agents sometimes work with state agents to influence and make key decision and actions for the Nigerian state.

With the benefit of hindsight, Nigerian agency has manifested itself strongly, although during military regimes in the 1960s and 1970s. During the Nigeria-Biafra civil war (1967-70), the Nigerian state severed ties with China, although informally as there has not being an official diplomatic relations with Beijing, for its tacit support of the secessionist state of Biafra. After the civil war however, official diplomatic relations were established between Beijing and Lagos in 1971. Another key manifestation of Nigerian agency strongly, albeit without any political economic benefit in return, was in its support for the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola's (PMLA) government almost unilaterally against the wishes of the United States and other western powers who favoured the enthronement of National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) in 1975 cited in (Jemirade, 2020).

In the 21st century however, the Nigerian agency, just like in other African countries appears to be non-existent at worst or poorly projected at best, especially in their relations with the Chinese state. This, sadly has created a leeway for Beijing to achieve its major strategic objectives of its going global policy in Nigeria. Nigeria's return to civil rule in 1999 coincided with the launch of the going global policy by Jiang Zemin, who stressed the need to have a strong start and outright implementation. To make this

happen, FOCAC was launched in 2000 with Nigeria as a participant. After attending the Conference, both countries signed key infrastructure agreement within the administration of President Obasanjo to include the Oil for Infrastructure Agreement, Protocol on Electric Power Projects in Nigeria, Bilateral Cooperation on Steel Industry, Bilateral Cooperation on Oil Industry, Reciprocal Promotion and Protection of Investments, etc. (Ezeani & Ngoka, 2022). Within the same period China made Nigeria its strategic partner in Africa with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to that effect in 2005 (Ezeani & Ngoka, 2022).

During the 7th Ministerial Conference of FOCAC, former President Buhari, did not shy away from expressing his gratitude towards Chinese largesse of \$5billion that has led to the building of several infrastructure-like railways, roads, refineries and seaport project in Nigeria (Debt Management Office, 2020). The signing of an MoU by Nigeria to be part of the BRI during FOCAC of 2018 cemented the Chinese state grip on the largest economy in Africa as it equally implied a firm assurance of achieving its going global policy objective in the country. The continued receipt of Chinese aid and investments under the BRI by Abuja without proper scrutiny in view of the terms and conditions and following due process of law in their relations with the Nigerian state; meant that China will continue to have unfettered access to Nigeria's resources, win choice contracts, and invest hugely in Special Economic Trade Zones and Sea Ports where it will have the highest majority shareholding with little or no national scrutiny of its activities. It is the argument of this study however, that China is on course to achieve its four strategic objectives as set out in its going global policy. At this point, a brief review of this achievement with or without Nigerian agency is imperative.

3.2. Attainment of Chinese Going Global Policy Objectives within the Nigerian State

In the area of *resource seeking*, Chinese government kicked off its resource acquisition in 2004 with the signing of \$800million deal with Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) to supply 30,000 bpd of oil to China (Cheru & Obi, 2011). The China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) further acquired a 45% share in the Nigerian Apo oil for gas field in 2005 at the sum of \$3billion, the biggest acquisition by the Chinese SOE at the time (Obi, 2019). In 2009, Chinese oil firm, Sinopec, acquired Addax Oil Company which grants it rights to two offshore oil wells in Nigeria. In view of this Sinopec discovered oil in Addax UDELE 3 oil well in the Niger Delta in 2010, giving Sinopec direct access to Nigerian oil wells. Similarly, in 2012, Sinopec bought a 20% stake in a Nigerian oil field from Total of France at the sum of \$2.5billion (Hu, Wu, & Patel, 2012; Kavanagh, 2012). This further increased the level of Sinopec's direct access to Nigeria's oil. Similarly, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), was awarded Oil Processing Licence in exchange of providing US\$2billion worth of financing to rehabilitate the Kaduna Refinery; but this was however revoked by the incoming administration of Umar Yaradua for lack of transparency and fraud (Umejei, 2013). Other resource seeking measures of the Chinese going global policy in Nigeria are in the mining sector where Chinese nationals have engaged in illegal mining of rosewood, pangolin scales and gold in Zamfara and Osun States respectively (Andolu Agency, 2020; Ikpoto, 2023). All these illegal activities, according Kayode Fayemi, then Nigeria's Minister of Mines and Solid Minerals, were done under the protection of the Nigerian security agencies who supervise the illegalities (Ajijeh, 2017); bringing the Nigerian agency to shambles and disrepute.

In the area of *asset seeking*, China has a majority stake of 52.5% in Nigeria's Lekki Deep Sea Port for a period of 45 years. Other equity investors include Tolaram Group having 22.5%, Lagos State Government (20%) and Nigeria Port Authority owning the remaining 5% respectively (Anagor-Ewuzie, 2019). Furthermore, China through its China Africa Investment Company (CAIC) also has a significant majority share of 82% in Ogun-Guangdong Free Trade Zone (OGFTZ), which sits on 10,000 hectares of land with 99 years concession agreement; while the Ogun State Government has the remaining 18% (De Freitas, 2019). With 100% CAIC management right, OGFTZ functions as an extension of Chinese territory. Nigeria has little or no sovereignty in such zones as the financial transactions within the zone does not pass through the Central Bank of Nigeria. More importantly, the Nigeria Police Force has no jurisdiction within the zone, as it has its own law enforcement agencies and prisons under the control of Chinese

nationals (Adunbi, 2019). One would have to wonder what state agent/agency agreed to the signing of such deal without leaving a window of control by Federal authorities, and allowing its implementation in a brazen neo-colonial fashion.

For *market seeking*, the Chinese state has achieved its going global objective by inundating the Nigerian market with its product to the detriment of local producers and manufacturers. For instance, in 2002, the trade volume between both countries was \$1.168billion, out of which Chinese export to Nigeria was \$1.047billion, and Nigeria's export to China was a paltry \$121million. China's main export during this period were finished products like light industrials, mechanical, and electrical products. Whereas Nigeria's exports were primary products like petroleum, cotton, timber, etc. (China Daily, 2006). Within ten years, and with the signing of Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2005 by both countries (Uchendu, 2021) trade volume between them (largely in favour of China) reached a sum of \$18billion in 2009 (Egbula & Zheng, 2011). Table 1 shows that the trade volume between Nigeria and China continues to increase marginally at the expense of Nigeria.

Table 1.
China – Nigeria trade relations as at 2021.

Indicators	China	Nigeria
Exports value	\$22.5billion	\$3.04billion
Top product export	Women suit/Telephones (\$1.5billion)	Petroleum gas (\$1.42billion)
GDP	\$18trillion (2 nd)	\$489billion (39 th)
Economic complexity index (ECI)	25 th	126 th

Source: Observatory of Economic Complexity [OEC] (2024).

The Economic Complexity Index (ECI) as shown in Table 1 is a set of metrics used in ranking the diversity of a country's export in international trade, by placing high rankings for countries that export finished and manufactured goods above others that export mainly agricultural and primary products. From Table 1, it is clear that Nigeria's economic diversity ranking is very low compared to China's. The annual flooding ritual of Nigeria's market with Chinese goods to the utter disadvantage of Nigeria is no surprise considering that Nigeria was the highest importer of Chinese goods in 2021, as imports from China reached an all-time high of \$22.5billion in spite of Covid-19 shocks, with Nigerian export been \$3.05billion. This shows that Nigeria dwells more on (or is conditioned to) exporting primary goods like crude oil to China, while she imports manufactured goods like women suit, synthetic filament yarn and telephones as shown in the table. This is a clear unequal exchange regime between the two countries with an excessive dependence of Nigeria economy on China without remediation from the Nigerian government to bridge the gap through diversification of its economy, encouragement of local production and creating enabling environment for small businesses to thrive.

Table 2.
Top articles of trade between Nigeria and China as at December, 2023.

Chinese export to Nigeria	Value	Nigeria's export to China	Value
Synthetic filament yarn material	\$84.8 million	Petroleum gas	\$46.6 million
Vehicles, parts & accessories	\$49.2 million	Other minerals	\$25.1 million
Telephones	\$42.1 million	Uranium and Thorium ore	\$7.05 million
Bathroom ceramics	\$41.3 million	Niobium, tantalum, vanadium and zirconium ore	\$7.03 million
Electrical transformers	\$40.1 million	Refined copper	\$4.05 million
+\$184.95 million	\$257.5 million	-\$184.95 million	\$90.55 million

Source: Observatory of Economic Complexity [OEC] (2024).

Besides the export of refined copper in December, 2023 as seen from [Table 2](#), the trade relations between Beijing and Abuja represents a clear reinforcement of the primary-finished goods dichotomy for both countries. Beyond this, the Chinese state equally had a super favourable balance of trade in December, 2023 worth \$184.95 million, which invariably was a corresponding loss and an unfavourable balance of trade for Nigeria.

In the case of *political gain, especially for support of its One China Policy*, the Chinese government has prevailed upon Nigeria to jettison support for Taipei and embrace Beijing fully. Following Beijing's pledge to facilitate an additional \$40 billion worth of FDI in 2017, President Buhari instructed that Taiwan consular outpost in Abuja be shut down, and relocated to Lagos. This stance by Nigeria was properly articulated and emphatically communicated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs – Geoffrey Onyeama – who categorically stated that the government of Nigeria no longer wish to officially engage in contracts with Taiwan as it supports efforts made by the PRC to reunite all of China. As a result, Taiwan will stop enjoying certain privileges because it is not a country recognised under international law. In this regard, the Nigerian state directs that Taipei moves its embassy out of Abuja, the capital city to Lagos as a trade mission with skeletal staff (Geoffrey Onyeama, as cited in [Aderale \(2017\)](#)).

3.3. Chinese Going Global Policy as a Neo-Colonial Experiment in Nigeria

To carefully examine whether or not the going global policy in the Nigerian space are neo-colonial, the study will analyse China and Nigeria relationship in comparison with 19th and 20th century British European colonisation under the headings below. However, while Nigeria's agency in rebuking European activities on its territory during the 19th and 20th centuries were grossly weakened by its non-State status with no sovereignty, it was equally compounded by the wide support the international structure of colonisation enjoyed at the time. This however, is no longer the case in the 21st century as Nigerian agency with its independent status can be invoked to reject all forms of neo-colonial overtures from international actors like China whenever it chooses to. Now we turn to examining and drawing patterns between European Colonial behaviour with that of Chinese neo-colonial tendencies.

- a) That trade relations under the going global policy in Nigeria through BRI, is reminiscent of European colonial patterns that create economic dependence.
- b) That China's lending practices in Nigeria undermines its political economy and sovereignty.
- c) That Chinese companies only employ Nigerian labour at the menial level like their European colonial counterparts in the last century.
- d) That Chinese nationals and their multinational firms brutalise and dehumanise Nigerians, just like the Europeans did during colonialism.

Instructively, it must be stated that while European colonial relationship with Nigeria and other African countries was by compulsion; that of China is largely by persuasion. With this, the argument for Nigerian agency to accept or reject these persuasions becomes imperative.

3.4. Trade Relations through the BRI in Nigeria, is reminiscent of European Colonial Patterns of Creating Economic Dependence

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the British interest in Nigeria was largely economic, and its investment during this period were for the purpose of securing Nigeria's primary products for export to Europe. In this regard, some vital infrastructures were built at the time. The railway line built from Enugu to Port Harcourt, was to facilitate the evacuation of coal from the city and to Europe by sea. Similarly, when tin was discovered in Jos, the eastern railway line was extended from Enugu to Jos for the same commercial purpose of exporting tin from Jos through Enugu, then to Port Harcourt, and then to Europe ([Ocheoha, 2017](#)).

Table 3.
Top 5 Chinese signed loan agreements with African countries.

2000-2022			
Country	Signed commitments	Sectors with highest commitment	Major lenders
Angola	\$45billion (\$2bn avg. per year)	Transport and energy	CHEXIM/CDB
Ethiopia	\$14.1billion (\$641mil avg. per yr.)	Transport, energy & ICT	CHEXIM/CIDCA
Zambia	\$9.1billion (\$414 mil. avg. per yr.)	Transport, energy, & ICT	CHEXIM/CIDCA
Kenya	\$9.7billion (\$441 mil. avg. per yr.)	Transport and energy	CHEXIM
Nigeria	\$8billion (\$363 mil avg. per yr.)	Transport, ICT & energy	CHEXIM

Note: N.B: CHEXIM- China's export and import bank; CIDCA- China international development cooperation agency; CDB- China development bank. Informationa and communication technology (ICT)

Source: [China Africa Research Initiative \(2023\)](#).

This line of economic interests and relations through the BRI can be observed in [Table 3](#) where the Chinese state major loan agreement went to the transport sector for the purpose of building roads, ports and rails to pave way for the evacuation of resources (especially oil, gas, tantalum, gold, rosewoods, pangolins, etc.) and market for Chinese goods emanating from its Sichuan, Zhejiang, Guandong, Shandong and Shanghai Provinces ([Observatory of Economic Complexity \[OEC\], 2024](#)). However, while the preponderance of transport (\$49.1billion), energy (\$59.9billion), and ICT (\$13.9billion) (see [Figure 1](#)) loans are commendable showing an impressive and public needs oriented African agency, indicating a slight departure from the European colonial era when they were weakened as a result of their lack of independence.

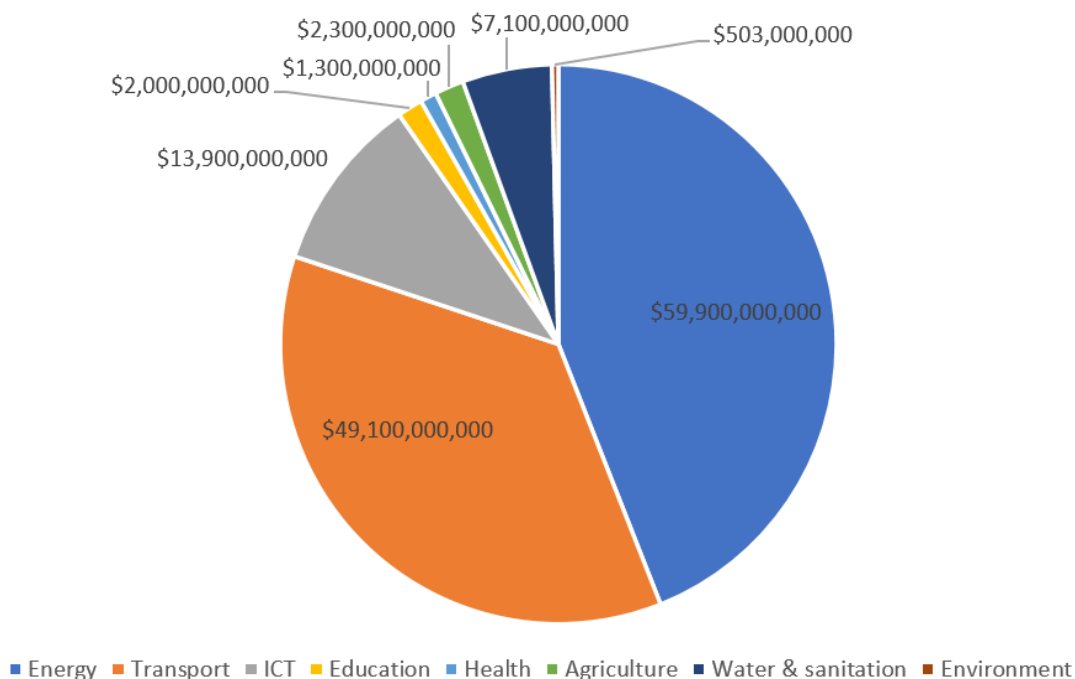


Figure 1.

Sectors of Chinese loan agreements with African States from 2000 – 2022.

Source: [China Africa Research Initiative \(2023\)](#).

Beyond this, the overwhelming neglect of the crucial sectors like education, agriculture, health and sanitation needed for mass human capital development is quite disturbing. The combined loan agreement

in water and sanitation, health, education, and agriculture (\$12.7billion) reveals the weak and elitist mindset of Africa's agency. It further shows that State agents in Africa appears to only pretend to care for the people only during election cycles as it was the case with Nigeria where entitlement politics of ethnic dimension were rife in the 2023 election.

3.4.1. That China's Lending Practices and Investments in Nigeria Undermines its Political Economy and Sovereignty

Statistics provided by [China Africa Research Initiative \(2023\)](#) in [Table 3](#) reveal that Nigeria is among the top 5 countries currently indebted to China to the tune of \$8billion. What is more worrisome are terms of these loan agreements, being shrouded in secrecy, remains a subject of controversy. [Gelpern, Horn, Morris, Parks, and Trebesch \(2023\)](#) examined 100 Chinese loan contracts and found that these loans have conditionality of non-disclosure and sovereign immunity waiver clauses to the extent that upon default in the loan agreement, debtor States are not allowed to plead sovereign immunity if Beijing decides to acquire the national infrastructure the loans were tied to. When this becomes the case the sovereignty of the State is undermined.

Sovereignty in its purest and traditional form, as dogmatically practised by the Chinese government and other great powers, frowns at any form of interference under any guise. Consequently, conditional or limited sovereignty under the restrictive immunity rule as a doctrine applied during commercial relations between states clearly undermines its traditional variant. As a matter of fact, the sovereign immunity clause waiver in Nigeria-China Loan Agreement in 2018, is an affront on Nigeria's sovereignty in its traditional sense, with neo-colonial implications. This provoked a robust debate amongst Nigerian lawmakers who called for a probe and outright cancellation of the loan agreement. As a result, the decision by the Nigerian House of Representative (HoR) of the National Assembly to probe the Chinese loan in 2020, the Chinese government sent a two-man delegation Li Ineijian and Wu Baocai to Nigeria to discuss the probe with members of the opposition party (Peoples' Democratic Party [PDP]) that instigated the probe. A month later, Wu led another delegation to Nigeria, to meet with the Interparty Advisory Council (IPAC), an umbrella body for registered political parties in Nigeria. The outcome of the meeting yielded positive fruits for the Chinese government following statements issued by then PDP National Chairman (Iyorchia Ayu) and his IPAC counterpart, Sani Yabagi, who made positive remarks of compliments regarding China's activities in the country ([Oshodi, 2022](#)). These visits however, have several implications. First, it led to the abrupt end of the probe. Second, it shows the level of political interference of Chinese government in Nigeria's internal affairs by meeting Nigeria's apex political body, the IPAC, to influence political decisions in the country. Another question to ask in this case is: where was the Nigerian agency to rebuke this neo-colonial tendency manifesting through these intruding and subversive visits from Beijing.

Table 4.
Top 5 Chinese investments and construction contracts in Africa from 2005 – 2023.

S/N	Countries	Value
1	Nigeria	US\$36.94billion
2	Algeria	US\$28.42billion
3	Angola	US\$27.71billion
4	Egypt	US\$25.25billion
5	Congo D. R	US\$22.89billion

Source: [American Enterprise Institute \(2024\)](#).

Furthermore, while Nigeria held the fifth spot in the top five countries with loan agreements with China in [Table 3](#), it occupies the top position as the investment destination and construction sites of Chinese companies in [Table 4](#), accounting for \$36.94billion in investments and construction contracts from China. This is no surprise as there are about 920 Chinese firms operating in Nigeria, the highest

compared to any African country (Statista, 2022). The challenge however, is that the bidding processes of the contract lack transparency and due process of law. As of 2019, the Asian giant boast of being in charge of \$47 billion worth of key Federal Government Projects across the country (Amaefule, Basiriyu, Ihua-Maduenyi, Ogunfunwa, & Asu, 2019). With this, it goes to show that whatever Beijing has given Nigeria in loans or investment it takes back through choice contracts and repatriates the proceeds back home. The Nigerian state have failed to observe and remedy this trade and investment anomaly that undermines its political economy.

3.5. That Chinese Companies Only Employ Nigerian Labour at the Menial Level Like their European Colonial Counterparts in the Last Century

One of the reasons advanced for Nigeria's independence struggles was the discriminate manner in which British colonial officers employed Nigerians in low level jobs, even though some were more qualified than their European counterparts who were given higher positions. Nigerians were not allowed to hold administrative or managerial positions in the colonial service, and they were variously exploited and racially segregated by foreign firms during colonialism (Iyer, Archieng, Borokini, & Ludger, 2021). The Chinese have adopted similar approach in their trade relations with Africa, and by extension Nigeria. In Africa, there have been debates regarding Chinese use and exploitation of local labour. While it is established that Chinese firms employ local labour in their investment relations in Africa (Oya & Schaefer, 2019; Shen, 2013; Wang & Zadek, 2016) most of the managerial positions were filled by Chinese labour (Wegenast, Struver, Giesen, & Krauser, 2017).

In Nigeria, this is also rife as Chinese firms treats Nigerian labourers as slaves in their own country. Ndudi Elumelu, a Nigerian lawmaker, described Nigerian workers' condition at the hands of their Chinese bosses as "slavish conditions." To be sure, and as at 2017, there are over 920 Chinese firms operating in Nigeria (Statista, 2022). In a survey conducted on two agencies – Nigerian Investment Promotion Council (NIPC) and the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) – to ascertain the number of Chinese firms operating legally in Nigeria, found that there were 221 firms registered by NIPC and 297 identified by MOFCOM. Out these numbers, about 160 of these firms, located in various rural areas of Nigeria (Adunbi & Stein, 2019). Some of them are into manufacturing, employing not more than seven per cent of Nigerians mostly at the lower rung of the ladder to engage in menial jobs (Amusan, 2022; Ngwu, 2019). With this, there is apparent lack of local capacity building, technology transfer and backward integration of Chinese investments in the country.

3.5.1. That Chinese Nationals and their MNCs Brutalise and Dehumanise Nigerians, just like the Europeans did during Colonialism

Just like in the days of British colonialism in Nigeria, the Chinese multinational firms and their nationals in Nigeria have brutalised and dehumanised Nigerians who work for them. While the case of European dehumanisation was a case of racism or racial abuse, that of the Chinese reflects the labour practices back home. According to Jiang (2009) trade policies and practices of Chinese multinationals and other businesses is an externalisation of domestic economic practises. By adopting this methodology, China's remarkable growth and development have come at huge cost of labour abuse, dehumanisation and low/insignificant wages (Ofosu & Sarpong, 2022). Back home, the Chinese government limits labour power by banning activities of independent unions, while providing little or no support for strike actions or demonstrations (Qi & Pringle, 2019).

In Nigeria, evidence shows that in some Chinese factories, Chinese nationals demands that their Nigerian workers refer to them as "master" whenever they are at work (Egbunike, 2021). Other evidence points to inhumane treatment, poor welfare, neglect of workers, sexual assault and child labour, with the Nigerian government looking the other way (Abolade, 2022; Egbunike, 2021). For instance, a Chinese national was responsible for the death of some Nigerians in Ikorodu, Lagos, whom he had locked up in his factory at night and went to his apartment to sleep. While he was away, fire broke out in the factory, some of the Nigerian workers, unable to get themselves out of the factory, lost their lives in the fire

incident. Others sustained various degrees of injuries before help came ([This Day Editorial, 2020](#)). In another instance, in October, 2020, a Nigerian worker died in a Chinese owned Xiyuan Quarry in Kobape area of Ogun state, following the non-provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) needed for him to work in the factory. One of the hospitalised survivors who sustained various degrees of injuries notes that the firm refused to pay for the medical bills as he sourced them from friends and relatives. Three years after, the factory is still open for operation with many of the factory workers still without PPE, which is a violation of section 5(3 III) of the National Policy on Occupational Safety and Health. And yet, the Nigerian government remains mute, looking the other way as usual ([Abolade, 2022](#)). These are few of countless cases of brutality and inhumane treatment of Nigerians at the hands of their Chinese employers.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the strength of the evidence presented above in terms of Chinese political and economic relations with Nigeria, it suffices to say that Chinese behaviours are neo-colonial to the extent that Nigerian agency allows. In the case of the oil for infrastructure deal signed by one government and revoked by another on the basis of non-transparency and fraud, reflects the presence or the lack thereof of Nigerian leadership willingness to be assertive and cautious in scrutinising contracts and loan agreements with external actors like China. Similarly, the continued yawning gap and imbalance of Nigeria-China trade in favour of China, labour abuses, political interference, asset acquisition through majority shareholding rights, sovereign immunity waiver clauses in loan agreements, economic subversion through excessive Chinese imports, unfettered access to resources (sometimes illegal), etc., strongly reflects Nigerian states leadership and its elites' weak and poor agency to rebuke, rebuff and ward-off Chinese neo-colonial tendencies and behaviours in the state.

In the light of this, the study recommends that the Nigerian state must meritoriously bureaucratise its leadership with persons of integrity and strong willed character to stand up to obtrusive and intrusive demands and offerings made by external actors like China with potential to undermine the political economy of the Nigerian state. Furthermore, scholars must likewise shine the intellectual light on the incompetent and enabling behaviours of African leadership and its elites who collude with foreign agents to undermine their states; instead of just focusing on the international structure or external actors and conditions that encourages neo-colonial tendencies on the continent.

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