



SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION AND THE POLITICS OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: AN ASSESSMENT OF CHINA-AFRICA BILATERAL RELATIONS

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Abstracts: The quest for national development shepherd in the eon of interdependence among regions, but the China-Africa Bilateral relation has embered polemic among scholars, as to the *raison d'être* of the economic intercourse. While some see it as a means for national development others prefer to call it debt-trap diplomacy even as some settled for imminent neocolonialism. Using the trend research design, as well as qualitative method of data collection and analysis, with complex interdependent theory, this study comprehensively appraise the character and dimension of China-Africa bilateral relations by coalescing existing assumptions with available data. It specifically attempt to figure out whether the bilateral relation is debt-trap diplomacy or national development oriented rooted in south-south cooperation. Accordingly, available data revealed that the China-Africa bilateral relation is derived by south-south cooperation devoid of debt trap. It however, passionately recommend that the detractors should pay more attention to corrupt African leaders who's agenda conflict with the ends of national development and may constitute or assist a *debt-trap* by not utilizing the aid offered to them by Beijing and other concerned international donors.

Keywords: Debt-book, BRI initiative, Neocolonialism, Complex interdependence; Land grab, Donor countries.

Introduction

National development as used here transcends mere improvement in national identity or political integration to include infrastructural development and economic growth in a given society. In fact, particular attention is focused on the last two above in this study given their role in the life of man. African leaders came into post-independent era with no discernable development vision and, or agenda for its realization. It is evident that after over fifty years of confusion of agenda most, if not all, African leaders still rely on the foreign countries for their

development plan that is more often than not anthology of policy objectives and programs that took for granted the validity of the inherited socio-economic and political structures. Probably the reason they fitted into Xi Jinping's development vision in 2013. This vision entails the re-establishment of the overland trade paths connecting China to Central Asia as well as Europe. It also include the 'maritime silk road' referring to the sea corridors, south of China that is hitherto well-traveled through the South China Sea along with the Indian Ocean towards Europe and Middle East. This vision if realized is



intended to revitalize China's primordial trade routes and also strengthen the contemporary accessible ones. Seeing the potential economic benefits embedded in this noble vision after a careful evaluation, Beijing hurriedly fine-tuned the plan, repackaged it and named it 'the belt and road initiative' (BRI). While these highlighted corridors appear to be the motivating factors behind the BRI initiatives, the Chinese government nurses a global BRI program that is all-encompassing and not particularly directed to any specific region or continent in the planet. Africa happens to be part of the program just as the Latin America, and in recent time, Italy as they have isolated themselves from Europe or the G-7 and signed up for the BRI initiative against expectations (Dollar, 2019).

Nevertheless, four years later, precisely on January 23, 2017, just as the Belt and Road Initiative are beginning to take shape, not just in Africa but in other developing countries, an India researcher, a Professor of strategic studies at the NDCPR (New Delhi-based Center for Policy Research) known as Brahma Chellaney in an article titled *China's Debt-Trap Diplomacy* nicknamed the BRI program as *Debt-Trap Diplomacy*. He contends that the Chinese government has ulterior motives towards African states *vis a vis* the initiative and intends to use such as an economic tool in the global economic relations to wane the sovereignty of the indebted States, and also to achieve their international security needs through the indebted regions (Chellaney, 2017). Exactly how that is going to happen is unclear at this point, but as if that was not enough, the subsequent year, 2018 also ushered in another form of scholarly attack on the same BRI initiative, this time from Harvard Kennedy School, in an article published by the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (BCSIA), on the 24th May 2018. In this particular publication Sam Parker and Gabrielle Chefitz refers to the BRI program as Debtbook Diplomacy, departing from the *debt-trap diplomacy*. Though, while these scholars appear to agree with most

of Prof. Chellaney's postulate in the *debt-trap diplomacy*, they went somewhat beyond him to assert that the BRI initiative is, but a strategic method of showboating China's spanking economic influence and its consequences for U.S. Foreign Policy (Parke & Chefitz, 2018). However, since the BCSIA publication the BRI program has attracted so many scholarly attacks as to the motive, substance and its character in relation to the African continent using Sri Lankan and Pakistan experiences as point of departure. Most of the critiques, are of the opinion that virtually all the development projects financed with, or backed by the Chinese loan in African are not economically viable since they are poorly cited and accordingly will not be able to offset the loan incurred and the accruing interest therein, in the long run, thereby creating a debt crisis situation in the African sub region. This impending debt crisis in Africa has also been referenced in another study in India published in the New Delhi Times and titled the *Chinese Diplomacy, BRI and 'Debt-Trap' in Africa*. The study viewed the Chinese initiative in Africa as a diplomatic accord in which Beijing will be reimbursed with raw materials for the infrastructural development projects they finance in Africa with a view to establishing their economic present in their regional market, so as to be able to transfer some of its industries as well as citizens to Africa with little or no resistance (New Delhi Times, 2018).

However, in characterizing such methods of penetration, the study preferred a system of neocolonialism to debt-trap diplomacy or debt-book diplomacy as the Chinese hidden agenda in their relationship to the African states. In all, the general perception, especially from the western scholars is that the Chinese interest and investments in African sub region is not as altruistic as it appears to be, they unanimously accuse the BRI initiative of predatory motive. But on the other side of the spectrum, it has also been argued that contrary to the above perception of



Beijing's interest in Africa as primarily centered on political control and repatriation of raw materials from the continent, China's national interest in Africa according to Yun Sun, is four folds, comprising the political sphere, security sphere, economic sphere as well as the ideological sphere (Sun, 2014). But even with the above dissenting opinion the fact is that Africa countries are becoming indebted again after a period of manageable public debt. As most of the African countries shift away from the concessional means of financing their projects towards market centered domestic debt, the composition of their internal and external debts also changed, increasing their debt profiles towards crisis proportion. Some Africa economies in 2017 accumulated a significant amount of public debt, to the point that multilateral institutions and, or organizations politely advised countries like Zambia, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Cameroon, Kenya and Ghana to be very courteous in public spending (Gill & Karakhula 2018). They also highlighted the fact that African countries such as Mauritius, Sudan, Gabon, Angola as well as Kenya have a collective GDP of little more than 300 billion US dollars, with debt to GDP ratios higher than 60% (2018). The big question now becomes how did some of these African states got themselves knee deep in debt crisis again after a relatively manageable debt period. The Beijing lending behavior is motivated by infrastructural financing and has financed over 3 000 infrastructure projects in Africa at the cost of about eighty six billion US dollars in commercial loans to the governments of African states and some state owned corporations between 2000 and 2014 accruing to about six billion US dollars yearly on average (Schneidman & Wiegert, 2018). In addition, President Xi Jinping in 2015 at the sixth Forum on Africa-China Cooperation also guaranteed and or, promised a supplementary sixty billion US dollars in project financing to the continent. With that, Beijing has displaced the region's traditional lenders and becomes the

new Africa's largest creditor, with about 14% of the total sub Saharan Africa's debt stock (2018). There is no doubt that this development was facilitated by the mutual interest of Beijing and the governments of African states; Beijing were ready to lend Africa states for infrastructural development while the African leaders are in dire need of financial aid for infrastructural development, making the bilateral relation appear like a round peg in a round hole, with the BRI initiative as the nuptial nut,

The BRI funding are disbursed to Africa and other interested regions by designated Chinese agencies such as the CDB (China Development Bank), the AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank), the EIBC (Export-Import Bank of China) the Shanghai-based New Development Bank and state-owned Silk Road Fund (White and Case, 2018). AIIB alone approved 1.7 billion US dollars for infrastructural development loans to nine BRI development projects in 2016 but at the end of October 2017, it had only made one set of investments in Africa continent, precisely in Egypt. However, as at November 2017 at least seventy six PPPs (public-private partnerships) projects in African countries related to the BRI projects are imminent, especially in the transport sector which claims about 60% of the development fund. No doubt the BRI program provides the Africa continent with prospects of infrastructural development, and will perhaps be a significant promoter of infrastructure expansion in the region. Although when Beijing interact with the government of African states it does not claim to be expert in African problems or ensure solution to them, it purely frame her interaction with the African states in the context of south-South cooperation, with multilateral organizations such as the United Nations emphasizing her developing country status (UN, 2018). This implies that China may not be as selfish as we are led to believe in her bilateral relation with Africa since the BRI *modus operandi* seems to be South-South development oriented. On the other hand, the BRI has generated so many



questions for Africa and Africans, prominent among which is what will be the effect of the infrastructural development financing on African debt profile? As well as how will the BRI projects be financed internally? Although, there are still so many related questions associated with this relationship begging to be answered this study will focus on the former, since it's more related to economic condition of the African states and the topic of this study, so as to understand whether the Cino-African bilateral relation is rooted on *debt-trap diplomacy* or national development oriented anchored on *south-south cooperation*. To achieve that we shall begin by unveiling the procedural approach used in the anthology of relevant data for the study, which is here referred to as "methodology", the analytical method employed as well as theoretical framework under which the analysis will be aligned to ease our required comprehension aptitude, hence, we shall begin with the review of relevant literature.

Review of Related Literature

National development

By national development this study refers to a phenomenon that encompasses a whole nation. Hence, national development can be viewed and described as the overall development or an amalgam of socio-political, economic as well as religious advancement of a nation or country. And these are actualized through developmental planning, which can be seen as a collection of country's strategies mapped out by the government. The concept national development is used to refer to a set of sustainable growth and development of a nation to a more conducive and desirable one. National development plan is usually people oriented and its success or failure is determined in terms of the impact it has on the masses. Also in Enahoro's diary (as cited in Onabajo and M'Bayo, 2009), he contend that, national development must be man oriented and not just an institutionally oriented venture. What he is implying is that national

development must be people oriented, as in, collectiveness, and not just an individual interest prone. National development to, Elugbe (1994), refers among other related things to the growth of the nations in terms of unity, economic well-being, education and mass participation in the activities of government what Elugbe is implying by implication is that national development involves the provision of the necessary equipments and social materials that will ensure that man make a very good living out of his environment in every society. The national development discourse seems to be in state of motion since the end of World War II. In fact, in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the ideological differences between the capitalist west and the socialist east seem to have influenced the conceptualization and the meaning of the term national development. Ake (2003, p. 9) for instance argue that "the ideology of development itself has become a problem for development because of the conflict between its manifest and latent functions" in those days when national development appeared to be understood as a direct consequence of economic growth, countless theorist such as Rostow (1952) and Harod and Domar (1957), among other scholars proposed models of development, holistically identifying savings, investment and structural change as the main source of economic development and national growth (Icho and Ukpere, 2012). Their believe was that in the long run economic development or growth would generate fund for national investments and infrastructural development which would engender better living condition for the people

However, in the late 70s it became clear that economic development in most developing and underdeveloped countries especially in Africa and Latin America do not provide corresponding social well-being. Obviously economic growth could not completely address the explosion of unemployment, disease, hunger, poverty, illiteracy and the ever increasing crime and



political/religious extremism. Therefore, “post development thought has called for a return to the stress on people as both the measure and determinant of national development” (Raplay, 2007, p. 6) These trends have necessitated the current thinking and redefinition of the concept ‘development’ from economic growth centered panorama to human centered approach. “national development is now seen as transformation of the society, a move from the old ways of thinking and old forms of social and economic organization to new ones,” Stiglitz diary (as cited in Afeikhena, 2004, p.207). National development has also been used to connote a stage of advancement that characterizes a nation-state at some point in their existence, this progress in question is resulted from the interplay of modern political, economic and social forces and processes which transforms variety of people, developing a common geographical area, from allegiance to, and participation in a transitional policy to the creation and acceptance of, and participation in a modern nation-state (Lukpata, 2013). The above entity is characterized by a strong but not autocratic government agencies and machineries that are capable of commanding loyalty, eliciting legitimacy, keeping order, permitting mass participation, fostering integration and satisfying popular demands and expectations. It also has access to skilled citizens, who exercise their potentials to create an advanced industrial society and exploits its environment to achieve a high quality of life for the entire population (king, 1988). When any state or nation is able to organize and agree on a national development strategy, it is a good sign that the state or nation in question is strong and lively. On the other hand “when a nation no longer defines a historical horizon to be pursued with courage and hope, it enters the unhappy state of awareness that Hegel referred to: the inability to take a harmonic stance before life” (Comparoto, 2005, p.3).

Indeed, the national development discourse attracted a lot of scholars with different contributions

including Rodney (1972) Nnoli (1981) and Ake (2003) who has argued fervently that the concept of development is multi faceted and cannot be discussed in isolation of man. For instance Nnoli (1981) contend that development can be conceptualized as a dialectical phenomena in which the individual and the society at large interact with their physical environment, manipulating and transforming them to the satisfaction of their needs and at the same time being transformed by it. This idea of development Okolie (2009) contends would generally improve man’s capacity and potential and subsequently remove and/or reduce the rate of poverty, inequality, unemployment, penury and also enhance the general condition for human existence and self-reproduction. On this note, therefore, national development can be rightly understood as the process of empowering the entire population in a given society with a view to increasing their potentials and the ability to manipulate their environment to the satisfaction of their daily human needs.

Bilateral Relations

The phrase bilateral relations as used in this Sino-African study, include the socio-political, economic, historical as well as cultural link, it also subsume the people to people contact within that specific geographical sphere. A good bilateral relation between countries or regions is distinguished by mutual assistance between related groups, institutions as well as public servants both in the public and private sectors, it also includes the academia and the civil society (Arel-Bundock, 2017). Cultural cooperation, mutual investment and trade, understanding and universal awareness about the other country and the existing relationship between them as well as general acceptance, constitute the essential elements of bilateral relations In the EEA and Norwegian financial mechanisms situation, the working definition of ‘fortified bilateral relations’ is seen as: improved assistance and enhanced mutual knowledge and



understanding between the benefactor and recipient countries (Arel-Bundock, 2017). The relationship between the states concerned in the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms according to Wilkinson, (2018) are strong before now as a result of their common shared values, history and culture, as well as their geographical contiguity. But note, that bilateral relations among states or bilateralism as we implies here is very different from unilateralism or multilateralism as used by the students of international political economy in their analysis of specific relationship between sovereign states, which is generally used to refers to the activity of a single state or in cooperation with multiple states, as the case maybe. The point being made, is that when sovereign states in the international system recognizes each order as independent nations and resolved to enter into a diplomatic relations, they establish a bilateral relationship by that very act, be it on socio-cultural, political or economic ground (Wilkinson, (2018). It follows therefore, that states with bilateral relation is expected to exchange diplomatic representative such as envoys or ambassadors to smoothen the immanent dialogues and corporations development among them. A successful economic diplomacy always begat a form of agreement signed by two states inform of (FDI) foreign Direct Investment, (FTA) Free Trade Agreement and other related economic nuggets. The purpose of intensification of bilateral relations of any country is as essential as the purpose of plummeting the social and economic discrepancies between the related regions or states.

And to guarantee flexibility and sustainability in development, the bilateral tools will incorporate: (i) donor project partnerships; (ii) bilateral funds with the level of elasticity required to attend to existing issues of institutional cooperation associated to bilateral relation at programme level, as well as (ii) economic interest and political will (Thompson & Verdie, 2019). In as much as nearly all bilateral agreements are signed in accordance to

a particular distinctiveness of the contracting states to offer special treatment to each other, a situational differentiation is what is required instead of a generalized principle in the formation of these documents. Therefore, through bilateral agreements, the concerned countries can acquire a more customized obligations and agreements that merely concern specific contracting states. Though, the contracting countries will experience a trade-off since it is more wasteful in transaction costs than the multilateral strategy. With a particular emphasis to the system of rules governing the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms 2014-2021 implementation, the major aim of the regulations is to present the appropriate and important stakeholders with a general idea and explanation of the necessities regarding the intensification of bilateral relations as well as to provide direction and suggestions on the best approach and or, ways these requirements can be implemented in practice not just in theory. Miles (2018), fervently, opined that these regulations must attends to pertinent procedures contained in the programmes, projects and the required finance for bilateral relations and ought to be of importance to the NFPs (National Focal Points), DPP (Donor Programme Partners) as well as the Programme Operators.

Nevertheless, there has been a protracted discourse concerning the advantages of bilateralism in relation to multilateralism. the foremost polemic on bilateralism correspond to the end of world War I as global politicians blame the war on the complex nature of pre-war system of bilateral treaties, which they insist led to economic misunderstanding that metamorphosed to the world war, and would continue if necessary measures are not taken to assuage the shortfalls. It was the attack on the bilateral treaties that led to the establishments of the post-war multilateral organizations such as the Leagues of Nations that was shut down after about two and half decades of establishment do to its inability to perform the



function to which it was established. (Thompson and Verdie, 2019). The period of Great depression was also blamed on the complex nature of bilateral trade agreements which many argued facilitated the creation of a cycle of rising tariffs that aggravated the economic recession. Consequently, the advance countries of the North turned to multilateralism after the World War II as the only viable panacea for economic growth and national development. This led the creation of multilateral organizations such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), World Trade Organization WTO as well as the United Nations (UNO). Although, even with the establishment of such high-profile contemporary multilateral organizations, most countries continued to keep their economic diplomatic treaties at bilateral level (Hurrell, 2007), probably as a result of its relative simplicity in operation compared to multilateralism and its complex and dependent tendencies, as is evident in the contradiction emanating from global technology, money, armament and power, disparities among the competing actors which are always exploited by the stronger party in the bilateral diplomacy.

Methodology

A contentious issue such as the exact nature and character of Beijing's interest in the Africa political economy requires a standard procedural approach otherwise known as 'methodology' for easier understanding of the facts and or, information being presented in the study; but that is not to imply that methodology is expected to proffer solution to the study problems, for it cannot be seen as methods. It merely provides the theoretical base for comprehending which technique or process was used in a particular research circumstances. Hence, the logical steps strictly adhered to in this particular research situation are; the research design, the method of data collection, the method of data analysis, the theoretical framework and finally data presentation as well as examination, and, or analysis after

which we shall draw an inference and proffer recommendation based on our research findings. The **trend** research design is therefore, used in the conduct of this study. This brand of design is a strand of the longitudinal survey design which is very useful in behavioral science research. It can be employed in such studies like the learning curve in a business research. It can also be used to study the motivation of workers, the productivity of employees over a period of time and even the profitability trend in an organization (Ary et al. 1972). In longitudinal design the researchers study the changes in the variable of study at different point in time. Therefore in trend design every set of observations is aimed at different sample of the same population at various points in time. The observation is focused on one or more independent variables. And the data collected from the observation can be used or is usually used to plot a trend (Kerlinger, 1986). Economic trends are good examples of the results of trend designs. In economic trend the x variable is the economic indicator that is observed over the years.

The *trend research* design is a good example of non-experimental research design in the social science literature. Fundamentally, identifying variables is the first step in creating a quasi-experimental design, the variables which is the unit of research that change when situation change. In this *trend* research design, x variable is the quasi-independent variable, which is that variable being manipulated to produce a dependent variable' although the expected effect would be observed in the y variable' which is here denoted as the dependent variable. The application of *trend* research design on the hypotheses of this study shall take the following order: Hypothesis 1: The Sino-Africa bilateral relation is not a debt-trap diplomacy but a south-south cooperation'. The x variable in this hypothesis is '*The Sino-Africa bilateral relation*' whereas the y variable is '*not a debt-trap diplomacy but a south-south cooperation*'. In the data anthology, the



qualitative method was preferred for this study. The effectiveness of this procedure is its ability to offer textual exposition of general perception of a particular research problem. In other words it provides data concerning people's view on a particular research issue, that is, the normal, contradictory viewpoint, attitude, behaviors, opinions, emotions, and individual relationships (Devizin & Lincoln, 2000). In addition, when jointly applied with quantitative methods, the methods can assist to explicate and understand better the complex reality of a given situation and the suggestion of a quantitative data in a scholarly research. Therefore, to complete the sequence the qualitative method of data analysis was also employed in the assessment of the character of Sino-Africa bilateral relation and its effects on economic condition of African states, this two research approach go in *pari pasu*, in an interactive conduct because the findings of the investigation will unquestionably support and, or facilitate the collection of subsequent data. It has been argued that data collection and analysis in every study derives or complement each other, with the findings that propels the investigation to a higher level synthesis of the information that is being sought by the researcher (Dunnin, 2009). The qualitative method of data analysis refers to a procedure that promotes "working with available data, organizing them into meaningful unit, coding them, synthesizing them as well as searching for veiled patterns as we intend to demonstrate in this study. We shall now turn to the next phase of this study, namely; the theoretical frame work.

Theoretical Framework

A sensitive polemic study of this magnitude requires an elastic and encompassing theoretical framework that will subsume the major variables in the study, which in this situation refers to *debt-trap diplomacy* and *south-south cooperation*. This study employed the complex interdependence theory after a careful review of related theories as the most appropriate

framework under which the analysis will flow. The Complex interdependence theory or interdependence theory as fondly used by scholars of international political economy, is a concept used largely by the international relation analyst to refer to the phenomena of increasing contemporary socio-political and mostly economic interdependent in the international system. The analytical utility of the complex interdependence theory recommend that modern states cooperate through several channels that may generate contending actors within the global system. The theory insists that, interstate relationships are rooted on multiple issues that are short of a steady hierarchy making agenda setting. The major proponents of the theory are Robert Keohane & Joseph Nye, and was first used in their classic work titled *Power and interdependence* published in 1977. The publication of the study made a significant impact on the study of international economic relation. It's regarded by most development scholars to have made great contributions to the discipline by conceptualizing those matters arising from international interdependence and isolating a set of variable that permit us to broaden our knowledge concerning the politics of mutual relation in the global economy (Michalak, 1979). The theory contends that economic interdependence increases the prospect of peaceful coexistence among states. Not merely is there a rising array of issues where power is not valuable, but interdependence imposes costs even on powers that control issue arenas. For example, in Nye's study, or his analyses of the substance of interdependence, economic policy makers in Beijing resisted internal pressure from collection of higher-ranking military personnel to vend the growing China's U.S. Treasuries stock as retaliation against them for the weapons provided to Taiwan military by the government of the United States of America, because vending the U.S treasuries stock will also damage economic interests of Beijing as well as Washington (Nye, 2000). However, for the fact that



Keohane & Nye's study recognize that there will be varying level of complex interdependence in different socio-economic formations they take a less categorical and more dependent view of outcomes than many conservative realist or liberal viewpoint.

Their classic work recommends a mixture of competitive and cooperative result away from the possibility of aggressive conflict in an increasing array of policy subdivisions. In the application of the complex interdependence theory to the Sino-African bilateral relations, the study suggest that, the relating regions in the global economy (China & Africa) offers each other, a necessities that is different from what they previously have, each having monopoly over assets that the other desperately desires. This economic situation no doubt creates the necessity for socio-economic interdependence between Beijing and the African states in their struggle for infrastructural development. The above postulates have already been highlighted by other scholars such as Enuka (2011). This however, implies that, the participating countries have something that is desired by each other. This implies that the driving force behind this mutual interdependent between African states and the Chinese government is the desire of the participating countries including China, to exchange some resources they possess for those they do not have at that point in time. In this situation, China as an up-and-coming donor country established a unique development partnership with some African states in which Beijing will bankroll infrastructural development in the African sub region and in turn receive their investments back in forms of natural resources. In other words, the donor and the recipients are involved in a mutual exchange relationship. Although, it has been argued that, China's major interests in the region are associated with Africa's abundant natural resources (Rupp 2008; Chellaney, 2017; Parker, & Chefitz, 2018). China is advantageously utilizing the structural distinctiveness of African political economy that

promotes the relationship between Africa and China, placing the former at the vulnerable situation, and the later, in a position that can compete, if not dislodge the several years of western domination and neocolonial influence in the sub-region. To substantiate the above postulates, in the economic terms, China's and Africa's frantic desires for resources are the major driving power behind their presumed interdependency in the global relations. And as already emphasized, both actors have assets to offer to each order and this swap of resources has improved the relationship among them.

In the political sphere, while China is strategically placing herself as the alternative model of development in the global socio-economic community, Africa's increasing ambition to break away from the neocolonial control of the West and improve her infrastructures, coupled with China's understanding of this state of affairs in the region provides the essential bases upon the interdependence blossoms. Regrettably, such interdependent relationship between the two actors increasingly affects the traditional influence of Western powers in African markets and this impact is bitterly felt in the West though that is not the issue in focus here. However, it is here argued that Sino-Africa bilateral relations play a facilitating role in the infrastructural development in Africa which intensifies the interdependency between the participating countries. Therefore, it might not be wrong in arguing that some scholars maybe correct in some ways, by arguing that the contemporary Sino-African relation are predatory and mainly focus on economic globalization and by so doing ignoring the important political attributes to the interdependency of the parties concerned. Consequently, without discrediting the ideas of scholars such as Enuka's analytical supposition regarding the contemporary relations among state in the global economy, this study insist from the basic tenets of this theory, that no country can survive in isolation, hence, the contemporary bilateral



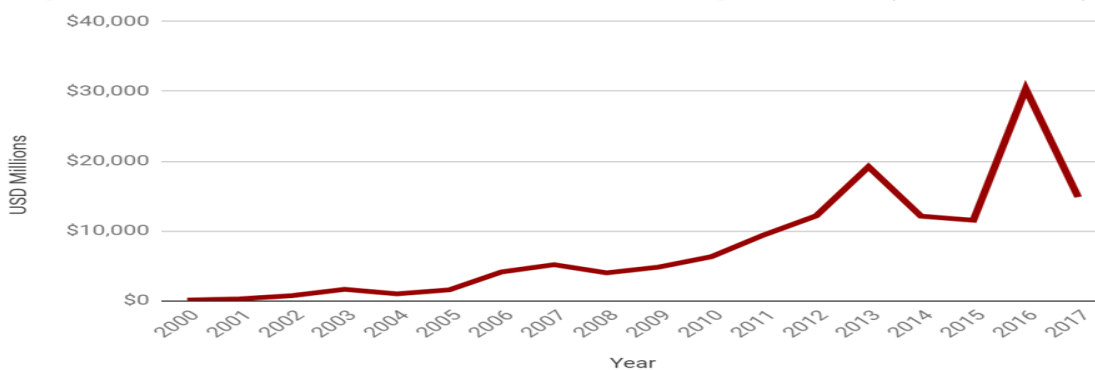
relation between Africa and China is rooted on their mutual perceived economic benefit imminent in the interdependent and not out of love for each other. So much on the exposition of the theoretical framework, we shall now turn to the next phase.

China-Africa Bilateral Relation; A Chronological Review

No doubt, in the history of development phenomenon is any other continent's development records more truncated than that of African states. Scholars have attributed these economic realities to so many things and reasons including their colonial and neo-colonial experiences with Europe. The African continent is hitherto considered as exclusive property of the European states which reflect in both their political and economic relations as well as diplomacy. However, after the decolonization era the United States of America became more interested in the diplomatic and economic relation with the emerging states in the African sub-region. Consequently, they seconded the European Union

in the provision of the development aid to African states during the early period of post-colonization epoch. The reason they are mostly referred to, by scholars as the traditional donors in Africa. Though, in recent time that nomenclature appears to require reassessment and reevaluation as the turn of the century has brought in other willing donors in the global economic relations, prominent among which is China, that have already established expanded interaction with increasing number of developing countries and or, regions in the world including Africa countries. In pursuant of this relation Beijing established FOCAC (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation) in 2000, this is seen as essential mechanism in strengthening the relationship between Beijing and the Africa states (Taylor, 2011). This initiative is followed by other major government policies aimed at intensification of the relationship such as the White Paper on CAP (China's Africa Policy), published in 2006 (CSC, 2006), as well as the White Paper on CFA

Figure 1: Chinese Loans to African BRI Signatories (2000-2017)



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(China's Foreign Aid), promulgated in 2011 (CSC, 2011) followed by the launching of the BRI initiative of

September and October 2013 in Kazakhstan and Indonesia respectively. Since then the Chinese presence

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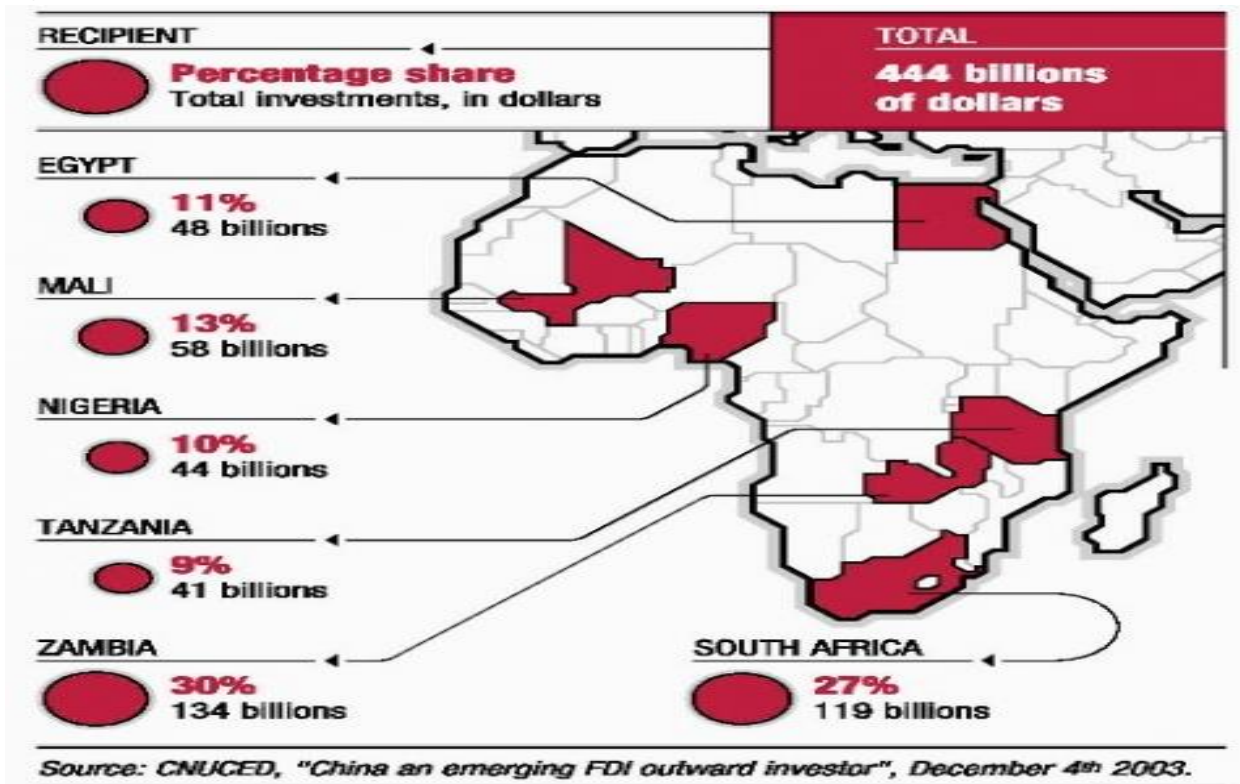
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in Africa in terms of development loans have been standing out like an accusing finger and has continued to grow as well (see Figure 1). This contemporary Chinese present in Africa as revealed in figure one is no doubt a food for thought considering the fact that they are also not

long ago one of the major recipient of direct overseas investment totaling about 53 billion US dollars in 2003 (Lafargue, 2005).

Figure 2: China's total investments in Sub-Sahara Africa as at 2004 (US\$ Bln)



Apparently, the tide has changed as revealed by the Johns Hopkins University studies as shown in figure one between 2000 and 2017. In contemporary times China has become one of the major sources of such investments to other countries, in fact as far back as 2003 China was the fifth highest overseas investment globally, just behind the United State of America, Germany, United Kingdom and France (Lafargue, 2005). Her investment overseas was about 2.087 billion US dollars, which signify 112%

increase from the previous year and represent an active global present in about 160 (one hundred and sixty) countries in 2002. As at 2002 China's present has encompassed both Latin America and Africa Sub-regions. Outside Hong Kong and Macao her total foreign investment was about 5.083 billion US dollars with 8.7% in Africa, 9.5% in Latin America, 8% in Australia and 25% in North America as at 2003. The major recipient of Chinese foreign investment in Africa as at then was South



Africa, Mali, Zambia and Egypt (see figure 2) above for the statistical distribution of figures. In recent time this

figures has continued to

Figure 3: The China Africa Trade between 2002 and 2017 (US\$ Bln)



increase. This Sino-Africa bilateral relations has continued to grow as weeks turn to months and months to years, though, in terms of quantification, China received about 10.67% of the Sub-Sahara Africa export in 2005 as revealed in John Hopkins School of Advanced International studies in January 2018 (see Figure 3). Nevertheless, this African export was dominated by unfinished goods, mostly oil and other mineral resources, just as the Sino-African trade was also dominated by five African countries which accounted for about 50% of the total export to China. On the other hand the China's imports from Africa, is also dominated by the resource rich countries in the region since the China's importations are mostly raw materials. However, Africa's significance as Beijing's trading collaborator has been conspicuously increasing since 2011 when they accounted for only 4% of China's global trade. Africa's bilateral trades with China over the past decade have continued to grow up to 30% CAGR (compounded annual growth) of 10.8 billion US dollars in 2003 and continued up to 132.3 billion US dollars in 2014 (see Figure 3). Whereas the bulk of the Chinese export to Africa essentially reflect the

characteristics of their global export, mainly manufactured goods such as; machinery, communication equipment, vehicles as well as electronics, the bulk of the Chinese imports from sub-Sahara Africa comprises of natural resources comparable to their Latin America imports. The composition of these Chinese imports from Africa reflects about 16% iron and other metal ores, 6% copper and of course 67% petroleum in 2016 (World Bank, 2018). These imports from Africa especially oil accounts for about 19% of energy requirement in China in 2016, and 32.7% of all the oil consumed in China in 2017 (2018). As much as most analysts, especially of western descent perceived the Sino-African relation as a one-way benefit activity, the prevailing records and literature suggests otherwise as they have shown exceptional growth and benefits accruing to both parties. The Chinese interest in the African raw materials has already provides a shift in infrastructural development in the region in addition to the increased geography of trading opportunities different in final texture from the conventional North-South linkages. We shall now



qualitatively assess our hypothesis with the available data and literature.

China-Africa Relations: A Tool for National Development or Debt-trap Diplomacy

We now interrogate our null hypothesis which states that ‘the Sino-Africa bilateral relation is not debt-trap diplomacy but south-south cooperation derived by national development’. Although, Beijing is frequently lambasted as a reprehensive player in the Sino-Africa relations, available records have continued to prove otherwise. Fact is that Chinese aid is enhancing infrastructural development in Africa and new job are being created by Chinese firms in the region. These economic activities may lead to absolute economic transformation of the continent or it may not, just as the European and American development plans often go awry, that is not enough to condemn the Chinese foreign policy in Africa. This Chinese loan to African states have

been under careful study by John Hopkins University as well as the Boston University scholars since 2000, this study revealed that China has provided at least 95.5 billion US dollar infrastructural development finance to Africa states between 2000 and 2015 (Bräutigam, 2018). This study also revealed that these loans are financing gargantuan infrastructural project in Africa, where more than six hundred people have no access to electricity and other essential amenities. The study also discovered that while 40% of the loan is channeled to power generation and transmission projects, 30% went to the rejuvenation of dilapidated rail and road infrastructure in Africa. The quality of these projects are also another source of its attack but fact is that transportation and power projects are investments that enhances economic development, as it touches other sectors of the economy directly or indirectly, enhancing their capabilities and productivities.

Table 1: The Biggest African Borrowers From China Between 2015 and 2018 (USD Mlns)

Country	Loans per year (2015-18, million USD)	Voice 2018 (Index)	External debt (2015-18, % GNI)	Logistics Performance Index 2017 (Index)
1 Angola	8,113	-1.1	33.3	2.24
2 Kenya	1,243	-0.2	32.9	3.33
3 South Africa	1,186	0.6	49.1	3.78
4 Egypt	1,030	-1.2	23.8	3.18
5 Zambia	980	-0.3	65.8	2.43
6 Cameroon	769	-1	26.7	2.15
7 ROC	756	-1.1	52	2.38
8 Uganda	738	-0.6	40.2	3.04
9 Ethiopia	730	-1.4	32.9	2.38
10 Nigeria	422	-0.3	8.4	2.63
11 Average	1,597	-0.68	36.5	2.75
12 Rest of Africa	45	-0.56	37.2	2.42

Source: The World Bank, <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home> & NBS 2019



In addition to that, the study revealed that the interests on Chinese loans are attractive with comparatively longer repayment period than that of the World Bank or IMF, on that ground; one can rightly argue that Chinese financial institutions are more risk taking or that they undervalue risk at least in China-Africa context. Presently the global interest rates are low, and Libor is in the region of 2%. Therefore, Libor plus 3.6% would arrive at 5.6%, interest rate, which is beautiful for states like Zambia or Kenya (Dollar, 2019). Despite the fact that highly western concessional loan are limited in developing countries such as in Africa, there is also the fact that financial institutions such as the World Bank and the likes takes longer time in financing big infrastructural projects do to redtapism and other social regulations and conditionality. Consequently, African States are forced to turn to Chinese for big infrastructural projects such as transportation and power projects finance. Studies have shown that Chinese lending to African states have neither a clear geographical pattern nor any discernable governance correlation. For instance, one of the BRI transport corridor only connected the East African States but the lending pattern stretched to most regions of the continent and appears to concentrated more in the south and west, the BRI has all most covered every part of the region as revealed in table 1 above. Also in terms of governance, the borrowing countries are not homogeneous either, they include both the democratic

and autocratic states as extracted from the World Governance Indicators, 2018 Voice index, which measures civil liberties as well as democratic political rights in a given state (see Table 1). By structure the said index, has a universal mean of zero and a standard deviation of 1. The mean is -0.6 for African countries. However, the major borrowers from China comprises states with more than average voice scores in Sub-Saharan Africa, such as Zambia, Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa. This major borrowers also subsumes some African states with poor voice scores, such as the Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Angola, Egypt and Cameroon. Uganda, on the other hand is right at the mean level of the distribution (see Table 1). The distribution in table one also revealed that the Chinese lending pattern is heterogeneous, as it finances the authoritarian states as well as the democratic nations, thereby disputing the allegation that the lending pattern is encouraging dictatorship in the region, and revealing the fact that there is a negative correlation between African categories of governance and the Chinese lending practices. It also illuminates the fact that the borrowing states are also relatively heterogeneous with reference to their external debt reports. It revealed that ten states possess external debt of about 36.5% on average of GNI (Gross National Income), approximately equal to 37.2% for the rest of Africa.

Table 2: The Trends of Chinese Workers In Africa (Selected Countries)

	Country	2012-15	2015-18
1	Angola	50,120	39,034
2	Kenya	3,430	8,099
3	South Africa	3,436	966
4	Egypt	740	1,899
5	Zambia	6,659	7,311
6	Cameroon	2,798	3,585



7	Republic of Congo	10,120	6,711
8	Uganda	1,737	4,529
9	Ethiopia	9,630	9,840
10	Nigeria	8,057	9,257
11	Average	9,473	8,523
12	Rest of Africa	2,707	3,107
Source: John Hopkins (SAIS) 2019, http://www.sais-cari.org/s/LaborData.xlsx and NBS 2019			

Though, the average covered extremely substantial variation in the distribution. On one side, Nigeria, Angola and Kenya demonstrates very low external debt profile, Nigeria and Angola are rich with natural resource with large GDP (Gross Domestic Products) that can contain significant foreign debt. However, Zambia is in the most worrisome situation among the ten countries dispersed with external debt of 65.8% of GNI (see Table 1). Among the China accusations associated with the debt-trap diplomacy is the land grab conspiracy promulgated by Western Media such as America’s CBS News which insinuated that China acquire most of the Congolese farmland under cultivation, and Henning Mankell, the Swedish crime writer who reemphasize the land-grab tale as well as the German top African adviser to Angela Merkel who advised newsgagents that the shortage of foods experience in Africa some years ago was a consequence of a large-scale land purchases deal concluded by China and the government of the concerned African states in the region, coupled with the rumor that Kenya rented hectares of land to the Chinese government to shift millions of Chinese peasants to Kenya for farming in the country. But a three year study conducted by IFPR (International Food Policy Research Institute) and John Hopkins University research institute revealed that those accusations are false and blotted out of proportion (Bräutigam, 2018). The last point we intend to highlight on, to buttress our hypothesis is another issue raised by the critics concerning the Chinese companies coming to

Africa with their personnel instead of employing the local populations to reduce unemployment in the region. The table two below presents a review of Chinese personnel in different countries of Africa on labor services or construction projects between 2012 and 2015 and between 2015 and 18. The distribution clearly indicates that there is a negative correlation between the Chinese loan to the African states and the number of Chinese personnel in each African country. It implies that the regulations of the borrowing states as well as the circumstances of local labor market influence the number of Chinese personnel in each country and not part of the debt conditionality. For instance Angola had 50120 Chinese personnel working in different part of the country between 2012 and 2015 but this number declined to approximately 39043 in the subsequent study while the loan and its conditions remained constant. Angola is specifically selected do to the volume of her loans *viz a viz* the Chinese staffs resident in the country, but other major borrowers such as South Africa and Egypt have relatively small number of Chinese personnel working in the their country (see Table 2). a close examination of the trends of the Chinese personnel in Africa as depicted in the table two below will reveal that the numbers of foreign personnel within the period under study alternates while the volume of the loans remains relatively constant. A clear indication that to control the Africa labor market may not be part of the Chinese aim in the Sino-Africa relations, even though it didn’t make economic sense for



the contractors to import expensive work force when they can easily train the available local ones to their needs at a far cheaper cost.

Conclusion

As is evident in the data and literature presented above, the findings of this paper gravely contradict the basic definition of debt-trap diplomacy and the major characteristics of neocolonialism in the Sub-Sahara Africa as the critics will have us believe, since the prevailing relations creates opportunities for infrastructural development that has eluded the Africa continent for ages. Fact is that no country can survive in autarchy as the Chinese president has reemphasized in his 2008 FOCAC's opening speech (Eom, Brautigam, & Benabdallah, 2018). The statement corroborates the basic tenet of our theoretical framework which suggest that, the relating regions in the global economy (China and Africa in this context) offers each other, a necessities that is different from what they previously have, each having monopoly over assets that the other desperately desires. Complex interdependent theory made it clear that the relationship is not out of love but is born of necessity. It follows that raw materials is needed by the Chinese industries to maintain its production, and Beijing needs the support of other countries in the UN (United Nations) decision making process to achieve her foreign policy objectives. Fortunately for Beijing Africa appear to possess the required quality and ready to play ball. Since they also have needs that Beijing is ready to satisfy this bilateral relation was entered into in the spirit of *quid pro quo*. Until proven otherwise, the Chinese are the only donor country that is willing to award hefty loans to Africa for significant infrastructural development in the continent. Although, Chinese increased present in Africa certainly increase the risk of debt crises, but so is other countries that have any economic interest in Africa. The John Hopkins University study revealed that African countries are also indebted to other countries and

institutions apart from China but why the Chinese situation is renamed a *debt-trap diplomacy* is still unclear at this point. For instance, between 2000 and 2019, Ethiopia has borrowed about 12.1 billion US dollars from China while its debt to World Bank, the Middle East and others, is up to 30 billion US dollars. Again The Mozambique foreign debt is estimated at 10 billion US dollars, whereas the Chinese share of that is just 2.3 billion US dollars. The Ghanaian situation is not that different since their public debt approximates 25 billion US dollars with the Chinese share of less than 4 billion US dollars. In Zimbabwe, 77% of their public debt is owned by World Bank, IMF and Paris Club. The stories remain the same in the Cameroon debt situation where china hold less than third of their public debt (Eom et al. 2018).

Naturally, every party in business dealings is expected to make profit, but it's the degree of that profit in the case of Sino-African relation that generated curiosity which forced the Chinese president to reaffirm the '*five NOs*' principles that govern the Beijing's relation to African States; **no** meddling in African countries' domestic affairs; **no** attachment of political strings in helping African states; **no** intrusion in African country's quest for development corridor that fit their national circumstances; **no** seeking of self-interested political gains in financing and investment cooperation with African states and finally **no** imposition of our wills on African countries (Xinhua, 2018). But we are not divorcing the fact that there is no risk of hegemony just like every other state that want to increase their political power, but the point is that, it is still too early to conclude where the relationship is taking both parties, too soon to draw inferences about the Chinese motive in Africa. They maybe in the continent to do business just like other western countries have done in the past and even in contemporary times, since a closer examination will reveal that they both have similar business



implementation approach in Sub-Sahara Africa; They both promise and or offer technical services in return for raw materials. Hence, if the modern day Chinese involvement in Africa infrastructural development is tagged *debt-trap diplomacy* then the activities of the western countries and some of their corporations such as Total, Sinopec Chevron etc should be tagged something worst than that because they receive payment without working whereas the Chinese at least put in some work before expecting payment. It is on this note that we reject the alternative hypothesis which argued that the Sino-Africa bilateral relation is debt-trap diplomacy and accept the null hypothesis that argued otherwise. And recommend fervently that the detractors should pay more attention to corrupt African leaders whose agenda contradicts the ends of national development and maybe assisting the *debt-trap* by not utilizing the aid and international finance offered to them by Beijing and other concerned countries and institutions. There is a tendency that corrupt African leaders instead of utilizing the resources derived from foreign aid to support projects that promote development will misappropriate it, in other words divert it to private needs. Since, a number of Sub-Saharan African countries, including Equatorial Guinea, South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan and Guinea-Bissau were listed in the latest TIACI (Transparency International's Annual Corruption Perceptions Index) among the ten most corrupt nations globally. The corruption index revealed that Sub-Saharan Africa is among the worst performing regions with 32 score on average where 100 is very clean and 0 is highly corrupt (TI, 2018). These distributions accentuate the worries of Africans in relation to management of public debt and the possibility of repayment without difficulty and not the possibility of debt-trap by Beijing in the China-Africa bilateral relations.

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