

THE CHINESE COMPANIES IN NIGERIA AND JOB CREATION

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Abstract

In a bid to remain the second largest economy in the world and aspiring to become the number one in future, People Republic of China (henceforth China) has full diplomatic relations with 178 out of the other 193 United Nations member states, Cook Islands, Niue and the State of Palestine; making her the nation with highest diplomatic networks. Since 1956, China has established diplomatic relations with 51 out of 54 African nations and has maintained relationships with 45 African nations till date. China is one of Nigeria's major political allies and trade partners. China-Nigeria trade volume in 2021 is valued around \$20 billion. The influx of Chinese people in Africa and Nigeria in particular has increased the number of Chinese companies in Africa and Nigeria in particular. This paper examines the Chinese companies in Nigeria and job creation. The paper adopts qualitative research methods by using the secondary data which were gotten from journals, newspapers, websites, books, etc. From the findings, the paper argues that despite the shortcomings of China-Nigeria relation and Chinese companies in Nigeria, Nigeria is gaining more than she is losing. It is recommended that Nigerians, both the leaders and the citizens, should be wiser in dealing with the Chinese. With a good policy from the government (leaders) and knowledge of Chinese language and culture from the masses (citizens), Africa (Nigeria in particular) will achieve a maximal gain from her relationship with China.

Keywords: China, Nigeria, Chinese companies, Job creation

Introduction

The international system consists of different nations which pursue their national interests within the global arena having put into consideration the benefits they stand to gain from such relationship (Ampiah & Sanusha, 2015:8 cited in Raji & Ogunrinu, 2018). It is important to note that every nation in the global system of international relation has her own interest. Many Africans, including educated and uneducated ones, fail to understand that China has interests in her relationship with Africa and other nations. African leaders should come up with general interests for their nations and not personal interests for themselves. According to Lo, 2018:

Understanding the emergence of Chinese actors in African countries, especially of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and private firms in construction and manufacturing, requires an understanding of the contextual dynamics of transformation and rapid growth that have shaped the phenomenon of China's "going out" (zou chu qu), since the early 2000s (Lo, 2018; CICC, 2016 cited in Oya & Schaefer, 2019)

"Going out" is a policy by the Chinese government in 1999 to promote Chinese investment abroad. Going out policy is China's strategy to encourage her local companies to invest abroad. Adunbi

& Stein (2019) state that there has been a growing influence of China globally in the last two decades. One of the major changes that is shaping China's growing economic and political input is its "Going out" policy which has led to negotiations and the signing of multilateral and bilateral trade agreements across the globe.

Because of the Going out policy by the Peoples' Republic of China, "in the past few years, there has been a significant increase in the number of Chinese businesses operating in Nigeria" (Adunbi & Stein, 2019). The increase in the number of Chinese businesses operating in Nigeria is as a result of the influx of Chinese people in Africa. It is estimated that over one million Chinese people live and work in Africa. Majority of them are in Nigeria due to Nigeria's population and too many business opportunities in Nigeria. According to Chen, 2020:

Historically, Nigeria has experienced several 'waves' of immigration and investment from China. The first was in the 1960s, when a wave of Chinese immigration from places like Shanghai and Ningbo came to Nigeria after the Communist revolution. A second wave in the early 2000s brought an influx of Chinese capital and migrant traders; this time, with a push from the Chinese state through the 'Going out policy'...Finally, many of the firms interviewed here belong to third wave of Chinese investors, arriving after the global financial crisis and with a stronger tendency towards direct investment.

The operation of Chinese companies in Nigeria is a means of job creation for Nigerians. Akeredolu (2019) says thus, "according to the Chinese government, Chinese companies operating in Nigeria employ 30,000 local workers...". It might be difficult to get the exact number of workers in Chinese companies in Africa particularly in Nigeria due to poor database and short duration of the workers. Most Nigerian workers in Chinese companies work for less than a year mainly on contract or as casual workers. According to French, 2014:

Given the pervasive underemployment in most African countries... foreign investors and contractors are expected to make important contributions to job creation. However, there is a perception, especially common media reporting, that Chinese firms rely on Chinese labour and make only limited use of local labour (French, 2014 cited in Oya & Schaefer, 2019)

In as much as Chinese companies create jobs in Africa, there are both local and foreign critics of Chinese companies and employments in Africa. Xiaoyang (2016) says that "the growing presence of Chinese enterprises in Africa has attracted public attention to their employment practices. Critics blame Chinese for not hiring local workers, paying low wages, having precarious conditions, and providing little training". We shall discuss the criticisms later.

Conceptual Framework

In this research, we adopt a win-win concept. Win-win is a situation where both parties win. Lose-lose is a situation where both parties lose. Win-lose is a situation where only one party wins. China-African relationship is a win-win situation although some Africans view it as a win-lose situation. Africans cannot deny gaining something from her relationship with China even though the gain might not be as much as expected. Qiwen (2015) states that:

The concept of “win-win cooperation” offers a lucid narrative for a profound and sophisticated diplomatic approach. As a theoretical font of wisdom, the concept is highly viable and relevant to our times, in that it is applicable to international cooperation in political, economic, security, cultural and many other areas, and could serve as a guiding principle for international efforts to tackle new challenges, and aspirations to build a new international order.

“Win-win cooperation” usually means that the two or more parties involved in a transaction or task can get common benefit by taking a reciprocal approach. Under the guidance of the concept of win-win cooperation, China’s relations with Africa, Arab and Latin American countries have witnessed not only further consolidation but also all-round expansion. China-Africa relations, China-Arab relations and China-Latin America relations have become models of win-win cooperation (Danzi, 2019). China is building a new international cooperation around the world with her win-win relation especially in Africa. Some African scholars and international bodies particularly from the West view this relationship as a form of colonialism. According to Adunbi & Stein (2019):

While there is a broad consensus on the growing importance of the relationship between China and Africa, there is much more debate on how to characterize the relationships. Literature on Africa-China’s relationship often fall under two broad categories: those who argue that the relationship is a ‘win-win’ for Sub-Saharan Africa and China and those who view the relationship as a new form of imperialism.

Alves (2013) discusses China’s use of infrastructure-for-resources loans in Africa as a win-win economic cooperation tool...embodying the principle of mutual benefit According to him, China has consistently combined the extension of financial assistance for infrastructure construction in Africa with the expansion of Chinese business interest and the pursuit of resource security goal. The author argues that the impact has been mixed. Although, there are some meaningful positive signs, many challenges persist, and as such the long-term developmental impact of this particular tool remains uncertain. The responsibility to ensure a positive outcome rests, however, on the African side as much as on China.

Literature Review

Umejei (2015) examines China’s engagement with Nigeria. The article answers the question: Does China’s engagement with Nigeria represent an opportunity or is it an opportunist? The paper identifies two dominant frames that underpin the framing of China’s engagement with Nigeria by

the two newspapers; opportunity and opportunist. The article argues that in its engagement with Nigeria, China is both an opportunity and an opportunist. The article concludes that while China's engagement with Nigeria would provide opportunities, it is the responsibility of the Nigerian authorities to ensure that what China offers is in tandem with its national aspiration.

Xiaoyang (2016) examines Chinese employment benefit for Africans and argues that the criteria for evaluating the benefits of employment are diverse and related to comprehensive social background. The author states that the evaluation of an employment pattern should consider not only employers' or employees' direct interests, but also a country's comprehensive social, economic and cultural development. In summary, the paper is of the opinion that when Chinese and Africans understand each other's visions and adjust their positions to converge, the cooperation can sustain and bring benefits to both sides. It is through mutual learning and the convergence of various cultural traditions that hiring practices can benefit both Chinese and Africans.

Raji & Ogunrinu (2018) analyse Chinese investment and its implications for Nigeria's economic security. The paper finds that Chinese investments in Nigeria are more pronounced in the oil, gas and road sectors. The Chinese investments in Nigeria are huge and on growing, while Nigeria's investment in China is far smaller, partly because of Nigeria's inability to compete with Chinese products in China. The paper concludes that Nigeria and China have benefitted from their diplomatic relations but the relationship is not mutually rewarding, having been tilted towards China.

Adunbi & Stein (2019) examine the political economy of China's investment in Nigeria. The authors state that there has been a growing literature very critical of Chinese-Africa relations. Some of these literature argue that the relationship have mostly benefited the Chinese because of its focus on the extractive industries while overlooking how regions undermine governance through violations of human and democratic rights. China is seen as extractive and exploitative in its relationship with Africa while at the same time contributing to deindustrialization, poverty and underdevelopment on the continent through it flooding of local markets with cheap and sometimes substandard product. Hence, China can be seen as a Leviathan, the all-powerful giant monster that devours everything in its path. Conversely, there are those who see China as a source of development for Africa. Hence, China should be seen in the spirit of the Greek God Prometheus who brought to humanity the gifts to dramatically improve their livelihoods.

Chen (2020) discusses "Africa's China": Chinese manufacturing investments in Nigeria in the post-oil boom era and channels for technology transfer. The study outlines major Chinese investments in Nigeria's manufacturing sectors, specifically looking at their potential to foster industrialization and structural transformation. The paper examines technology transfer mechanisms that may catalyse transformation processes. It reports that though positive cases exist of technology and skill transfer from Chinese firms to the local economy, poor infrastructure, lack of skills, and low social trust are barriers to the development of linkages into industrial supply chains.

There are many works on China-Africa and China-Nigeria relations but only few papers are written on the Chinese companies in Nigeria. Based on the available literature, there has not been a

research the on the Chinese companies in Nigeria and job creation. This paper attempts to bridge the gap.

China-Nigeria Relations

In 1971, China established diplomatic relations with Nigeria. In 1972, “a delegation visited Beijing and signed an open-ended agreement on trade and technical cooperation. Since 1999 when democratic elections started, every Nigerian president has visited China. In 2005, China and Nigeria published a joint communique with China announcing Taiwan as an unalienable part of the territory of China. In 2006, China and Nigeria signed an MOU on the establishment of a strategic partnership which was the first for an African country. The partnership led to an oil for infrastructure arrangement where Chinese companies were offered the first access to oil processing licenses (Adunbi & Stein, 2019).

In 2015, China endorsed Nigeria’s attempt to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council, while Nigeria supported China’s position in territorial disputes in the Pacific region. China has also provided military support in counter-insurgencies efforts in the Niger Delta (Umejei, 2012; Ramani, 2016 cited in (Adunbi & Stein (2019)).

Over the years, China has been relating to Nigeria through trade, aid and investments while Nigeria has equally been exploring trading opportunities in China. The Sino-Nigeria relation also has its basis on the premise of exploring their economic comparative advantages for mutual benefits. The Sino-Nigeria trade has also increased as China’s growing economy requires more raw material resources from Nigeria; including crude oil to propel its industries (Raji & Ogunrinu, 2018). In spite of the functional relationship between Nigeria and China, the benefits from the socio-economic interaction between the two countries have been subjected to diverse opinions by scholars and analysts, in which Chinese investments in Nigeria attracted resentment and criticisms (Ogunsanwo, 2008 cited in Raji & Ogunrinu, 2018).

Nigeria has been a major destination for Chinese FDI, not only for its energy sector, but also in its nascent manufacturing industries. Successive governments in Nigeria have tried to leverage these waves of investment to foster industrialization and structural transformation, recognizing manufacturing’s economic potential as a sector for job creation, and reducing dependency on oil commodity exports. After the 2006 FOCAC, Nigeria was also among the first countries to join the Chinese partnership to host two ‘economic cooperation and trade zones’, which became the Lekki Free Trade Zone and Ogun-Guandong Free Trade Zone (Chen, 2020).

Chinese Companies in Nigeria

Historically, there were a number of Hong Kong based companies that invested in Nigeria after independence. Some originated in mainland China but moved to Hong Kong after the Communist takeover. Two are still operating in Nigeria. The Lee Group produces shoes, bread, plastic bags, steel and ceramics. The second WEMPCO, which is controlled by the Tung family, is in ceramics, building materials, and the hospitality sector and opened the largest cold-rolled steel milling in Africa in 2015 (Chen et al (2016) cited in Adunbi & Stein, 2019).

Chinese interests in Nigeria appear to continue to focus on oil extraction and related industries (Adunbi & Stein, 2019). Chinese investments in Nigeria are more pronounced in the oil, gas and

road sectors. Others Chinese investment interests cover rail construction, power and telecommunications, with SINOPEC, CNPC and CNOON being the major Chinese investors in the Nigerian oil and gas sectors with a total amount of about US\$713.4 billion investments as of 2015 (Raji & Ogunrinu, 2018).

The major Chinese companies in Nigeria are mostly state-owned enterprises. Some of these are Sinopec (oil and gas), CNPC (oil and gas), SEPCO (electricity power construction), CCECC (construction and real estate), CSCEC (construction and real estate), CNOON (offshore oil and gas), Sinoma (Cement engineering construction), CGC (construction), Huawei (Telecoms) and Zhong Xing Telecommunication (ZTE) (Telecoms) (Egbula and Zheng, 2011:12 cited in Umejei, 2015).

A review of the data by sector shows that less than 5% of firms with Chinese ownership are engaged in mining or oil and gas extraction in Nigeria. Meanwhile more than one third are engaged in service delivery, broadly defined to include products such as consultancy, public relations, trade facilitation and a number of support services for other sectors. Industrial manufacturing accounts for just over 25% of the companies, followed by Construction and Real Estate, which together represent 8% of the total. In terms of representation of Chinese shareholdings, education, leisure and tourism, media, and consumer goods fall at the lower end of the scale. Together all four account for less than 3% of the total (Asoko Insight, 2017).

According to Nigerian Investment Promotion Council (NIPC) registration document, there are 208 registered Chinese companies doing business in Nigeria as of 2013 (Umejei, 2013:23). By 2016, the number registered with the investment agency had grown to 308 though the numbers could be considerably higher (Sun et al 2017 cited in Adunbi & Stein (2019)

The zone's (Lekki Free Zone) website claims there are 116 companies in the zone though it would appear that these are mostly still companies that have expressed an interest and registered with the zone. Total employment in the seven companies surveyed in the zones for which data is presented is 1,496 or an average of 214 people per firm. However, only two firms had above the average. In all, the companies employed 84% on the average from the local population and 16% Chinese (Adunbi & Stein, 2019).

An Asoko analysis of Nigeria Corporate Affairs Commission data indicates that 3,321 registered companies in Nigeria have at least one shareholder of Chinese nationality. Out of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) only two do not have registered firms with a Chinese shareholder: Gombe and Taraba States. Chinese shareholdings are densely concentrated in Lagos State, where 52% of the companies are registered. The FCT accounts for another 15% of the part-Chinese owned. Also notable is the concentration of these firms in Kano to North and Anambra to the South (Asoko Insight, 2017).

The presence of Chinese companies in Nigeria were noticed after the Nigerian independence in 1960. The earliest Chinese investors (companies) in Nigeria came from Hong Kong. Chinese companies in Nigeria can be categorized into different sectors: oil, gas, manufacturing, construction, telecommunication, real estate, leisure and tourism, media, education, etc. Majority of Chinese companies in Nigeria are into manufacturing sector. There are hundreds or thousands of Chinese

companies in Nigeria. It is difficult to get the exact number of Chinese companies in Nigeria due to many factors. Some Chinese companies are registered in Nigeria but operate in China.

Job Creation from Chinese Companies in Nigeria

According to (Sun, 2017) in Harvard Business Review, the official unemployment rate in Nigeria is 12.1%, but the government recognizes an additional 19.1% of the working age population as “underemployed”. For younger people, the situation is much worse: youth unemployment is at 42.2%. Thus, Africa is a natural destination for China’s manufacturing jobs. The author further says that the word on the street in Africa and the sentiment in the African newspapers is that Chinese companies don’t hire Africans. But every rigorous study as shows precisely the opposite: Chinese factories in Africa overwhelmingly employ locals. A recent meta-analysis of the various statistics that have been collected shows no sample in which the proportion of local workers dips below 78% and in some companies with thousands of employees, the figure exceeds 99%. In Nigeria, my own (admittedly small-scale) field research shows that 85% of workers hired by Chinese manufacturers are locals.

In 2015, total employment created was listed as 551 for the 21 companies surveyed (UNDP, 2015 cited (Adunbi & Stein (2019)) and by July 2018, the workforce had risen to above 1000. Roughly 86 were non-Nigerian (LFTZ, 2018 cited in Adunbi & Stein, 2019). In a bid to improve employment generation in Edo State, a ceramics factory operated by a Chinese firm, Time Ceramic Limited has employed 500 direct staff. This is in addition to unspecified number of indirect jobs created by the firm located in Utesi community in Benin City (Ibileke, 2016).

The quantum of investment in the Nigerian economy by Chinese companies has hit \$20bn, the president, China Chambers of Commerce in Nigeria, Mr. Ye Shuijin, has disclosed. He explained that the 160 Chinese firms operating in the country had also employed over 200,000 Nigerians, noting that the companies were promoting what he called ‘people to people’ cultural diplomacy of the Belt and Road Initiative of the People’s Republic of China in Nigeria (Ojoye, 2019). Yongxing Steel Company, a Chinese manufacturing firm, has employed over 700 workers and 10,000 indirect jobs. According to (Emenyonu, 2021), Yongxing Steel Company which has begun operation in 2013 is located in Ogua, a community in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area of Edo State, Benin City.

It is difficult to say how many jobs Chinese companies in Nigeria have created for Nigerians but from the available literature, Chinese companies in Nigeria have created about one hundred thousand (100,000) jobs. The number is not stable due to many factors like the shortness of the employment duration. Many Nigerian workers in Chinese companies work for less than one year. Some of these workers are students who work only on holidays.

Criticisms on Chinese Companies and Job Creation

Xiaoyang (2016) states that public opinions and media have paid special attention to the employment practices of Chinese companies in Africa. Much of this publicity is negative. Some observers express concerns – that Chinese companies prefer to bring a large number of Chinese workers to Africa and are unwilling to hire local workers. According to The Economist (2018), “Chinese have also been sending an increasing number of workers to Africa. In 2015, there were an estimated 264,000 up from 181,000 in 2011”.

The Nigeria Labour Congress (2016, 5) criticizes Chinese firms in Nigeria for being “closed” as they hardly employ highly skilled local experts. As posits the Union, the conditions of employment of Nigerians in Chinese firms neither conform with the Nigerian Labour Laws nor to that of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The Union equally contends that technology transfer from Chinese FDI to Nigeria is insignificant because most of the Chinese firms bring into the country finished products and complete the equipment with Chinese technicians (Raji & Ogunrinu, 2018).

Many authors, scholars and media both international and local have criticized Africa-China relation as well as Chinese investments (companies) in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Some of these criticisms are dumping/manufacturing of inferior goods, unhealthy competition for local industries, lack of skill and knowledge (technology) transfer, nonconformity with labour law, low wage, poor working condition, lack of health and safety measure, lack of training, long working hours, fear of colonialism, and others.

Challenges Faced by Chinese Companies in Nigeria

Despite the numerous criticisms by Africans and foreigners on Chinese investments (companies) in Africa and Nigeria in particular, Chinese companies face many challenges in Africa, like Nigeria. According to (Chen, 2020), political and exchange rate instability are consistently cited challenges, particularly in the wake of the recent economic recession...and security issues were also frequently cited challenges.

The win-win relationship between China and Africa is not without lose. Every side, both China and Africa, has something to lose in order to gain (win). Chinese companies in Africa like Nigeria are faced with many challenges ranging from insecurity, corruption, political instability, poor infrastructure, poor power supply, exchange rate fluctuation, racism, kidnapping, language barrier and others.

Conclusion

China-Africa cooperation has recorded important achievements. China-Africa relationship presents both opportunities and challenges for both China and Africa. China-Africa relation remains a win-win relationship despite the shortcomings. Chinese companies in Nigeria have not only created jobs for thousands of Nigerians but have also contributed to the economic development of Nigeria. Chinese companies have been blamed for not meeting up with Nigerian and international expectation and standard. The same Chinese companies face many challenges in Nigeria. As Chinese companies in Nigeria are advised to improve their goods, service, workers' conditions and welfare, Nigerian government is advised to reduce the challenges Chinese companies face in Nigeria. With a good policy from the government (leaders) and knowledge of Chinese language and culture from the masses (citizens), Africa (Nigeria in particular) will achieve a maximal gain from her relationship with China.

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