

CHINA-NIGERIA CULTURAL RELATIONS: CREATING POSSIBILITIES FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Adaobi Sandra Onwuekwe¹ & Halida Agaba² PhD

ABSTRACT

The paper examined the cultural tie between the People's Republic of China and the Federal Republic of Nigeria, with emphasis on the feasibility of hitching the strengths in the relations for national development. China-Nigeria relations date back to the early 60's following Nigeria's independence. The paper relied on secondary data, which were sourced from textbooks, journal papers, and seminar papers, among others, that are related to the subject matter and adopted complex interdependence theory as a framework of analysis. Findings from this work show that Nigeria's strategic partnership with China in all aspects, including the cultural domain, needs to be scaled up, as it remains key to the country's development. This is comprised of tinkering with the country's foreign policy by President Tinubu's administration to drive and boost investors' confidence, providing levellers for the ease of doing business in Nigeria. Nigeria and China, having celebrated 50 years of diplomatic relations in 2021, must now take their destinies into their own hands. Nigeria stands to gain from this relation tremendously, with this mutually beneficial relationship further enhanced and upgraded to a comprehensive strategic partnership. Nigeria is China's second-largest trading partner in Africa; it is the largest economy in Africa and the most populous country on the African continent.

Keywords: China, Nigeria, Culture, Relations, National Development

Introduction

There have always been cultural exchanges and influences between various peoples and nations, dating back thousands of years. With the internet and other telecommunications tools, information is instantly distributed around the world, accelerating the development of all fields of human knowledge and the explosion of technology. Cultural diplomacy is one of the most effective strategies for swaying the beliefs of people throughout the world. Distance and space have virtually vanished in today's globalised world, as states and regions integrate more deeply. Since various cultures coexist and interact, the state's role in promoting its culture outside of its borders and in leveraging its cultural assets to further other international policy objectives has become a standard instrument in international relations.

¹ Adaobi Sandra Onwuekwe is with the Department of Political Science International Relations University of Abuja

² Halida Agaba, PhD is with the Department of Political Science International Relations University of Abuja

Every state has its official cultural diplomacy policy and institutions that promote such policy because states have actively promoted and engaged in cultural diplomacy for many years, both within the framework of old and new diplomacy. Nigeria, like many other sovereign states, had its first interaction with China in 1960 when a Chinese delegation came to Nigeria to celebrate Independence Day at Nigeria's invitation (Agubamah, 2014, as cited in Odeh, 2019). However, the official establishment of diplomatic relations between the two states started in 1971 when embassies were opened in each other's capital cities. Thus, in addition to other types of bilateral ties, cultural ties got off to a great start, with both nations working hard to make this relationship stronger.

Nigeria hosted the Anhui Acrobatic troops from China in the first quarter of 1980 which China reciprocated by hosting the Nigerian women's basketball team who were in China for a two-week play tour (Chibudu, 2000). Cultural exchange between the two countries further receives a boost following a series of exhibitions on the economic and cultural life and the performance of acrobatic troops from China at the National Theatre in 1983 and 1985, respectively. There were also high level visits by both countries' ministers of culture in 1983 and 1984 that were most significant in facilitating the signing of two enabling working programs. The Chinese delegation led by Vice-minister of culture signed the cultural program from 1983-1984. In November 1984, the Nigerian minister of culture visited China to sign the 1985-1986 cultural program which implementation has helped to strengthen the relationship between the two countries (Dauda et al., 2018). Both countries share similarities with regard to their strategic positioning in their respective continents, their political and economic influence as well as population strength. This fosters a mutually beneficial and harmonious atmosphere full of opportunities for sharing, understanding and exchanging of cultural commonalities and diversities among the two countries. There are a number of factors that have enhanced mutual benefits between Nigeria and China. Both countries share October 1 as their national day; for Nigeria, the year is 1960, while China is 1948, and both countries are ethnically diverse (Xiaoliang, 2018). Apart from being the most populated countries on their respective continents, China and Nigeria have populations that are very industrious and business-oriented with strong family ties and culturally oriented. Also, both are agrarian societies.

Methodology

The study made use of secondary data. As a result, information pertaining to the topic was gathered from periodicals, textbooks, monographs, journal articles, seminar papers, and symposiums. The content analysis method was used to analyse the collected data.

Theoretical Overview: Assumption and Application

In the late 1970s, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye introduced the concept of complex interdependence in international relations as a neoliberal critique of the realist worldview. The previous idea and underlying presumptions of classical and structural realism are called into question by the theoretical perspective of complex interdependence. Realists believe that military

and economic concerns rule and shape state behaviour. The significance of transnational actors on state behaviour and major international relations issues is further highlighted by complex interdependence.

According to the definition of interdependence in international relations and world politics, it is the state in which all actors, including states and non-state actors, are reliant on one another. Dependence refers to the state of being greatly influenced or determined by outside factors. Therefore, the simplest definition of interdependence is mutual dependence (Keohane and Nye cited in Waheeda 2014). In light of this, circumstances in which nations or actors in various nations experience reciprocal effects are referred to as interdependence in world politics (Waheeda, 2014, as cited in Agaba, 2024). It is therefore argued that under this mutual dependence, the relationship between the actors involved, including states as well as other transnational actors, is characterised by both cooperation and competition. Interdependence does not only mean peace and cooperation among actors, but a relationship between actors characterised by cooperation, dependence, and interaction in several different areas, and conflict as well. Complex interdependence defined international institutions as it means of accomplishment. It offers that international regimes and institutions induce cooperation, and this enables states to transcend the anarchical forces in the international system. This theory is apt in explaining the work in that the preceding postulations raised by Waheeda (2015) on the complex and interdependent nature of world politics find expression in FOCAC and the relationship between the actors involved- in this context, China and African nations. Nigeria is part of is characterised by cooperation where you have multiple channels of communication and issues with no hierarchy. More so, military security does not consistently dominate the agenda. Among the features of complex interdependence theory are that; the actors are states and non-state actors with multiple channels of communication: interstate, trans governmental, and transnational. The agenda of interstate relationships consists of multiple issues that are not arranged in a clear or consistent hierarchy. In other words, there are multiple issues with no hierarchy; military security does not consistently dominate the agenda. Military force plays a relatively minor role in international relations mainly because it is not used by governments toward other governments within the region or issues when complex interdependence prevails.

Theory Assumptions and Application

Unlike traditional theories that primarily focus on state-to-state interactions, complex interdependence assumes that there are multiple channels of interaction. These channels include interactions involving international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and multinational corporations, in addition to state-to-state interactions. Another premise of complex interdependence is that there isn't a distinct hierarchy of issues in international relations. Other concerns, such as economic and environmental ones, are just as important as security, contrary to realist theory. According to the theory, these problems are intricately related to one another. Additionally, the likelihood of using force to further political goals declines as states become increasingly interdependent through a variety of channels. This is due to the fact that conflicts have greater costs when states are intertwined politically and economically (Hudeyin, 2014).

In theoretical and practical terms, complex interdependence provides an explanatory model of long-term relations between China and Nigeria. There has been a relationship between unequal throughout Nigeria's postcolonial history to the present security and economic concerns (Stelowski, 2015). The two states have maintained a complex web of interactions and interconnectedness. The primary focus of China-Nigeria relations in the twenty-first century is economic cooperation, which will hopefully result in agreements and conversations at the institutional level to reduce trade deficits and infrastructural gaps jointly. It is a result of the historically unbalanced socioeconomic and cultural ties between China and Nigeria. International organisations like the one between China and Nigeria are seen by complex interdependence theory as a means to an end. A cooperative way to remove anarchical forces from the international system is through international platforms like the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), whose structures, norms, and values influence how African member states behave and interact with China. Multiple levels of communication represent the characteristics of FOCAC. Subunits and various levels of interaction between and among actors are created when multiple actors emerge in international relations. This clarifies the impact of additional players on Nigeria's economic scene, including Chinese multinational corporations. These are extraterritorial actors operating in several Nigerian states with well-coordinated operations.

Cultural and Educational Perspective of China-Nigeria Relations

The fields of Culture and Education are some of the areas that have featured prominently in the friendship between China and Nigeria. As of 2019, Nigeria had the highest number of African students studying in China; there were about 6,800 Nigerian students in various fields, many of whom received scholarships from the Chinese Government (Vanguard Newspaper, 4 November 2020). Culturally, China has been remarkably successful in promoting Chinese culture in Nigeria, and Nigeria has benefited in a similar way, despite the fact that China and Nigeria have very different historical experiences and cultural traditions. The main drivers of the growing cultural fusion between the two nations have been student exchanges and the expansion of Chinese media in Nigeria (Mbakogu, 2015). A number of Nigerian universities, including the University of Lagos and the Nnamdi Azikiwe University of Awka, have set up Confucius Institutes to teach Chinese to their student body. Value has been added to the bilateral ties between China and Nigeria by the Confucius Institute. Being a non-profit, it has improved the way Chinese language and culture are taught. The Beijing Institute of Technology and a few Nigerian universities collaborated to find it.

According to Ramani (2016), the institute has received praise for being a successful project, in part because of the recent rapid growth of business ties between China and Nigeria. When Nigeria's first Chinese Cultural Research Center was announced to be established on June 29, 2016, the Chinese Embassy in Abuja acknowledged its success. Additionally, the embassy promised to establish a Nigerian language institute in China with the goal of luring Chinese university graduates to Nigeria to work for Chinese-owned businesses (Ibrahim & Aliyu, 2014).

In the area of tourism promotion in China and Nigeria, entrepreneurs have established their respective national food and beverage service outlets in their host countries. There is the presence of several Chinese restaurants across Nigeria's business landscape, including in Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt, which enjoys a high level of patronage from both Nigerians and Chinese expatriates (Ogbu, 2018). Nigerian restaurants have also been established in the Chinese cities of Beijing and Guangzhou, among others. Cuisine, no doubt, has a significant role to play in promoting culture and fostering harmony in cultural diversity (Rivera, 2016).

Challenges to China-Nigeria Cultural Relation

There are challenges to China-Nigeria cultural relations emanating from both the domestic and the external environments, especially giving cognisance to the internal dynamics of Nigeria's governance space, including corruption and official bureaucracy and the contemporary global politics as well as current trends in the international system (Banarou, 2014). One problem has been a trade balance that favours China. Any trade agreement between countries typically entails expectations of gains of various kinds from both parties. From Nigeria's point of view, it is anticipated that its commercial ties with China will align with one of the main objectives of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which is to attain and maintain an average annual GDP growth rate of at least 7% (Chidozie, Alo, et al., 2024). By 2015, it is anticipated that this will have cut the percentage of Africans living in poverty in half (Musila and Sigue, 2006, cited in Chidozie, Alo, et al. 2024)). The important thing to remember is that China was benefiting more from trade with Nigeria than Nigeria was, and Nigeria could have severed its commercial ties with China at any time without suffering any negative consequences (Ogunsawo, 1974; Chibundu, 2000).

Nigeria and China's trade and investment volume grew steadily until 1993 when China's rapid economic expansion transformed it from a net exporter of crude oil to the world's second-largest importer. China's insatiable appetite for energy to fuel its expanding economy has resulted in a rise in trade and investment between Nigeria and China in recent years. China, which was once the biggest oil exporter in Asia, became a net oil importer starting in 1993. China's energy needs are predicted to be met to the tune of 45% by imports of oil by 2045. Thus, the nation requires supplies from Middle Eastern or African suppliers at comparatively low cost (Onuoha, 2008).

However, the lack of vision, political squabbling, and, most importantly, the leaders' deep involvement in egregious corruption have Nigeria ill prepared to take advantage of this trade opening. One of the biggest problems facing Nigeria's public administration is corruption. To state the obvious, corruption has permeated every aspect of Nigerian society. The findings of numerous investigation panels, which were established at various points in the nation's history by various regimes, confirm this (Pethyyagoda, 2014). Corruption, narrow, sectional and sometimes personal interests at times curtail Nigerian officials' disposition towards negotiating trade deals and signing agreements with the national interest at the heart of such treaties.

This relationship has always been threatened by the potential for the Nigerian government to get into debt due to China's substantial loans to the nation. Second, since State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and Private-Owned Enterprises (POEs) are the two categories of Chinese enterprises covered by China's going-out policy, SOEs typically invest in resources, whereas POEs prefer to invest in market and strategic assets (Stelowski, 2014). However, Chinese SOEs typically have opaque management and receive lower bids than costs. In this case, the Nigerian government's internal corruption may get worse due to the opaqueness of Chinese SOEs. For instance, the safety of the petroleum sector. This governance issue has been problematic in the Niger Delta, where residents have received very little compensation despite the region's high oil production (UNESCO, 2014). Activities of militias affiliated with the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), including attacking oil infrastructure and ensnaring foreign oil workers as a means of voicing their dissatisfaction, as well as oil theft, resulted in a worsening of the oil cooperation relationship between China and Nigeria.

Conclusion

Nigeria's strategic partnership with China in all aspects, including in the cultural domain, needs to be scaled up, as it remains key to the country's development. This comprises tinkering with the country's foreign policy by President Tinubu's administration to drive and boost investors' confidence, providing levellers for the ease of doing business in Nigeria.

Nigeria and China, having celebrated 53 years of diplomatic relations in 2024, signals both states strong commitment to their relations. Within this time period, a lot has been achieved, especially on comprehensive platforms such as FOCAC, which has galvanised socio-economic and cultural ties between both countries as well as with other African states. Nigeria is China's second-largest trading partner in Africa; it is the largest economy in Africa and the most populous country on the African continent. This burgeoning relationship between Nigeria and China allows both countries a stand to gain mutually from the friendship.

Recommendation

The nature of China-Nigeria cultural relations has apparently been a mutually beneficial one, and both countries must work hard at sustaining the momentum. Nigeria stands to gain from this relation tremendously when this mutually beneficial relationship is further enhanced and upgraded to a comprehensive strategic partnership. The contribution of China-Nigeria in relation to growth and national development for both countries has been clearly demonstrated. This has been evident in Nigeria in terms of infrastructure development, educational opportunities and Chinese investment in the mining and solid mineral sector.

China has also benefitted in terms of its privileged access to Nigeria's petrochemical industry, manufacturing and promotion of Chinese culture and language across Nigeria. The challenges to the relationship from Nigeria's internal and external environments are multifarious. There is a high level of illiteracy in Nigeria hence, lack of capacity is a huge challenge. Notwithstanding, China

and Nigeria should enhance mutual trust, advance practical cooperation and elevate their bilateral relation to a new height under the right political atmosphere.

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