

Imperialism and Economic Dependency in the Nigerian Textile Industry: A Synoptic Study of Liberalisation Policy and Nigeria-China Trade Relations.

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[0211] Abstract

This paper x-rays the impact of trade liberalization between China and Nigeria in the textile trade industry with the Kantin-kwari Market, Kano, as a case study. It could be recalled that the military regime of Sani Abacha having made Nigeria an international pariah nation as a result of its human right abuse records, got China as the only major country to associate with. This consequentially brought about Nigeria's dependency on China, which has continued unabated till today and has affected a good number of Nigeria's socio-economic and political structures. This paper therefore interrogates the economic attractions in Nigeria-China trade relations and how that relation has particularly affected the sustainability of the textile industry in Nigeria. The study employed the instrumentality of qualitative research as data were generated from existing knowledge and analyzed contently. Dependency theory provided the necessary explicatory framework and helped in establishing intellectual linkages between variables. It was discovered that the easy access to loans and other infrastructural aids from China was the major attraction to China. It was also discovered that the closure of textile shops and its concomitant unemployment in the industry have increased due to the fact that the Chinese were having retail shops in the market while the original owners of the trade were currently playing the role of middlemen for the Chinese. The paper therefore recommended that the government should assist indigenous textile producers and dealers financially and logistically. It should also be protective by putting up some protective measures, as seen in Kenya, in the implementation of liberalization policy. Again, adequate infrastructure such as electricity, conducive environment, etc. should be put in place so as to ameliorate and reduce the cost expended by indigenous manufacturers in Nigeria during production.

Keywords: Bilateral Trade, Dependency, Imperialism, Liberalization, Protectionism Textile Industry

Introduction

At independence, the newly independent Nigeria adopted a pro-Western stance and did not seek covert relationship with the East. In 1963, when the then Chinese premier Zhou En Lais visited ten African countries in Africa, he did not visit Nigeria. In fact, the first Nigerian Head of State to visit China, General Gowon, did that in 1974. The visit had no positive economic impact because the regime was ousted from power ten months after the visit. Since then, nothing concretes enough existed between Nigeria and China relations until the emergence of General Sani Abacha as the leader of the Nigerian nation in 1993. Abacha due to his human rights records with the West, became the First Nigerian Head of State to establish serious contacts with China by establishing the Nigeria-Chinese Chamber of Commerce in 1994.

With the return of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo to power as a civilian president, he began to deepen the relationship. During this period, Nigeria and China signed an agreement on the establishment of a Nigeria Trade office in China and a Chinese Investment Development and Trade Promotion Centre in Nigeria. During his tenure it became clear that Nigeria and China had formally began bilateral relationship as he secured several oil blocs for China. Chinese MNCs got a lot of contracts in Transportation, Communication and Power, and Chinese manufactured goods increased rapidly in Nigeria. The key element of Obasanjo's policy towards China could be best described as 'Oil for

Infrastructure,’ (Salter, 2009). By the time Yar’adua came into power, the Obasanjo’s “Oil for Infrastructure” disappeared and was replaced with ‘Oil for Cash’.

The explanation for Nigeria’s shift from pro-Western aid to Chinese bilateral relations is because of the difficult conditionalities attached to Western aid. Almona (2004) believed that Nigeria’s bilateral trade with China improved in the recent times despite the trade imbalance, because Nigeria’s borrowing from China increased significantly by 89 to 94 percent making it the nation’s largest bilateral lender. According to Nigeria’s Debt Management office, about 3.12 billion dollars of loans are projected, such are Nigeria Railway Corporation modernization, four Nigerian Airports terminal expansion and Abuja Light Rail Project (NDMO, 2022). As all these were going on, the Nigerian textile industry and trade which were hitherto, a booming business, got affected negatively. Industries went down the drain, just as the textile shops as Chinese products and merchants took over the industry in Nigeria. This didn’t come without daring consequences. It is therefore, the danger inherent in this existential reality that inspired this work taken Kantin-kwari Market in Kano State as a case-study.

Theoretical Framework

In order to affect a critical analysis of the subject, the study adopted Dependency Theory as variously articulated by Emmanuel (1972), Cardoso (1979), Amin (1970) and Santos (1970) who argued that imperialism, colonialism, and neo colonialism structured the world into center and the periphery, and led to unequal exchange between the two. Again, Cardoso and Falletto according to Cohn (2009), contends that the elite in the south act as intermediaries between the capitalist international order and subjected the local people. The four major formulation on dependency paradigm as prescribe by Chilcote (in Okereke and Ekpe, 2002) are: (a) The development of underdevelopment (b) The new dependency (c) Dependency and development (d) Dependency and imperialism.

As a matter of fact, the relevance of dependency theory to this paper hinges on the fourth element which is dependency and imperialism. Dependency as it relates to imperialism, argues that the economic and structures of developing nations are shaped by their historical and integration into a global capitalist system dominated by wealthier nations. This integration, often a legacy of imperialism. Leads to a situation where developing countries are dependent on developed nations for capital, technology and hindering their own autonomous development. The core exploits the periphery, extracting resources and labour, while maintaining a system of unequal exchange that benefits the core. According to Gallagher and Robinson (1953), new imperialism could be best characterized as a continuation of a longer-term policy begun in 1850s in which informal empire based on the principles of free trade was favoured over formal imperial control. In “Imperialism, Free Trade” CENGAGE (N.D) added that trade was the overriding factor in imperialism. Powerful states naturally sought outlets for their investments and products. Through imperialism, capitalist powers were able to establish new markets and gain access to cheap labour and raw. Although China was not part of the European imperialistic scramble for market in the 18th century, but in the twenty first century, Chinese business activities in Nigeria and its pattern of lending loans that are mostly tied to projects or scramble for markets are now a source of concern. In the time of Olusegun Obasanjo as President of Nigeria, it was “oil for infrastructure”. During the time of Yaradua it shifted to “oil for cash”. This pattern of dependency has not changed, because it has given the Chinese the opportunity to dominate trade in textile market in Nigeria. Again, the bilateral trade agreement signed with Nigeria has created unemployment and also collapsed the textile companies in Nigeria. Under this analysis, Nigeria represents the periphery due to its lack of competitive advantage while China is the center. China is the center or the core, due to its high-based production. Through technological prowess, textiles are manufactured with speed, quality and at a reduced cost. This advantage makes liberalization and globalization a kind of marginalization and domination to the backward country like Nigeria (Kachiga,2010).

Nigeria’s Trade Liberalization Policy: A Foundation For Chinese Imperialistic Quest in Nigerian Market Although China maintained an independent civilization different from Europe’s banditry

imperialistic quest under neoliberal globalization, China has launched a foreign policy centred around what is called the *Forum On China Africa Cooperation* (FOCAC) established in October 2000. The aim, in the opinion of this work, is to maintain a predatory market exploitation through trade liberalization. Modern political and economic relations with Africa commenced in the era of Mao Zedong. In studying Chinese imperialism some scholars have employed the expression 'new scramble for Africa' to express the level of ravenous imperialistic activity being perpetrated in Africa under the guise of trade liberalization.

Trade liberalization is the removal or reduction of restriction or barriers on the exchange of goods between nations. These barriers include tariffs, such as duties and surcharges and non-tariff barriers such as licensing rules and quotas. The terms of an exchange are defined by the price at which goods are traded. When there are multiple buyers and sellers of a good, prices are determined by market competition (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2012). In Nigeria, the term became pronounced through the adoption of the IMF Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986 which primary aim was to restructure and diversify the productive base of the economy and to establish a realistic and sustainable exchange rate for the Naira through trade and payment liberalization, tariff reform commercialization and privatization of public enterprises (Oyejide, 1990 in Anowor et al, 2013).

According to the National Bureau of Statistics' data on foreign trade, China is responsible for the bulk of imports into Nigeria, ranking number one on the list of top ten countries in the first quarter under review (2018 to 2022). However, export to China is negligible, as Nigeria was missing from the nation's top ten export destination in Q1 2018- Q1 2020, an Q1 2022 (Ejere, 2022). Bilateral trade deficit against Nigeria is widening in favour of China, with available data showing a steady increase in Nigeria importation from the Asian country, rising by 183,91 percent from ₦530.98bn in the first quarter of 2018 to ₦1.51tn in Q1 2022 (Ejere, 2022). Importers opt for import from countries that offer the best deals, this explains why there is a high level of import from China which has a strong competitive edge in manufactured products (Muda, 2022). For example, according to the NBS (as quoted by Tunji, 2025), Nigeria's import from China surged to ₦14.15tn in 2024, more than doubling the ₦6.6tn recorded in 2023. This represents a year-on-year increase of ₦7.55tn or 114.3 percent. Total bilateral trade between Nigeria and China stood at ₦17.14 trillion in 2024, up from ₦7.49tn in 2023 marking a 128.8 percent increase in trade volume. However, with imports making up over 82.5% of this total, Nigeria maintained a significant trade deficit with the Asian giant. As observed by Maidawa and Elisha (2013), the changes in international trade agreement and liberalization of Nigeria-Chinese trade after 2010 have undermined present efforts at revitalizing local textile manufacturing in Nigeria.

The opposite of trade liberalization is protectionism. Protectionism encompasses a variety of trade policies arising from various motivations, it is contrary to liberalization in that it seeks to distort free markets to gain an advantage for the state or for sub-state actors within it, generally by discouraging imports of competing goods or services. Protection may also be motivated by a defensive effort to ward off predatory practices by foreign companies or states. According to Cohn (2009), the United States was the main force behind trade liberalization efforts after World War 11, but domestic protectionist pressures in agriculture and textiles caused the U.S Congress to oppose liberalization in these areas (agriculture and textiles). Unlike the United States, Nigeria overtly and magnanimously embraced her trade liberalization agreement with China in the area of textile since 2010 without protectionist measures. Ogujiuba, Oji and Adenuga (2014), states that trade liberalization has a number of benefits that have endeared it to the current global realities. They include: (a) Low price: Lower prices for consumers can arise due to the removal of tariff barriers. In the western world for instance, it would help the global price for agricultural commodities. This implies more benefits for countries who are importers of food. (b) Trade liberalization could enable some countries to concentrate on products they have a comparative advantage to produce. (c) Increased competition: Trade liberalization can open up channels for competition with firms abroad. This will reduce cost and also make countries to relocate to places where they can maintain a competitive advantage. For example, this is what made UK to focus less on manufacturing and more on service sector. (d) Trade liberalization encourages specific specialization because countries can concentrate on producing particular goods.

In the same vein, Romer (2013) argues that trade liberalization can also have the following encouraging impacts: (a) Trade liberalization often leads to a shift in the balance of an industries growth. Some decline. Therefore, this may often be structural unemployment from certain industries winding up. Trade liberalization can often be painful in the short run as some industries and workers suffer from the decline in uncompetitive firms (b) Trade liberalization could lead to greater exploitation of the environment.eg Greater production of raw materials and trading toxic waste to countries with lower environmental laws. (b) Trade liberalization may be damaging for developing economies that cannot compete against free trade. Most economies had a period of trade protectionism. It is unfair to insist that developing economies cannot use some form of tariff protectionism. (c) Given these assumptions, some argue that trade liberalization often benefits developed countries more than developing countries. From the benefit of the above, it is obvious that while liberalization has some disadvantages, it also has some advantages which smart and big nations leverage on in their relations with other nations in the international system.

Trade Liberalization: A Paradox or Politics?

Khor (2000) had observed that the benefits and costs of trade liberalization for developing countries constitute an increasingly controversial issue. Furthermore, there is a paradox in the approach developing countries in general and many scholars take towards this issue. On one hand, it is almost invariably repeated that we are committed to trade liberalization, which is positive for and essential to growth and development. On the other hand, many developing countries also notice and are now actively complaining that trade liberalization has produced negative results for their economies or has marginalized them. The notion that all are gainers and there are no losers in trade in trade liberalization has proven to be overly simplistic. Khor (2000), further argued that a clear explanation of why trade liberalization has had negative results is found in TDR 99 (Trade and Development Report under UNDP 1999). The Report found that for developing countries excluding China, the average trade deficit in the 1990s was higher than in the 1970s by 3 percent points of GDP while the average growth rate was lower by 2 percent points.

On the role of rapid trade liberalization in generating the wider trade deficit, the UNCTAD Report said: "trade liberalization led to sharp increase in their import propensity, but export failed to keep pace, particularly where liberalization was a response to the failure to establish competitive industries behind high barriers. With the notable exception of China, liberalization has resulted in a general widening of gap between the annual growth of imports and exports in the 1990s. The UNCTAD Report findings in Khors (2000), corresponds with some recent studies that shows there is no automatic correlation between trade liberalization and growth. Countries that rapidly liberalize their imports did not necessarily grow faster than those that liberalize more gradually. Out of 41 least developed countries studied by UNCTAD senior researcher, Mehdi Shafaedidin, concluded that trade liberalization has been accompanied by deindustrialization in many less developed counties and where export expanded, it was not accompanied by the expansion of supply capacity. Rodrik (1999) in Khor (2000) argues that developing nations must participate in the world economy on their terms, not the terms dictated by global markets and multilateral institutions. Rodrik (1999) further posits that that there is no convincing evidence that openness, in sense of low barriers to trade and capital flows systematically would increase growth and reduce poverty in developing countries.

A major problem faced by developing countries like Nigeria in trade liberalization is that a country may be able to control how fast to liberalize its imports but cannot determine by itself how fast its exports grow. A number of factors in the global trade context according to Kachiga (2005), have contributed to the marginalization of weak economies. The endogenous is bad governance in concerned states. The exogenous one is poor export revenue. In line with those factors is that global market synergy accommodates better the state and economic actors with competitive capacity. Less successful states with already minimal trade impact will grow insignificant in the global market. In his view, Stiglitz (2002) argues that Western countries pushed trade liberalization for the products that they exported but at the same time protects those sectors in which competition from developing countries

might have threatened their economies. This was the bases for opposition to the 1999 Round of Trade Negotiation that supposed to hold in Seattle. Again, one of the World Bank calculations according to Stiglitz (2002) showed that Sub-Sahara Africa, the poorest region in the world, saw its income decline by more than 2 percent as a result of trade agreement. Sun (2017) in her interaction with the General Manager of Skyrun, Mr Wu (a Chinese home appliances brand with assembly operations in Nigeria), observed that sooner or later, many of Chinese factories would relocate away from China to Nigeria, the trend of global manufacturing sites is to shift. Sun (2017) is hopeful that if Africa becomes China's successor as the factory of the world, it could completely eliminate unemployment. The flood of jobs coming out of China matches Africa's current demographic moment. For Africa, many more factories and hence jobs- will most likely come out of Chinese investment over the next decade.

Factors responsible for this factory shifts are correlated with the factors that brought imperialism in Africa. This is not strange because, Sun (2017) has identified demographic factors, rising energy cost and increasing competition as the reasons for relocating Chinese factories to Africa. Again, a generation under one-child policy has shrunk China's labour pool. Labour cost in China have risen sharply in the recent years since 2001; manufacturing hourly wages have increased by 12 percent each year. The cost of electricity grew by 66 percent and the cost of natural gas more than doubled during the period. This necessitated her aggressive inroads into Africa especially Nigeria where she believes that with conducive and favorable environment, she can gain much without qualms.

The Golden Era of Nigeria Textile Industry before Chinese Invasion

Kano Citizens Trading Company was established in 1952 as the first modern textile mills. The company emerged through the 1946 Textile Development Scheme. According to Paden (1986), the Northern Regional Government decided to establish the textile industries in kano in 1952 and in Kaduna in 1957 to take advantage of the available raw materials such as cotton and labour in the region. The last decade of colonial rule saw the establishment of more textile industries in the country. The establishment of these industries was part of the federal policy of promoting import substitution industrialization from 1960 to 1970s. By the 1980s, the textile industries had become the largest employer of labour. The industry had about 100,000 unionized workers in addition to thousands of cotton farmers as well as suppliers and traders. Aremu, (2005). Direct employment increased to 250,000 among over 175 large, medium and small textile factories. Other indicators showing the growth pattern of industry include the appreciable rise in investment to over thirty billion Naira with a turnover of about twenty billion Naira annually. Capacity utilization was at 70-80%. In addition, new companies developed while existing ones enlarged their outlets, contributing to about 25% of the manufacturing value. Frishman (2001), affirmed that about 35% of Nigerians produced fabrics exported to West African countries. The textile sector became a lead sector to Nigeria's economy.

Nevertheless, from this state of glory, the textile industry began to depreciate and decline steadily. The major factor responsible of this decline was the import of cheap textiles from China (Muhammad, 2017). To compound the matter, Nigeria discovered and started harnessing the super wealth of the crude oil around 1958 and experienced the so-called oil boom in the 70s. The oil boom significantly led to the total abandonment of not only the textile industries but also other sectors of manufacturing.

In Nigeria and in Kantin-kwari market kano, to be specific, the economic impact of globalization is seen in the expanding predominance of Chinese manufactured textiles in the local market. The dramatic growth in the relationship between Africa and China is part of the profound, transformation taking place in the global political economy in the twenty-first century (Muhammad et al, 2017). For the Prosino-African relations, it is spawned by the historical affinities of struggles against Western imperialism and humanistic aspirations for development (Ong, 1997). In the light of the above, Aremu, (2005) opined that Nigeria has become the largest economy in Africa with huge accumulation of Gross Domestic Product. This growth is only expressed in GDP, causing growing concern about the trade imbalance. Chinese low-cost goods are pushing local manufacturer out of the market and creating the problem of unemployment. Askouri (2007) is doubtful about the merits of Chinese trade activities in Africa, claiming that it has led to the displacement and dislocation of traditional economies. The easy

accessibility of Nigerian kintin-kwari kano encouraged by neo liberal policy measures and supported by the Washington Consensus gave China the edge.

The Dimensions of the Problems and Collapse in Nigeria Textile Industry

Nigeria had gone through many forms of economic conundrum due to its religious followership of all forms of neo liberal economic reforms. In 1986, it was the Structural Adjustment Program. While trying to recover from high unemployment rate, social dislocation and escalating cost of commodities occasioned by SAP, the trade liberalization policy came with its consequences on the local industries

One of the adversely affected industry in Nigeria is the textile industry. In compliance with the trade liberalization and World Trade Organization (WTO) agreement, Nigeria lifted the ban on textile importation on January 1st 1997. In 1995, the World Trade Organization implemented some policy measures on textile products one of which is the removal of textile and clothing allocation among member countries. China was a major beneficiary of the measures (Mukhtar and Lola 2017). Due to cheap exports from China, Nigeria textile industry started dying a natural death. Nigeria was one of the major suppliers of quality textile in Africa popularly known as Ankara. Mukhtar et al (2017), affirmed that China was able to produce this Ankara as counterfeit and labelled made in Nigeria. National Union of Textile, Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria (2004) indicated that China smuggled into Nigeria about three Billion Naira worth of textile and garments. These products are mostly imported without payment of the necessary taxes and duties. Over 90 percent of the textiles sold in Nigeria according to Muhammad (2017), are smuggled into the country. A garment trader in Kano holds that China textile dominated the Nigerian market with a few from Europe, India, Malaysia and Dubai. According to Lola (2017), buyers prefer China materials because they are cheaper. From employing 250,000 workers, the few available factories now barely engaged 18,000 workers (Muhammed, 2017). Fola & Yakubu (in Ubi & Mohammed, 2025), noted regrettably that the import of these fabrics often substandard, allows foreign textiles to flood the Nigerian market. These imports not only discourage local production but also erode the market share of Nigerian-made fabrics, further weakening the sector's competitiveness. No wonder, Ubi & Mohammed's (2025) assertion to the effect that the Nigerian textile industry, once a thriving contributor to the nation's economy, now faces numerous challenges that hinder its growth and its potential role in economic recovery.

Other Causes of the Collapse of the Textile Industry in Nigeria are: **(a) Poor Infrastructure:** in Nigeria, the infrastructures are in a sorry state and constitute a serious impediment to the growth of the textile sector. The absence of some critical infrastructures such as poor road network, erratic power supply, and strong security architecture contributes to the increasing cost of production. Beckman and Andrae (1999) affirmed that unstable electricity, fuel and water supply and problems of road network are having a paralyzing effect on economic activities. Without constant power supply, textile manufacturers rely heavily on generators, increasing production costs and making local textiles less competitive (Ubi & Mohammed, 2025). **(b) Multiple Taxation:** According to Salami, (2011), about 17 to 40 different taxes are being paid by textile factories. The Committee set up by the Kano State Government on Industrialization under Kwankwaso administration listed about 39 different taxes manufactures are subjected to. All the taxes are summoned up from the demands of the three levels of government. These uncoordinated tax methods discourage the activities of the indigenous industrialists and investors in the country. **(c) Unfavourable Liberalization Policies:** In compliance with the WTO policies, Nigeria lifted the ban on textile importation. China has been a major beneficiary. Nigeria has become a textile imports hub rather than an investment destination. China has substantially increased its textile exports on annual basis to Nigeria market. Mass influx of textiles product importations significantly denies Nigeria local industry the capacity to grow (Aremu 2005). The total import of textile in Nigeria in 2023, for example came up to \$2.86b marking it the 53rd largest importer of textiles globally. China was the largest supplier, with \$2.11b in exports to Nigeria, followed by India(\$255m), Japan (117m), UK(\$58.9m) and Austria (47.5m) (AI overview, 2025). **(d) Oil Economy** The discovery of oil in Nigeria is seen both as a blessing and anathema. Nigeria started exploring oil in 1958 and experienced the oil boom in 1970s. Too much reliance on oil due to the boom caused the

manufacturing sector to fall from 7% to 10% in 1967 and 1970 to a mere 3.8 and 3.4% in 2002 and 2006 in terms of contribution to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (World Bank, 2000). It is pathetic that up till 2025 that manufacturing industry is still contributing almost what it did over 50 years ago when Nigeria was still a toddler. Adamolekun (2025) referring to the statistics office report made us to know that the Nigeria's manufacturing sector's contribution to the real Gross Domestic Product in the first quarter of the year shrank to 9.62 percent from 9.76 percent a year ago. Also quoting the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria, Ikpoto (2024) reported that 767 manufacturers shut down operations while 335 became distressed in 2023 alone. This is unhealthy for a nation on the path of economic rejuvenation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study examined imperialism and economic dependency in the Nigerian textile industry with special focus on the liberalization policy and the Nigeria-China trade relations in the textile trade with specific emphasis on Kantin-kwari Market Kano State. It was observed that the trade liberalization policy has led to a serious deindustrialization in Nigeria, loss of jobs, and Chinese domination of the textile market. Despite this, Nigeria has continued with the implementation of liberalization agreement, principally because China is her highest lending partner with little or no conditionality's like the ones given by the West that are usually cumbersome. The cumulative implication is that it will take Nigeria donkey years of successive efforts and determination to liberate herself from the excruciating grip of Chinese textile products and merchants on the neck of the Nigerian nation.

The following recommendations have been made based on the findings of this work: (a) The state should assist the manufacturing sector and also put up some protectionist measures. Leys, (1978) argued that in Kenya ethnic links between the state and the indigenous Kenyans enabled the people to take over the accumulation of the surplus. Increasingly, this allowed the indigenous bourgeoisie to buy out foreign capital in farming service and manufacturing sectors. With, these, indigenous Kenyans moved from the sphere of circulation to that of production. If the Nigerian state can assist the infant industries in Nigeria both in infrastructure and policy, the textile sector can once more be revitalized. (b) Adequate infrastructure should be put in place. In the course of the study, it was observed that lack of critical infrastructures such as water, constant electricity and good road network has the capacity to increase the cost of production, and when the cost of production is high in Nigeria, it can be an advantage to the Chinese textile industry and merchants whose cost of production are not very exorbitant due to the availability of those infrastructures. In this situation, more customers will be tempted to go to those that are selling at a cheap price (the Chinese). (c) Serious regulatory framework is urgently needed in the manufacturing sector Nigeria. There should be stricter oversight of foreign trade actors in the market especially, in terms of custom enforcement and quality control of imports. If this is not done, illegal imports and smuggling will further destroy the local textile business.

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Biographical Note

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