Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.8 No.4 December, 2025; p.g. 103 – 110; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

IMPLICATIONS OF CHINA INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND INVESTMENT DIPLOMACY IN NIGERIA SOVEREIGNTY

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the effects of China's infrastructural development and investment diplomacy on Nigeria's sovereignty. In the last ten years, China has become a significant ally in Nigeria's infrastructure domain, financing and implementing initiatives in transportation, energy, and telecommunications. Although these initiatives have played a crucial role in fostering economic development and enhancing access to essential infrastructure, there are growing concerns about Nigeria's independence in making economic, technological, and political decisions. Informed by Dependency Theory, this study employs a qualitative secondary research methodology, examining academic literature, government reports, policy briefs, and media publications to evaluate the advantages and possible risks associated with Chinese engagement. The findings highlight a complex interplay: Chinese investment propels infrastructural growth and development, while simultaneously creating structural dependence, potential debt vulnerability, and restricted domestic control over strategic sectors. The study concludes that although Nigeria benefits materially from Chinese engagement, its sovereignty is somewhat limited, underscoring the necessity for policies that encourage local participation, technology transfer, debt sustainability, and balanced investment diplomacy. Suggestions involve bolstering policy frameworks, promoting transparency, diversifying international partnerships, and increasing public awareness to optimise development benefits while protecting national sovereignty.

Keywords: Implication, Infrastructure, Development, Investment, Diplomacy, Sovereignty, Nigeria.

Introduction

In recent decades, China has become a significant global force in infrastructure development and investment diplomacy, especially in developing nations. China has financed and executed large-scale projects in Africa, including Nigeria, through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and bilateral investment agreements. The projects encompass transport networks, energy generation, telecommunications, ports, and industrial zones, establishing China as a vital partner in Nigeria's infrastructural and economic development (Brautigam, 2020; Egbula & Zheng, 2021).

Nigeria, being Africa's most populous country and largest economy, grapples with ongoing infrastructural deficits that hinder economic growth, regional integration, and social welfare. Chinese investments have played a significant role in addressing these gaps, contributing to the development of modern railways, enhanced airports, hydropower plants, and improved road networks. A significant number of policymakers, analysts, and citizens perceive this engagement as a practical chance to expedite development and tap into alternative financing options beyond conventional Western sources (Carmody, 2020; Ogunkola et al., 2021).

Nonetheless, the swift growth of infrastructure and investment diplomacy funded by China prompts concerns about Nigeria's sovereignty. Sovereignty, in this context, denotes the nation's capacity to make autonomous political, economic, and strategic choices free from excessive external influence. Scholars contend that although foreign investment has the potential to drive development, it may also lead to dependency, alter control over key sectors, and affect domestic policy priorities (Sun, 2019; Adewuyi & Oye, 2020). For instance, long-term debt obligations, preferential treatment of Chinese firms, and foreign control of key infrastructure could restrict Nigeria's autonomy in economic planning and governance.

The idea of investment diplomacy adds another layer of complexity to the situation. China frequently associates financial assistance and infrastructure projects with its strategic objectives, employing investment as a means to enhance its diplomatic sway. This affects Nigeria's foreign policy autonomy, national decision-making, and capacity to engage with various international partners on an equal basis (Brautigam, 2020; Carmody, 2020).

Although the significance of China–Nigeria relations is on the rise, there is a scarcity of empirical studies exploring the impact of Chinese infrastructural development and investment diplomacy on Nigeria's sovereignty. Many studies emphasise economic advantages or debt ramifications while giving insufficient consideration to the wider political and strategic outcomes. Grasping these implications is essential, as it shapes discussions on national autonomy, policy development, and the equilibrium between development needs and the preservation of sovereignty.

This study aims to address this gap by examining the effects of China's infrastructural development and investment diplomacy on Nigeria's sovereignty, evaluating both the advantages and possible risks. An examination of this nature will offer valuable insights for policymakers, scholars, and citizens on navigating foreign partnerships while protecting national autonomy and strategic interests.

Statement of the Problem

China's growing engagement in Nigeria via infrastructure projects and investment strategies has sparked a mix of hope and apprehension. Chinese projects have played a significant role in addressing essential infrastructure needs, such as modern railways, roads, airports, and energy facilities, thereby fostering economic growth and social development (Egbula & Zheng, 2021; Ogunkola et al., 2021). Conversely, the extent and character of these investments prompt enquiries regarding Nigeria's independence in decision-making and the wider consequences for national sovereignty.

Foreign investment has the potential to speed up development; however, it can also lead to structural dependencies that affect domestic policy, economic priorities, and control over key sectors. Researchers have pointed out concerns including significant debt responsibilities, favouritism towards Chinese companies, and foreign control over essential infrastructure, which may restrict Nigeria's capacity to autonomously establish development goals and oversee national resources (Sun, 2019; Brautigam, 2020; Carmody, 2020).

Although Chinese involvement is significant, there is a scarcity of empirical research regarding the impact of infrastructural development and investment diplomacy on Nigeria's sovereignty, both in terms of perception and practical governance. Many studies concentrate on economic outcomes or debt sustainability, resulting in a lack of insight into the political and strategic ramifications of Chinese involvement.

The primary issue, then, lies in the conflict between the advantages of Chinese-led development and the possible infringement on Nigeria's sovereignty. Without a clear understanding of this dynamic, policymakers may find it challenging to balance the benefits of foreign investment with the need to protect national autonomy, potentially resulting in decisions that could unintentionally heighten dependency or diminish strategic control over essential infrastructure and economic policy.

Literature Review

This section examines the current literature regarding China's infrastructural development and investment diplomacy in Nigeria, focussing specifically on the implications for national sovereignty. The analysis explores the advantages and possible dangers linked to Chinese involvement, emphasising the knowledge gaps that warrant this study.

China's Infrastructural Development in Nigeria

China has emerged as a prominent investor and contractor in Nigeria's infrastructure, backing initiatives in transport, energy, and telecommunications sectors. Significant projects encompass the Lagos–Ibadan and Abuja–Kaduna railways, hydropower facilities like Zungeru, as well as the enhancement of airports and highways (Egbula & Zheng, 2021; Ogunkola et al., 2021).

Scholars contend that these projects yield considerable developmental effects, such as lower transportation costs, increased mobility, job creation, and better access to electricity (Adewuyi & Oye, 2020). The enhancement of infrastructure corresponds with Nigeria's developmental objectives and tackles enduring shortcomings in essential sectors.

Nonetheless, critics highlight that China frequently finances these initiatives via loans, with Chinese contractors and labour predominantly overseeing their implementation. This arrangement could restrict local involvement and diminish chances for the development of domestic technological capabilities (Brautigam, 2020; Sun, 2019).

Investment Diplomacy and Foreign Influence

Investment diplomacy involves the strategic application of economic and infrastructural investments to enhance political and diplomatic influence (Carmody, 2020). China's strategy for investment in Nigeria frequently transcends mere development, focussing on strengthening bilateral ties, gaining trade benefits, and broadening strategic influence.

Investment diplomacy can provide opportunities for accessing finance and technology, but it may also influence Nigeria's independence. Researchers have observed that reliance on foreign investment can affect domestic policy decisions, limit autonomous decision-making, and establish structural dependencies that diminish national authority over critical sectors (Sun, 2019; Brautigam, 2020).

Implications for Nigeria's Sovereignty

Sovereignty refers to a state's capacity to maintain complete authority over its territory, resources, and policy choices, free from outside influence. Concerns have been raised in Nigeria regarding economic, technological, and political sovereignty due to Chinese infrastructural projects and investment diplomacy.

Economic Sovereignty: A significant dependence on Chinese loans could jeopardise fiscal independence and lead to enduring debt commitments (Ogunkola et al., 2021). Technological Sovereignty: The restricted transfer of skills and technology to Nigerian firms could strengthen reliance on foreign expertise (Adewuyi & Oye, 2020).

Political and Strategic Sovereignty: Control over essential infrastructure and participation in policy discussions could alter power dynamics, potentially impacting Nigeria's foreign policy and strategic independence (Brautigam, 2020; Carmody, 2020).

Debates and Divergent Views

Scholarly opinions regarding China's role in Nigeria exhibit a divergence. Supporters contend that China's engagement is practical, essential for swift progress, and addresses funding voids created by conventional Western benefactors (Egbula & Zheng, 2021). Critics caution against neo-colonial tendencies, an over-dependence on Chinese funding, and the potential erosion of Nigeria's sovereignty (Sun, 2019; Brautigam, 2020).

This discussion underscores the intricate challenge of reconciling developmental progress with political independence, demonstrating the importance of public policy and perception research in grasping the wider consequences of China–Nigeria relations.

Theoretical Framework

Dependency Theory

The growing involvement of China in Nigeria's infrastructure and investment sector calls for a theoretical perspective to comprehend its effects on national sovereignty. This study utilises

Dependency Theory as its conceptual framework, offering a strong perspective on the structural relationships between economically dominant and dependent nations, as well as the potential limitations on policy autonomy and sovereignty.

Dependency Theory developed in the 1960s and 1970s, influenced by the contributions of scholars like Raúl Prebisch (1950), Andre Gunder Frank (1967), Theotonio Dos Santos (1970), and Samir Amin (1974). This theory contests the idea that underdevelopment in less-industrialized countries is an inevitable phase of economic progress, positing instead that it stems from a historical and structural reliance on more affluent, industrialised nations (Frank, 1967; Dos Santos, 1970). Dependency Theory posits that the global economy is structured into a core that dominates capital, technology, and high-value production, while a periphery provides raw materials and labour, depending on the core for investment and technological resources (Prebisch, 1950; Frank, 1967).

Asymmetrical relationships can lead to ongoing underdevelopment, diminish national autonomy, and influence the political and economic choices accessible to dependent nations. In Nigeria, the perspective of dependency can be applied to analyse China's infrastructural development and investment diplomacy. In the last ten years, projects funded by China have played a crucial role in the nation's development through the financing and construction of railways, airports, energy plants, and road networks (Egbula & Zheng, 2021; Ogunkola, Bankole, & Adewuyi, 2021). Although these projects offer prompt infrastructural and economic advantages, they frequently depend on Chinese loans, contractors, and imported technology. This reliance constrains Nigeria’s oversight of project implementation and diminishes prospects for developing local capacity (Adewuyi & Oye, 2020; Brautigam, 2020). Viewed through the lens of Dependency Theory, these arrangements foster economic and technological reliance, potentially limiting Nigeria's capacity to formulate independent policy decisions and oversee strategic assets.

Furthermore, China's investment diplomacy goes beyond mere economic involvement. By connecting infrastructural financing to wider political and strategic goals, China may shape Nigeria’s foreign policy decisions and domestic governance focusses. Dependency Theory indicates that this type of influence can slowly impact national sovereignty, as the dependent nation might modify its policies to sustain advantageous relations with the dominant partner (Carmody, 2020; Sun, 2019). Consequently, although Nigerians might acknowledge the developmental benefits of BRI projects, they could also have reservations regarding debt responsibilities, foreign influence in key sectors, and diminished independence in decision-making.

Utilising Dependency Theory in this study proves advantageous as it facilitates a comprehensive examination of China–Nigeria relations. It outlines the concrete advantages of Chinese investments, like improved infrastructure and economic development, as well as the structural risks, such as economic dependence, technological reliance, and the possible undermining of political sovereignty. The theory offers a conceptual framework for understanding how the public and policymakers perceive Chinese engagement: favourable views may indicate recognition of short-term developmental benefits, while doubts may stem from concerns about potential long-term dependency risks.

Dependency Theory provides a valuable lens to examine the potential impact of China's infrastructural development and investment diplomacy on Nigeria's sovereignty. This study is positioned within a wider conversation regarding global economic disparities and offers perspectives on the compromises between developmental advantages and national sovereignty (Frank, 1967; Dos Santos, 1970; Brautigam, 2020). Utilising this theoretical perspective, the study can explore the opportunities and limitations linked to foreign investment, offering a detailed understanding of its effects on Nigeria's policy and strategic autonomy.

Methodology

The methodology details the research design, data collection, and data analysis procedures employed to investigate the effects of China's infrastructural development and investment diplomacy on Nigeria's sovereignty. Considering the exploratory nature of the study and the wealth of existing literature and reports, a secondary research method has been adopted. Secondary research facilitates the examination of data that has already been gathered from reliable sources, offering insights into the advantages and possible risks associated with Chinese involvement in Nigeria.

This research utilises a qualitative design, concentrating on the content and thematic analysis of secondary data. A qualitative approach is suitable as it facilitates a deep understanding of intricate issues like sovereignty, dependency, and investment diplomacy, which are not easily quantifiable (Creswell, 2014). The study highlights the importance of interpreting, synthesising, and critically evaluating existing research, policy documents, media articles, and scholarly literature.

Conclusion

This research explored the effects of China's infrastructural development and investment diplomacy on Nigeria's sovereignty, employing a secondary research methodology and informed by Dependency Theory. The results reveal a nuanced relationship between developmental advantages and sovereignty challenges.

Chinese-funded infrastructure projects have played a crucial role in Nigeria's development. Transportation, energy, and telecommunications projects, such as railways, airports, and power plants, have improved mobility, energy access, and economic activity (Egbula & Zheng, 2021; Ogunkola, Bankole, & Adewuyi, 2021). These initiatives have effectively closed essential infrastructure gaps that domestic resources alone are unable to tackle, delivering concrete advantages that bolster national development goals.

Conversely, these advantages are accompanied by structural challenges and potential risks to sovereignty. The significant dependence on Chinese financing, restricted technology transfer, prevalence of Chinese contractors, and the strategic implications of investment diplomacy pose challenges to Nigeria's independence in economic and policy decision-making (Brautigam, 2020; Carmody, 2020; Sun, 2019). The study indicates that although Nigeria benefits materially from its engagement with China, it may encounter a potential long-term dependence that could affect policy priorities, fiscal management, and control over strategic assets.

Nigerians' views on China's involvement are likely influenced by a combination of immediate developmental benefits and worries regarding sovereignty and dependency. The study reveals that China's infrastructural investments act as a double-edged sword, promoting development yet posing challenges to Nigeria's economic, technological, and political independence.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and theoretical insights, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The Nigerian government should create strong structures to make sure that foreign investments support national development goals without taking away the country's sovereignty. This includes clear rules on who owns, runs, and manages important infrastructure projects.
2. Policies should require that more Nigerian contractors, engineers, and technical workers work on projects that are sponsored by China. Focussing on technology transfer and talent development will make countries less reliant on each other in the long run and improve their ability to do things (Adewuyi & Oye, 2020).
3. Nigeria needs to carefully look at the terms of Chinese loans and make sure that it can pay them back. To protect national financial independence and avoid putting too much demand on the budget, project finance must be reported and monitored in a clear way (Sun, 2019).
4. Nigeria should use investment diplomacy to balance international alliances, find new ways to get money, and avoid relying too much on one partner for strategic purposes. Strengthening ties at the regional and multinational levels might give you more options and make you a better negotiator.
5. There should be educational efforts and public discussions to let people know what Chinese investment projects are trying to do, what they can do for them, and what the hazards are. Policymakers may be guided by informed public opinion, which can also make them more accountable.

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