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# RETHINKING CHINA: PERCEPTIONS FROM AFRICA

## A SURVEY OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

This article studies the sources from which Nigerian university students receive information about China. The awareness of the Nigerian youth about China's initiatives such as 'One Belt One Road' and 'Forum on China-Africa Cooperation' further discloses the perception of the students on the rise of China and its influence on global affairs. In addition, the study reveals how African students perceive China as a trade partner. The results indicate the internet and social media are major sources of awareness. Some students are somewhat aware of the Chinese initiatives, but others have never heard about these initiatives. The students think that China has influence in the World and African affairs and are neutral about the responsible behavior of China as a global power. Students are positive about the Chinese development model and are concerned about the influx of Chinese labor in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** China; Nigeria; Africa; perception; trade; power

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### INTRODUCTION

China's global economic and cultural engagement has increased in the last two decades. New markets for its products and sustainable resources for its hungry production

industries necessitate China to enlarge its global reach, including African states. China is intensely investing in African economies through economic aid entailing the "buy China" model, undertaking mega projects such as highway,

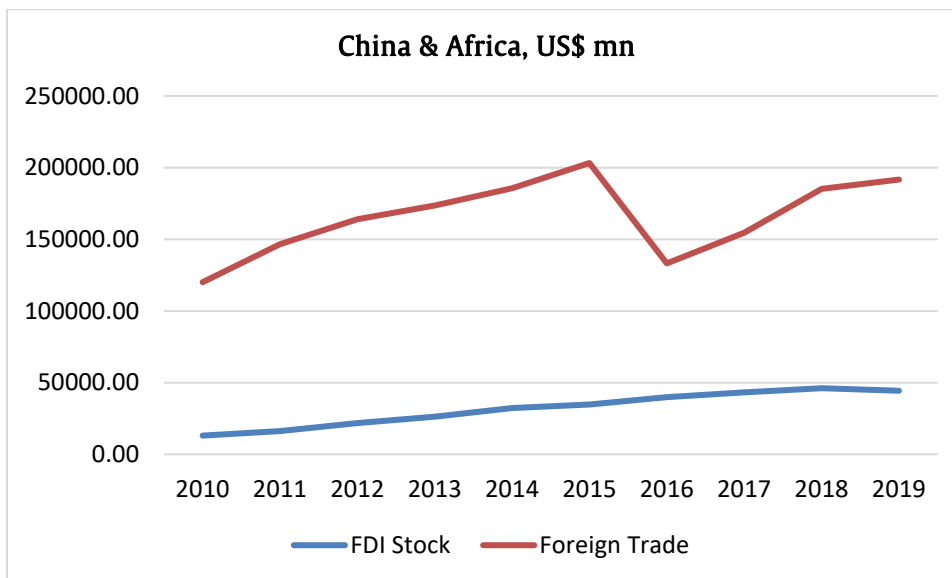
port, and airport construction, and establishing cultural links through Confucius institutes. China dynamically backs infrastructure and energy projects, increasing bilateral relations and trade traffic in different regional states (Berdiyev & Can, 2020). Along with economic investments, China invests in human capital by providing scholarships to university students and researchers.

Chinese FDI surpassed European and US investments on the continent. Other major powers are aware of the rise of Chinese investments in Africa, and some commentators state their conserving comments (Smith, 2021). With this pace and investment approach, other interested parties seem to have less competitive capacity than that of China on the continent. China is purchasing natural resources and marketing its ready-made products to the region. African states are among the migration destinations for the Chinese labour force. China's intensive, all-compassing engagement with African states and their economies is generating

benefits for both parties. However, still, there are prevailing doubts about the sustainability of economic development in Africa.

To evaluate the effects of China on the continent, one needs to calculate the costs and benefits of Chinese trade and investment and to what extent these are reflected at the national level in terms of prosperity, growth, and social development. Though national trade patterns and FDI are increasing, there is evidence of changing class dynamics (Broadman, 2007). Some scholars did empirical research on the Chinese business strategies focusing on traditional networks and social relations on which international enterprises work (Haugen & Carling, 2005).

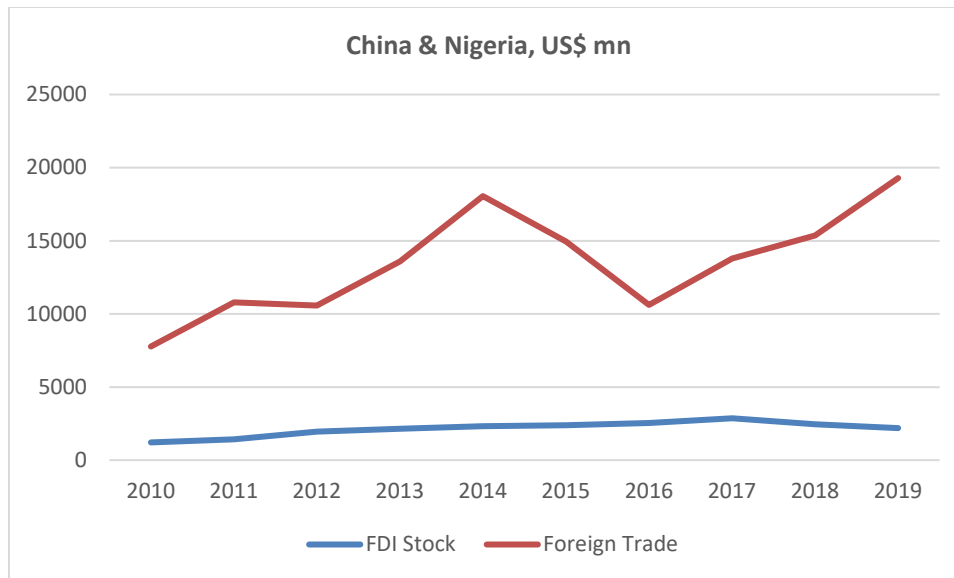
Chinese FDI stock has increased in the African continent from 2010 – 2019. There was a slight decrease in 2019, but for international trade, there was an increasing trend for the 2010 – 2015 period, followed by a sharp recession in 2016 and another growing trend after 2016.



**Graph 1.** FDI Stock of China to Africa and total trade among them (SAIS-CARI, 2023).

This study selected Nigeria as a case study since Nigeria is the largest FDI economy, has the largest population, and receives the largest Chinese FDI in Africa. International trade with China had an increasing trend for the 2010 – 2014 period, then a sharp decrease for two years, followed by a rising trend for the last three years. For the Chinese FDI stock side, there was an

increasing trend for the 2010 – 2017 period but a decreasing period for the previous two periods.



**Graph 2.** FDI Stock of China to Nigeria and total trade among them (SAIS-CARI, 2023).

According to Imanche et al. (2021), China's investment reached US\$49.1 billion in 2019, almost a 100-fold growth since 2000. Further, China-Africa trade reached US \$208.7 billion, a 20-fold rise since 2000, making China Africa's number one trade partner for 11 years and contributing more than 20% to Africa's growth. China has been investing in mega development projects.

Though China market has established its foreign policy under slogans such as 'peaceful rise', 'peaceful development' (Pathak, 2015), 'harmonious world,' and 'scientific development' and is seen as a developing country, two and half decades of constant economic development has changed the perception of China in the West, being labeled as the 'China threat.' Further, there are doubts about Chinese foreign policy as a developed, powerful state in African states. As Africa's largest trade partner and investor, China and Chinese investment provide opportunities for African states while also garnering suspicion and doubts about its behaviour in the future (Tull, 2006; Herrick et al., 2016).

Since the perception studies produced mixed results, there is still a need to conduct country-specific and issue-specific perception studies.

The need for perception studies on China in African states is clear for the factors mentioned above. China-Nigeria relations are increasing and deepening. With its more than 200 million population, Nigeria has the potential to reflect

the success or failure of China's engagement with Africa.

The study's main research objective is to investigate Nigerian university students' awareness of China's rise and initiatives. Other specific research objectives are to study Nigerian university students' perception of China's national powers and world affairs and to understand their impression of the economic and commercial relationship between China and Nigeria.

The study employed an empirical research method with a questionnaire and its analysis. The data collection method is a questionnaire that is filled out by 602 students from different universities in 36 states and Federal Capital Territory in Nigeria. The data collection method is a statistical method of testing hypotheses [via Cronbach's Alpha value, etc.]. The data is analyzed with the decisions of hypotheses and interpretation of other statistical data.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of China as an economic power at a global scale, on the one hand, provides opportunities for trade and development; on the other hand, it causes anxiety among concerned parties (Can et al., 2021). China-Africa relations have been deepening in recent decades though they have historical roots far beyond the Cold War, according to Duggan (2020). He argues the Chinese engagement with African states was viewed as a rivalry between China and the USA

during the Cold War. The rivalry continues in many forms. Though China has primarily pursued the 'let's do business' model by not aiming to promote its political regime, Sino-phobia or the so-called 'China Threat' has roots in academia and policy circles. The Chinese government's rigid stance in the South China Sea and on the Taiwan issue galvanized the anxiety. Chinese foreign policy instruments such as Chinese direct investments, economic aid, Belt and Road Initiative, infrastructures investments, and Confucius institutes worldwide are perceived differently by various sides, from an opportunity to an anxiety pendulum. Flores-Macías et al. (2013) disclosed that trade with China ends with foreign policy consequences. Off all regions, intensely developing Sino-African relations seem to be a more attractive area to focus on by many scholars.

Li and Rønning (2013) studied Chinese soft power building in the case of Africa. The study investigates the role of the media as the central instrument in building China's soft power in Africa. Naidu & Mbazima studied China's African engagement and results (Naidu & Mbazima, 2008).

In their empirical study, Shen & Taylor investigated the Ugandan youth's perception of China (Shen & Taylor, 2012). They chose Kampala, an important political and economic region where many Chinese live. Eighty-three percent of the respondents had undergraduate or postgraduate education. The study revealed that the youth neither perceive China as a threat, as some circles anticipate nor appraise China.

Tan-Mullins et al. (2010) studied the Chinese engagement and aid to African states from normative liberal discourse, comparing the aid policies of the West and China in the case study of Angola and Ghana. The study argues that foreign countries use aid and conceal their true policies with different ideologies defining Chinese aid as 'rogue aid' and implying that Western aid is superior.

Jackson reviewed several surveys about Nigerian perceptions of China and concluded that China is very popular in Nigerian public opinion (Jackson, 2019). In his review of surveys between 2006-2018, Afrobarometer, PEW, Gallup, BBC, and others indicate that more than 61 percent of the interviewed Nigerians have a positive image of China [up to 89 percent for some years].

According to Selormey (2020), China ranks second after the United States as a development model. In this study, 38 percent of Nigerian respondents believe China has the best development model. On average, 59 percent of African respondents think China has a strong economic and political influence on their countries, whereas 62 percent of Nigerian respondents do not (Selormey, 2020).

The empirical study conducted by Imanche et al. (2021) reveals that the successful performances of Chinese investors strongly influenced Nigerians' positive perception of China's FDI and its acceptability in Nigeria. Oke et al. (2019) empirically studied Nigerian businesspersons' perceptions of China and Nigeria's trade balance. It concludes that Nigeria needs to support local industries and trade organizations to boost Nigeria's production capacity.

Though developing markets welcome economic relations with China, the perception of China is loosely connected to the level of investments in the countries surveyed. Compared with Indonesia receiving \$47 billion in capital investment from China, Nigeria received \$44 billion, and 70 percent of Nigerians think positively about China, whereas it is 36 percent favorable in Indonesia. China is the second most praised country, following Russia in Nigeria (Silver et al., 2019). Rebol, in his qualitative study, concludes that a rising trade deficit negatively impacts African perceptions of China (Rebol, 2020). He also found out that Western media generally tends to portray China's relations with Africa more negatively than most Africans perceive it.

Waweru finds that anti-Chinese sentiments are most widespread among Kenya's small-scale traders displaced by Chinese FDI flow and trade (Waweru, 2020). Kenya's politicians and intellectuals who question Chinese-built infrastructure also have anti-Chinese perceptions. Furthermore, ordinary Kenyans faced with Chinese misconduct also have anti-Chinese sentiments. A survey study conducted in the Czech Republic revealed that China is the most dominant power in Asia and will surpass the USA as a leading power. The respondents perceive China as neither positive nor negative and are divided on the expectations for the rise of China (Chen & Hao, 2019). Herlijanto analyzed the perception of China among Indonesian elites

(Herlijanto, 2017). Even though the government of Indonesia wanted to enhance its relations with China, the elites outside the government were suspicious of the connections.

Sautman & Hairong, in their empirical study, conclude that African views are not as harmful as Western media reflects but are multi-colored and multifaceted (Sautman & Hairong, 2009). The survey also found varying results representing dominant Western media displaying how only African ruling elites are positive about China-Africa links. Although the perception changes according to age, education, and gender, the key variation is by country. The country variations stem from national politicians' approach to reflecting on Chinese issues and how Western media has affected their perception of China.

As China's initiatives continue in full swing, it is assumed that the perception of China will change in different directions. Though Chinese perception has been studied with respondents from different layers of the population, there has been a lack of recent studies, especially on students and the youth. This study fills in the gap in the literature on the perception of China among students in the Nigerian case.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study aims to understand Nigerian university students' perception of China's rise as a global power and its initiatives such as 'One Belt One Road' and 'Forum on China-Africa Cooperation'. The study also aimed to explore the sources of awareness about China for Nigerian university students. The study specifically analyzed the university students' perception of Nigeria's economic and commercial relationships with China. The present study applied the positivist philosophy wherein research objectively emphasizes an empirical investigation (Galliers, 1992). Researchers collected the data from Nigerian university students rather than subjectively analyzing the subject area, thereby adhering to the basics of positivist philosophy (Žukauskas et al., 2018). Positivist studies use the deductive approach wherein the researcher progresses from the general to the specific domain while testing the various hypotheses/assumptions (Kuczynski & Daly, 2003). Hence, this study also adopted the deductive approach wherein researchers tested the various hypotheses related to the awareness

and perception of Nigerian university students towards China's rise as a global power and its various initiatives, fulfilling the deductive approach guidelines (Saunders et al., 2009). Usually, quantitative methods are applied along with a deductive research approach wherein data is collected from a sample representing the entire population about a clearly defined research problem. The present study also adopted the quantitative methodology wherein clear objectives were formulated, and data was collected from a Nigerian university student sample. A range of strategic alternatives exists, such as experiments, surveys, case studies, etc., to fulfill the research objectives (Robson, 2002). This study adopted the survey strategy, for being the most widely used and capable of testing the hypotheses (Saunders et al., 2009). Non-probability sampling using judgment and convenience techniques was applied to select a sample of 602 university students from Nigeria. Primary data was collected from the respondents using a structured questionnaire having 22 statements. Both online and offline modes were used to collect the data. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 23.0 applying both descriptive and inferential statistics. Data was represented with the help of pie charts, bar charts, and tables. One sample t-test was applied to test the following hypotheses:

- H1: Nigerian students perceive China as a global power that significantly influences world affairs.
- H2: Nigerian university students positively perceived economic relationships with China.
- H3: Nigerian university students positively perceived commercial relationships with China.

Nigeria is a federation of 36 states and 1 Federal Capital Territory. In this survey, there are 602 respondents. Of this, 592 are from all those 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. A total of 10 of them stated that they are studying in universities out of Nigeria, such as Asia Pacific University, Newcastle University, Nims University Jaipur, York University Canada, etc., or those which are not stated clearly. Ignoring those ten students, 43.4% [261] of them are female, and 56.6% [341] of them are male. From this, 63.1% [380] are undergraduate students, and 36.9% [222] are postgraduate students. The average age of respondents is 26.13. A total of 337

respondents are studying at a federal university, 172 at a private university, and the remaining 83 at a state university. The respondents are from 66

different educational institutes. The sample profile details have been presented in Table No. 1.

**Table 1: Sample Profile**

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Type of University	Federal	336	55.8
	Private	173	28.7
	State	83	13.8
	Foreign	10	1.7
Zone	Federal Capital Territory	159	27.8
	North Central	134	22.6
	North East	104	17.6
	North West	53	9.0
	South East	15	2.5
	South	38	6.4
	South West	89	15.0
Gender	Female	341	43.4
	Male	261	56.6
Educational Qualification	Undergraduate	380	63.1
	Postgraduate	222	36.9

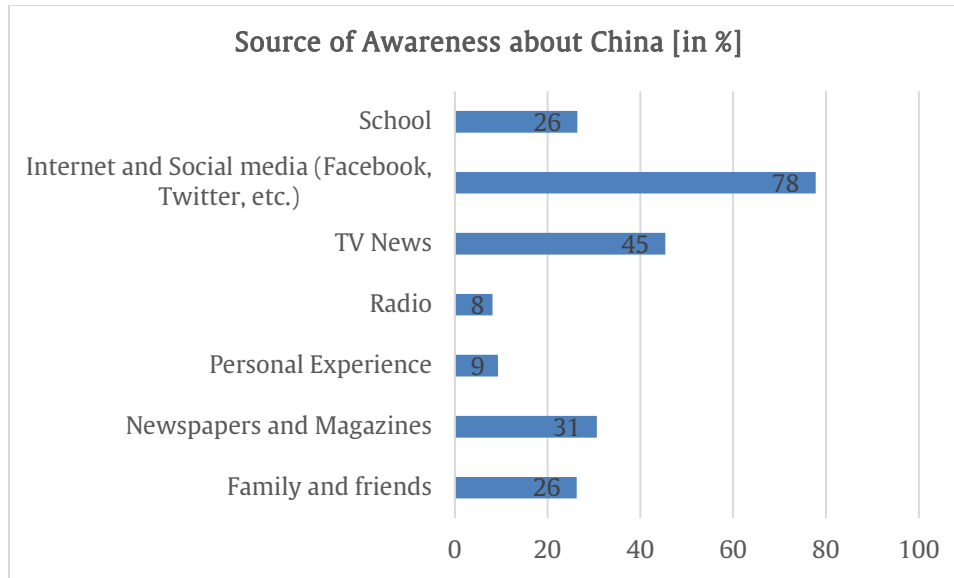
Source: Authors' work

Table 1 shows that 58% of the respondents belonged to a federal university, whereas 29% belonged to a private university. A total of 14% of respondents in the study belonged to state universities, and 2% of the respondents studied in a foreign university. As they are also shown geographically in the Figure in the Appendix, the North Central zone represented around 50% of the respondents, followed by the Northeast, representing 18% of the respondents. The South East zone represented only 2.5% of the respondents. It can also be seen from Table 1 that 43% of female and 57% of male respondents constituted the study's sample. Of this, 63% were undergraduate students, whereas 37% were postgraduates.

sources are the most prominent in determining Nigerian university students' knowledge of China. Figure 1 represents the major sources Nigerian university students use to acquire knowledge about China.

#### **AWARENESS OF NIGERIAN STUDENTS TOWARD CHINA'S INITIATIVES**

This study wished to assess the awareness of Nigerian students towards China. Many sources such as family, friends, personal experience, school, and media like TV, newspapers, magazines, radio, internet, and social media contribute to university students' knowledge of China. The study aimed to determine which

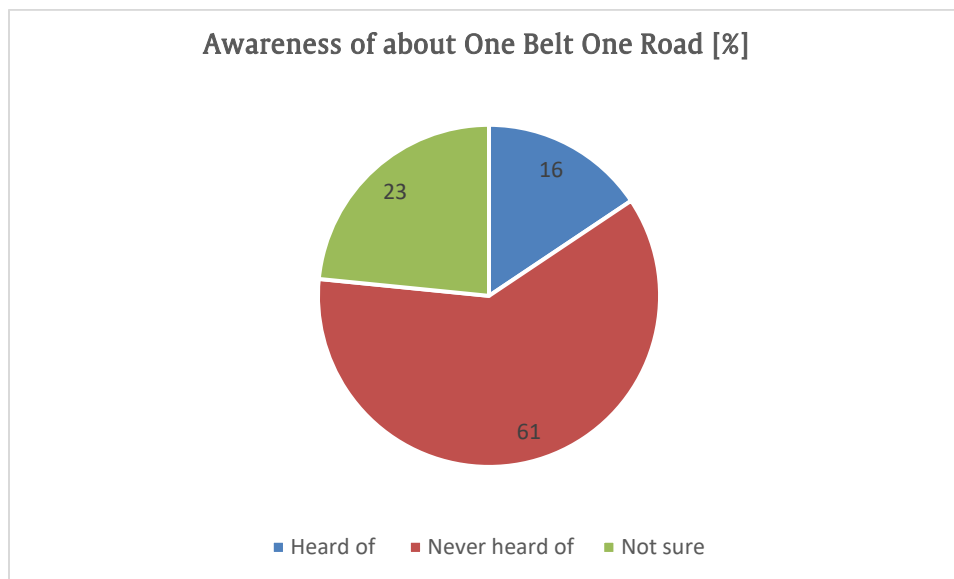


**Figure 1:** Sources of Awareness

Figure 1 shows that the internet and social media are major sources of awareness for most university students. 78% of students get information about China from social media. TV news is another major source of awareness; 45% of the students acquire knowledge about China TV news. Newspapers and magazines were major sources of awareness for 31% of the students, followed by family and friends used by 26% of the respondents. Personal experience was the main source of awareness for 9% of the university

students, whereas radio was used by only 8% of the students to discover information about China.

The researcher also wished to understand Nigerian university students' awareness of various initiatives like the 'One Belt One Road' and 'Forum on China-Africa Cooperation'. Figure 2 shows the awareness of Nigerian university students about the 'One Belt One Road' initiative of China.



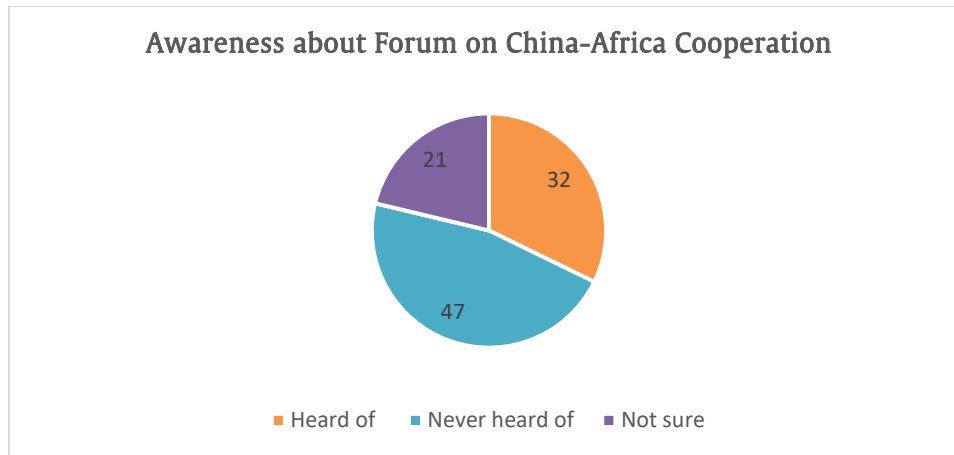
**Figure 2:** Awareness of One Belt One Road



Figure 2 shows that only 16% of university students had heard about the 'One Belt One Road' initiative of China, whereas a good majority of the students (61%) had never heard of this initiative. A total of 23% of university students were not sure of the 'One Belt One Road' initiative of China. The results depict a low level of awareness regarding China's 'One Belt One

Road' initiative amongst Nigerian university students.

Figure 3 depicts the awareness of Nigerian university students about the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation.



**Figure 3:** Awareness of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

Figure 3 shows that 32% of university students knew about the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, whereas 47% had never heard of this initiative. A total of 21% of university students were not sure about this initiative. The results depict a low level of awareness regarding China's Forum on China-Africa Cooperation initiative amongst Nigerian university students.

The study aimed to understand Nigerian university students' perception of China's rise as a global power and its influence on world affairs.

Respondents were asked to rate the various statements related to China's global Power on a scale of 1 to 5. The reliability of the construct was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, the value of which was found as .868, which is more than the cut-off value of .7. Hence, it can be concluded that the scale used to assess the perception of Nigerian students towards China's rise as a global power was reliable. The descriptive and inferential statistics are displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Perception of Nigerian Students towards China's Rise as a Global Power

Statements	N	Mean	t	Df	Sig. [2-tailed]
China acts responsibly in the world.	602	3.05	1.118	601	.046
China has more influence on world affairs today.	602	4.04	-20.743	601	.000
China is very influential in Africa.	602	4.14	1.078	601	.281
Having strong political ties with China is important.	602	3.50	3.752	601	.000
Having strong military and security ties with China is important.	602	3.39	-11.805	601	.000
Having strong economic and trade ties with China is important.	602	4.13	-13.677	601	.000

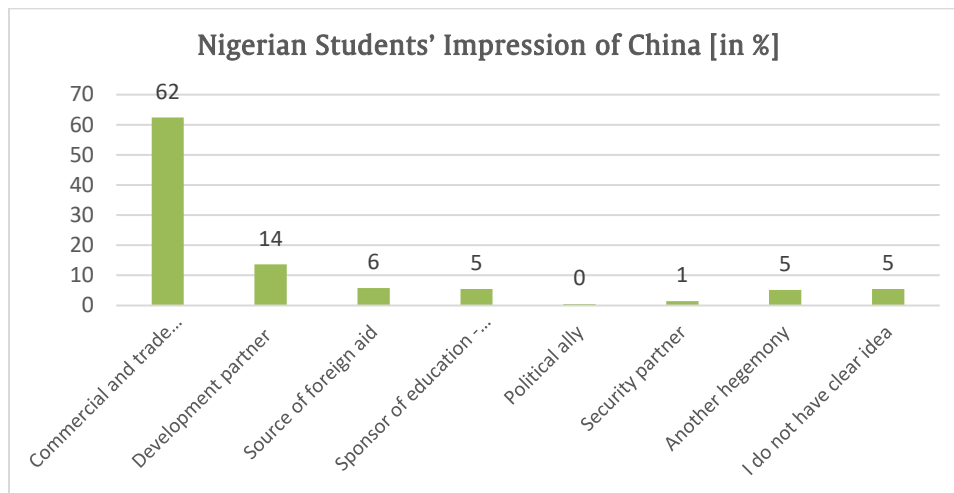
Table 2 shows that all the statements were rated more than average, i.e., 3. The maximum score of 4.14 was assigned to the statement 'China is very influential in Africa' followed by 'Having strong economics and trade ties with China is important' with a mean score of 4.13. A minimum score of 3.05 was assigned to the statement 'China acts responsibly in the world'. The descriptive results revealed that Nigerian students considered China to have a strong influence in Africa and world affairs. They also thought that having strong economic, military, security, and political ties with China is very important. However, they almost remained neutral towards the responsible behaviors of China at a global level.

The significance of the descriptive results was checked with a one-sample t-test at a 5% significance level. The test hypothesized:

H1: Nigerian students perceive China as a global power that significantly influences world affairs.

Table 2 shows that the t value was found at a significance level of less than .05 for every statement except one, i.e., "China is very influential in Africa". This led to the partial acceptance of hypothesis H1. So, based on significant results obtained, it can be concluded that Nigerian students considered China to be a global power with a significant influence on world affairs, wherein they accepted that having strong ties with China is essential. However, they had a neutral perception of China towards its responsible behavior in the world. The perception of Nigerian students towards China's investment in Africa could not be confirmed because of insignificant results obtained.

The researcher aimed to comprehend the way China is perceived by the Nigerian youth i.e., as a trade and development partner, source of foreign aid, sponsor, security partner, hegemony, etc. Figure 4 gives the details of the same:



**Figure 4:** Nigerian Students' Impression of China

Figure 4 shows that most university students (62%) considered China a commercial and trade partner. A total of 14% considered China a development partner, followed by 6% of students considering China a source of foreign aid. Further, 5% of students considered China, a sponsor of education and another hegemony. Only 1% considered China as a security partner for Nigeria. China was not considered a political ally, and 5% of students had no clear idea about China's impression.

#### PERCEPTION TOWARDS ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP

Researchers wished to understand Nigerian students' perceptions of economic and commercial relationships with China. Perception towards economic relationships with China was studied with the help of statements related to economic activities, the influx of Chinese businesses and labor in Nigeria, adopting the Chinese model to develop the Nigerian economy, and encouraging Chinese investment and exploitation of natural resources. These were

measured on a five-point scale. The reliability of the scale was checked with the help of Cronbach's Alpha, the value of which was found

to be more than the cut-off value of .843. The descriptive and inferential statistics are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Nigerian University Students' Perception towards economic relationships with China

Statement	N	Mean	t	Df	Sig. [2-tailed]
China's increasing economic role in Nigeria	602	3.31	-15.092	601	.000
The influx of Chinese small & medium size businesspeople in Nigeria	602	3.29	-16.852	601	.000
The influx of Chinese labour in Nigeria	602	2.98	-22.302	601	.000
Nigeria should learn from the Chinese model in developing its economy.	602	4.14	3.449	601	.001
Nigeria should further open its market for Chinese goods and services.	602	3.09	-17.538	601	.000
Nigeria should further encourage Chinese investment.	602	3.39	-13.249	601	.000
The main goal of the Chinese companies is to exploit Nigeria's natural resources.	602	3.46	-11.872	601	.000

Table 3 shows that Nigerian students assigned the maximum mean value (4.14) to the statement 'Nigeria should learn from the Chinese model in developing its economy', indicating the fact students appreciate the Chinese development model and want Nigeria to adopt the same for its development. However, it is interesting to note here that although students appreciated the Chinese development model, they still thought that the main goal of the Chinese companies operating in Nigeria was to exploit the country's natural resources, as the statement was assigned a mean value of 3.46. Students also acknowledged that Nigeria should further encourage Chinese investment [with 3.39 mean value], and China has an increasing economic role in Nigeria [with 3.31 mean value], which they valued. They also appreciated the rising influx of Chinese small and medium-sized businesspeople in Nigeria by assigning a mean value of 3.29 to the statement. However, they didn't appreciate the influx of Chinese labor in Nigeria as the statement was given a mean score of 2.98, which was less than the average score.

The results' significance was checked with a one-sample t-test at a 5% significance level. The test hypothesized:

- Nigerian university students had a positive perception of economic relationships with China, as confirmed by H2.

Table 3 shows that for all the statements, the test was found significant as all the statements had a significance value of less than .05. However, the influx of Chinese labor was rated less than the average score by the university students, and the significant results obtained for the statement indicated that university students didn't like the influx of Chinese labor in Nigeria. So, this led to the partial acceptance of H2.

Researchers also aimed to see the perception of Nigerian university students towards a commercial relationship with China. Respondents were asked to rate the statements related to infrastructure, imports, human capital, trade, etc., on a 7 points scale. The scale's reliability was checked with the help of Cronbach's Alpha statistic, which was found as .897, demonstrating the scale's reliability. The table displays the descriptive and inferential statistics.

**Table 4:** Nigerian University Students' Perception towards commercial relationships with China

Statement	N	Mean	T	df	Sig. [2-tailed]
Nigerian industries have been negatively hit due to Chinese imports.	602	3.72	-6.111	601	.000
China would make the Nigerian economy dependent on itself completely.	602	3.18	-16.463	601	.000
China has improved the infrastructure in Nigeria.	602	3.29	-16.256	601	.000
China has contributed to the human capital development of Nigeria.	602	3.19	-18.814	601	.000
China is an extremely important trade partner to Nigeria.	602	3.70	-7.623	601	.000

Table 4 shows that Nigerian university students assigned less than an average mean score to all the statements. However, fewer mean scores were assigned to statements like 'Nigerian industries have been negatively hit due to Chinese imports' with a mean score of 3.72 and 'China would make Nigerian economy dependent on itself completely' with the lowest mean score of 3.18 actually representing a positive perception as students disagreed with both the statements. They didn't think that Nigerian industries are negatively hit due to imports from China, and the latter is making the Nigerian economy dependent on itself. However, lower than average scores assigned to all other statements revealed that students didn't think that China improved infrastructure in Nigeria and contributed towards the human capital of the latter. Although their impression of China was that of a trade and commercial partner, as shown in Table 4, they didn't consider China an extremely important trade partner to Nigeria.

The results' significance was checked with a one-sample t-test at a 5% significance level. The test hypothesized:

- Nigerian university students had a positive perception of commercial relationships with China, as the result of the testing of H3 indicates.

Table 4 shows that for all the statements, the test was found significant as all the statements had a significance value of less than .05. However, a lower-than-average mean score for infrastructure and human capital development, along with not considering China as a vital trade partner led to the partial acceptance of H3.

The findings of this study suggest that Nigeria may look for diversification of direct investment.

The Chinese and other state policymakers may use the findings to review their approach/strategy in perception building. The findings from this study have several implications that can be highlighted. China shall use the internet and social media more effectively to publicize economic, commercial, and scientific activities towards Africa, especially Nigeria. China and Nigeria shall work on collaborations with particular attention to universities to improve perception. The survey shows that Nigerian students have some doubts about Chinese labor migration. Nigerian policymakers shall investigate such issues and take necessary actions to identify the source of this perception. And business people shall work on developing perceptions among these countries.

## DISCUSSION

The study indicates the sources of the perceptions and knowledge of Nigerian university students on China-related issues. Although China's 'One Belt One Road initiative has been very visible on social media and the internet, it is surprising that 61% of respondents have never heard of it. It may imply an indifference to various initiatives of China. It is also surprising that the 'Forum on China-Africa Cooperation' (FOCAC) initiative is heard by only 32% of the respondents, while TV is the second most important source of knowledge. One may assume that Nigeria's TVs have mentioned FOCAC in the news for two decades, but the low level of awareness about FOCAC may also indicate the unconcern of Nigerian students to numerous initiatives of China. Since it is also evident in our empirical study that the opinion on China's investment is not clear (statistically

insignificant), it may also be consistent with our comment. Because the students' indifference to such initiatives is clear from our findings, as our empirical study shows a low percentage of the respondents heard FOCAC, one of the main bridges for China's investment in Nigeria.

On the other hand, while a significant percentage of students think that China is very influential in Africa and it is very important to have strong relations with China, it is meaningful to see the hesitance of the respondents to approve the responsible roles of China in World affairs. It may be inferred that the students develop neutral opinions in evaluating China's behaviors in the world as neither responsible nor irresponsible. This may slightly imply the reluctance of the students to pronounce a critical opinion on this. However, we can infer one of the possible sources of these opinions from the statistical analysis. Let's consider our empirical findings which indicate China is neither considered as a security partner nor a political ally. It is consistent with our findings that the survey participants do not consider China a responsible player globally.

The empirical findings imply that Nigerian students are realistic about the economic relations between Nigeria and China. For example, although they think that the Chinese development model is positive for Nigeria, they criticize Chinese companies for exploiting Nigeria's natural resources. Similarly, while a considerable number of students appreciate the increasing economic role of China in Nigeria and an influx of Chinese businesspeople into Nigeria, they realistically did not appreciate the influx of Chinese labor into Nigeria.

The empirical results show that Nigerian students have positive opinions about the character of commercial relations between Nigeria and China. Contrary to critical opinions on the character of China's relations with Nigeria (and Africa in general), they do not consider Nigerian imports from China as a threat or a source of dependence for the Nigerian economy, which is also one of the critics in the literature (Imanche et al., 2021; Arabaci & Ozden, 2019). However, the students do not have a positive impression that China improved infrastructure and contributed to human capital in Nigeria. It may be inferred that the respondents have realistic opinions on the benefits of trade but are also aware of the weak points in the relations,

such as the issues of infrastructure and human capital. Since the students praise the Chinese model of development, they may want to see more diversified direct investment in Nigeria's infrastructure and human capital.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The economic rise of China and its engagement with African states have become a source of debate in academic and political circles. Due to the subsequent economic development and global reach with mega-projects such as the Road and Belt Initiative and Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, China and its perception are at the epicenter of research focus and academic debate. Academically, it is worth studying whether significant growth is proportional to the perception of China.

The survey results are as follows: firstly, the internet and social media act as major sources of awareness, followed by in order, TV news and newspapers and magazines, family and friends and personal experience, and radio. Secondly, only 16% of university students had heard about China's 'One Belt One Road' initiative, whereas a good majority (61%) had never heard of this initiative. 23% of university students were not sure of the 'One Belt One Road' initiative of China. Thirdly, there was a low level of awareness regarding China's Forum on China-Africa Cooperation initiative amongst Nigerian university students. 32% of university students knew about Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, whereas 47% had never heard of this initiative.

Further, 21% of university students were not sure about this initiative. Fourthly, Nigerian students think that China has a strong influence on Africa and world affairs. They also think having strong economic, military, security, and political ties with China is paramount. However, they are almost neutral towards the responsible behavior of China as a global power. Fifthly, most university students (62%) considered China a commercial and trade partner. A total of 14% considered China as a development partner. Sixthly, students appreciate the Chinese development model and wish Nigeria to adopt the same model for its development. Nevertheless, they do not appreciate the influx of Chinese labor in Nigeria.

### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The current study had some shortcomings that must be addressed. The study used a quantitative technique and a closed-ended questionnaire. Other academics may consider employing qualitative research, e.g., interviews or focus groups, to better understand students' perceptions of China. The study used a low-level scale, i.e., multiple choice questions, which was another disadvantage of the current study. Lower-level scale restricts the statistical analysis skills and accounts for the complicated interpretation of the results. Other researchers may use higher-order scales for more accurate statistical analysis. The nonprobability sampling approach was utilised in the study to acquire relevant information from the sample respondents. Probability sampling is seen to be preferable for better portraying the population. As a result, other researchers are advised to perform their research using probability sampling.

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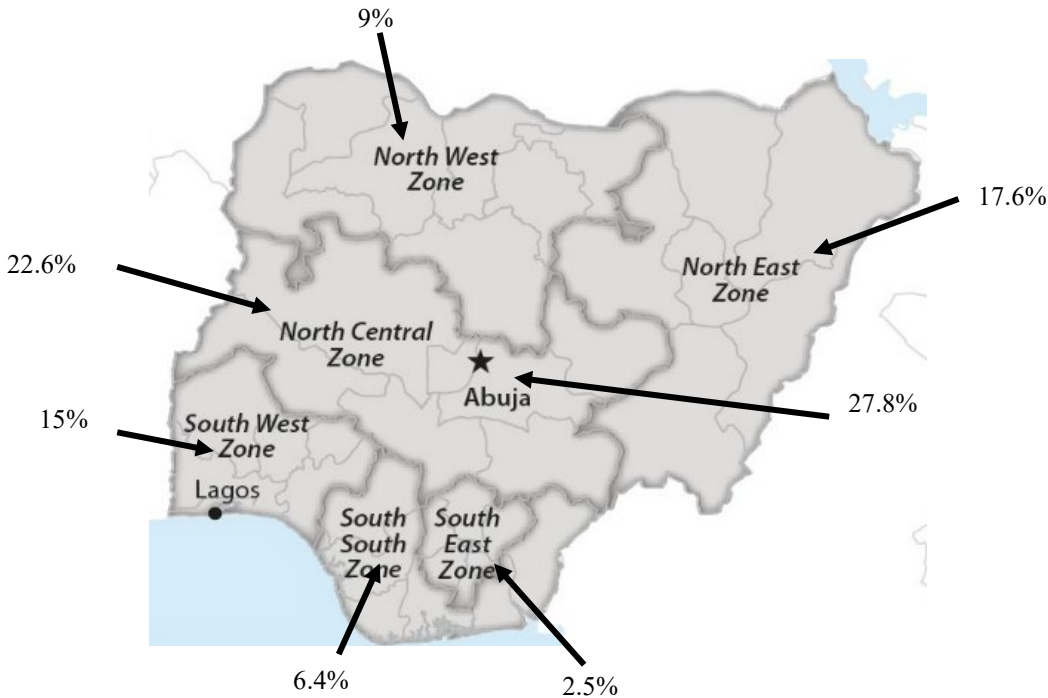
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## APPENDIX

## Political Zones of the Federal Republic of Nigeria



Source: Authors' work.

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