Nigeria is still lamenting about poverty, failed infrastructure, social welfare and the diversification of its economy and economic development even in the midst of plenty. Like her relationship with most other countries, Nigeria makes little effort in driving these relationships for her benefits. This study attempts to analyze the structure and character of Nigeria-China oil relations, highlighting the trade imbalance which has remained to the advantage of China and the inability of the Chinese to enhance Nigerian local content development in terms of personnel in the ensuing oil relations with Nigeria. The study also captures the continuous reliance of the Nigerian state on such developed countries, without looking inward towards self sufficiency in the near future.

Conceptualization

Bilateral Relations

A bilateral relation is the conduct of political, economic, or cultural relations between two sovereign states. This cannot be so in the isolation of the recognition of sovereign status of states by each other in the international system. Bilateral relations ensue when states recognize one another as sovereign states and agree to enter into diplomatic relations, thereby creating a bilateral relationship. States with bilateral ties will exchange diplomatic agents such as ambassadors, high commissioners, as the case may be, to facilitate dialogues and cooperation in areas of interest. China-Nigeria bilateral relations represent bilateral relationship between an Asian economic global giant, China, and Nigeria, an economic giant in West Africa sub region.

The relations between Nigeria and China which cut across political, trade, investment, aid and military spheres have grown so much in recent years. Okolie & Chime (2013, p.126) underscored the inevitability of inter-state relations emanating from the inherent tendency of man for social relations:

> The world of a man is in a flux. The fluidity of social relations conduces into the search for social coalescence, partnership and cooperation. Naturally, man is created with inbuilt and ever elastic gregarious instincts which propel man to enter into social relations with other men basically to eke out a living. These gregarious instincts combine with differential natural resource endowments to induce man to develop the propensity to partner with others to address the needs of the community. Fundamentally, the scenario opens new vistas of relations between and among states in a world of change.

The China-Nigeria bilateral relations have often been described as a powerful south-south alliance which can position the two countries to actualize their interests optimally. The Asian giant in its globalization move meets the African giant who aims to become one of the world's top 20 economies (Egbula & Zheng, 2011). China's growing presence in Africa, motivated by search for vital resources and new markets to fuel its economy coupled with a commitment to multilateralism resulting to trade and diplomatic offensive drive, have left much to be discussed.

Methodology

The researchers adopted qualitative descriptive method of data collection and analysis for the study. The data comprise mainly secondary sources of data consist of books, journals articles, official documents and Internet materials. The qualitative method of data collection is considered appropriate for this study because it has the potential to meaningfully analyze the terms and aid the understanding of the context of a problem study. To aid our generation of specific data on Nigeria-China bilateral relations and its effect on economic development of Nigeria, this work utilized the instrumentality of data collected from secondary sources, as mentioned earlier.

Theoretical Framework

This paper hinged its discussion on the Marxian political economy theory which was drawn from Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Frederic Engels' (1820-1895) work: "Social Production." Marx and Engels viewed Political economy as a comprehensive social science of change from the profit and exploitative capitalist system to a humane, social and public property system (Akpuru-Aja, 1998). Nolan (2002; p.1299) defines political economy as:

> ...the study of the interrelatedness of politics and economics, whether at the domestic or international levels. It is the use of economics models of rational choice to explain political decisions and actions; and the actual structures of the interrelated global (or regional/national) political and economic activity and phenomena, including but not limited to the world markets production and consumption patterns, global financial and trade institutions, multi-national corporations, and the states, their governments and myriad economic regulations.

The Marxian political economy theory recognizes the significance of economic factors in the determination of the behaviour of social groups and that social solidarity, economic relationship and conflict are interchangeably related to each other within a singular explanatory framework, considering the fact that they are products of the same mode and relations of production in material life of the society. In this context, the political economy theory evaluates the political and economic dominance and expansion of the capitalist mode of production. The focus of this approach centres on the contradictions, nature, dynamic changes and developments occurring within a given society (Akpuru-Aja, 1998; Udoh, 2015).

Marxian political economy theory is primarily concerned with economic determinism and supports the assumption that material conditions of life are dependent on economic factors which largely determine the behaviour of social groups. As such, these economic factors become the main focus in the study of relations that exist between actors in the international system. It deals with the production of material wealth which is the basis of the survival and sustenance of human society. In a bid to explain the significance of economic factors in the relations that exist between states, it captures the production processes, global relations of production, distribution and exchange, the contradictions of the global movement of capital as very significant in shaping, influencing and sustaining the behaviour of states (Akpuru-Aja, 1998; Onyia, 2012).

The paper adopts dialectical materialism as the defining method of analysis within the political economy theory. This is because the Marxian political economy theory operates within a social process which is holistic and thus employing the dialectical materialism method of analysis will help the adequate understanding of phenomena in terms of contradictions, struggles, conflict or even cooperation between opposites that produce new effects. Ake, cited in Onyia (2012), reveals that the main idea of dialectical materialism is the significance of economic factors as the major drive that sustains social life. It sees dialectical materialism as an analytical framework that investigates production and distribution relations, observes the process as an objective reality; highlights the contradictions of development inherent in the production and distribution process. The material conditions of life are in constant process of change due to tension(s) between conflicting or interacting forces, elements or ideas. According to Udoh (2015), the analytical, illuminating and predictive utilities of dialectical materialism as a framework of analysis are significant in its characteristics and will consist of the following:

a. The significance of material conditions
b. The dynamic character of reality
c. The relatedness of different elements of society

Application of the Theory

The Marxian political economy theory explains the relationship between the inconsistent pattern highlighted in Nigeria-China oil relations and Nigeria's inability to optimally utilize her foreign policy to enhance her interest and pursue her domestic economic and developmental objectives of becoming an economic giant within the West Africa sub-region, the Africa Region and the globe.

This theoretical framework sees crude oil trade as constituting the basis of Nigeria-China trade relations. China has overwhelmingly exported manufactured goods and imported mostly oil and other primary commodities which are raw and unprocessed from Nigeria. China is now the second largest consumer of petroleum products in the world, after the United States. China's increased domestic energy demand, along with declining domestic petroleum production and insufficient coal out-put, has spurred Beijing to pursue stable overseas sources of hydrocarbon fuels. Asian oil and natural gas production is not growing fast enough to meet Chinese demand, and a large portion of Middle Eastern oil and gas production is normally allotted to US and European markets (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/foreignrelations). In an effort to ensure energy security, China has shifted attention to Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Venezuela and African nations as likely hydrocarbon acquisition targets. An estimated 25 percent of China's total oil imports presently come from Africa. Beijing, therefore, placed a high priority on maintaining strong ties with its African energy suppliers, which Nigeria is the foremost in terms of oil production, investment potentials and market. China is replicating the old antics of the colonialists, using home or multinational companies as agents of penetration through her multinational companies like CNPC, SINOPEC, CCECC, etc. China is one of Nigeria's largest importers of crude oil. As at 2016, Chinese import of Nigerian crude and other petroleum products was valued at about USD 400 million (United Nations International Trade Statistics Database). Also, in 2017, Nigeria exports to China was valued at USD 721.26 Million, with mineral fuels, oils, distillation products constituting 82% (USD 588.81M) of the export made (https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/exports/china; UNComtrade).

In view of the foregoing, the theory proposes that Nigeria's oil is explored and exploited by China to ensure uninterrupted source of energy for its production sector to meet up with market demand for Chinese semi and finished products (Utomi, 2008; Bukarambe, 2005). Hence, we can agree that Nigeria-China relations and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in oil are trade agreements that seek to ensure the maintenance of the mutual strategies for accomplishing Chinese goal of uninterrupted flow of oil from Nigeria. In this light, Ezirim (2009) explains that such bilateral relations as illustrated in Nigeria-China bilateral relations are characterized by the domination of the economically weak economies by the dominant economies. Considering this, China's developed industrial base provides a convincing drive for expanded penetration of Nigeria. Such newly industrialized countries like China constitute a force in the increasing complexity of the world system, as they do not only relate directly on a sub-imperialist basis to the rest of the countries within the same South-South framework, but carefully provides for well-disguised vehicle for manipulation and exploitation of such weak economies like Nigeria.

Structure and Character of Nigeria-China Bilateral Oil Relations

Nigeria is abundantly blessed with both human and mineral resources. Its huge deposits of mineral resources such as petroleum and natural gas, solid minerals such as columbite, tar sands, tin, iron ore, coal, limestone, lead, zinc, gold, bitumen, talc, gypsum etc have positioned the country as an economic giant within the continent and West Africa sub-region. The Nigerian economy is heavily reliant on the oil sector. The International Monetary Fund estimates that the oil and gas sector in Nigeria accounts for over 95% of the foreign export earnings and about 65% of the Nigerian government revenue (Okonjo-Iweala, 2012). Momoh (2013) explained that Nigeria derives 41% of her Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and 88% of her collectable revenue from oil. Yet, Nigeria is among the poorest countries in the world, with the highest number of poor people in the world (Vanguard, July 3, 2018). The people are subjected to severe hardship, with infrastructure in a sad state of decay and life expectancy alarming.

In the case of China, it is observable that since China's economic reforms which started in 1978, China has become a highly diversified economy and one of the most consequential players in international trade with major sectors of competitive strength including manufacturing, retail, mining, steel, textiles, automobiles, energy generation, green energy, banking, electronics, telecommunications, real estate, e-commerce and tourism. In the words of Nenbee and Kalu, (2018, pp 117-118):

> …one might say China is no longer a developing economy but rather an emerging one. In fact, she has become one of the Asian Tigers. She belongs to the class of economies tagged the BRICS economic block namely Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The rise in Chinese economic dominance in the world has its roots in the late 1970's economic reforms which aimed at attaining economic growth and development.

With the increasing demand for infrastructure uplift due to the dilapidating state of infrastructure in the developing countries of Africa, China has been able to meet up with requirements needed to remedy the need of the moment. China has been able to develop its construction sector to become one of the world's largest and most competitive construction sector with particular expertise in the civil works critical for infrastructure development, coupled with its ability to provide the necessary financial assistance to the countries in need such as Nigeria (Okpeh, 2018). On the other hand, China's industrialization drive and massive inflow of FDI into its economy led to fast growing its manufacturing economy which requires oil and mineral inputs that are outstripping the country's domestic resources, hence the need to source these from abroad.

The major oil Multinational Companies operating in the oil and gas sector of Nigeria include Shell, ExxonMobil, Chevron, Total, Eni, Addax, Petrobras (Petróleo Brasileiro SA), CNOOC, SINOPEC, CNPC, amongst others. These Multinational corporations are either in joint-venture or production sharing arrangements with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). Thus, the Western oil MNCs that are operating in the Nigeria oil and gas sector control a considerable share of it. However, Chinese companies are also investing tremendously in the oil and gas sector in Nigeria. For example, China Petroleum and Chemical Group (SINOPEC) which is state-owned Chinese oil MNC and the largest in Asia and third largest in the world, recently acquired Addax Petroleum (Canadian oil Multinational Company) operating in the oil and gas sector of Nigeria. Also, in November 2012, SINOPEC acquired a total of 20% stake in a Nigerian offshore oilfield (https://journals.openedition.org/cea/1704?lang=en).

As regards the advancement of human and technological capacity base of the Nigeria oil and gas industry and economy in general, it could be argued that China's CNOOC and SINOPEC is set out to explore and exploit Nigeria's oil, with no commensurate effort to ensure Nigeria's economic development through the development of local content. Even that embarked upon by Addax, a subsidiary of SINOPEC, is still limited (Ndubuisi, 2018). There are fears about the intensive economic over-drive by Chinese multinational companies. It has been argued that Chinese economic interest is still exploitative, just like the western multinational companies which are only interested in extracting Nigeria's natural resources to enrich themselves (Ezirim, 2009). Also, Nigeria's oil relations with China have not remedied the increasing trade imbalance between Nigeria and China which has remained in favour of China.

The literature on Nigeria-China oil relations also agree that the evident structure and character of oil relations existing between Nigeria and China have not promoted the Nigerian oil industrial development capacity, rather it has undermined Nigeria's economic development. Chinese investment in African countries like Nigeria has remained an avenue to ensure continuous and uninterrupted extraction of natural resources needed by its production sector. Nigeria provides China with crude oil, while China utilizes her domestic endowment harnessing her natural resources, technological skill and industrial flexibility to process such raw materials imported from developing countries such as Nigeria to empower her primary-extractive sector, secondary/productive sector and tertiary-services sector. In most cases, the crude imported when refined, the produced surplus is still exported back to Nigeria (Udoh, 2015; Okpeh, 2018).

It can be argued that the guiding principles of Nigeria-China bilateral relations can be understood better by attempting to understand their economic relations. The Chinese have entered into agreements with Nigeria in critical areas like power, mining, rail way projects, oil supply, among others. This should suggest that China has a long term plan for its engagement with Africa. Initially driven by the need for mineral and energy resources for its growing industry, China has re-oriented and deepened its cooperation with African countries such as Nigeria to become a partner in development through the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Overtime, China has diversified investment beyond strategic resources to manufacturing; infrastructure; entrepreneurial development; cultural ties; and peacekeeping.

Chinese investment in developing countries, just like investment from the West, has been argued to have similar outlook, since both are attracted to large markets and countries with natural resource wealth that can enhance their economic interests. The difference, however, is that Western investment tends to stay away from countries with poor governance in terms of property rights and rule of law, while Chinese investment is really indifferent to these governance measures (Kwaghe, 2018). Thus, it can be argued that both China and the West are taking advantage of Africa's peculiar problems of underdevelopment to exploit Africa, and at the same time enhancing their economic interests. Whether Nigeria benefits from China's new stance depends on Nigeria's ability to formulate beneficial engagement strategies that would ensure progressive socio economic development taking advantage of the cooperation.

The National Bureau of Statistics 2018 report revealed Nigeria's largest import partners as China, Netherlands, Belgium, United States and India. We also observed that, whereas China remains Nigeria's highest importer, this cannot be said in terms of Nigeria's export partners as China did not make the list of Nigeria's largest export partners.

Table 1: Nigeria-China Bilateral Trade Volume 2008-2018 ($ USD)

Year	Export	Import	Trade Total	Trade Balance
2008	$268.1m	$4.3bn	$4.6bn	-$4.0bn
2009	$716.9m	$6.0bn	$6.7bn	-$5.3bn
2010	$1.4bn	$7.3bn	$8.8bn	-$5.9bn
2011	$ 2.5bn	$9.4bn	$12.0bn	-$6.9bn
2012	$8.0bn	$7.7bn	$15.8bn	$323.4m
2013	$1.1bn	$9.7bn	$10.8bn	-$8.6bn
2014	$1.7bn	$10.2bn	$11.9bn	-$8.5bn
2015	NA	NA	NA	NA
2016	$471.0m	$6.9bn	$7.4bn	-$6.5bn
2017	$721.3m	$5.8bn	$6.6bn	-$5.1bn
2018	$1.0bn	$8.3bn	$9.4bn	-$7.3bn

Source: Researchers' Compilation from UNComtrade

From Table 1, it can be seen that Nigeria-China bilateral trade volume which stood at US$9.4 billion in 2018 had a continuous trade deficit within the period studied. From the table, it can be argued that Nigeria's import volume from China continuously surpassed its export to China, hence the widening trade balance. Between 2008 and 2012, Nigeria's trade volume with China witnessed a progressive increase, from US$4.6 billion in 2008 to US$15.8 billion in 2012 reflecting about US$11.2 billion increase. While between 2012 and 2013 it decreased from US$15.8 billion to US$10.8 billion. From 2016 to 2018, Nigeria's bilateral trade volume with China increased from US$7.4 billion in 2016 to US$9.4 billion in 2018, though it witnessed a drop in 2017 to US$6.6 billion. Whereas Nigeria's bilateral trade volume with China kept increasing within the period studied, its trade balance also kept widening up, trade deficit of -US$4.0 billion in 2008 to –US$6.9 billion in 2011. The trade deficit decreased to –US$323.4 million in 2012, increasing to –US$8.6 billion and –US$8.5 billion respectively in 2013 and 2014 and by 2018 it stood at –US$7.3 billion. While Nigeria's crude oil export to China increased the trade volume between Nigeria and China, it did not significantly reduce the widening trade balance between Nigeria and China.

Emordi and Osiki (2009), highlighting Chinese involvement in Nigeria's oil sector, observed that, by 2000, China was not in any oil deal with Nigeria. Subsequently, China's CNOOC, SINOPEC, and others now have investments in Nigeria's oil and gas sector. China, in her great quest for crude oil to sustain its manufacturing drive and expanding economy, is ready to invest in Nigeria, in order to ensure her energy security. China is an emerging world power with a booming economy; she needs oil while Nigeria needs as much investment as possible and, at the same time, diversify the resources of its investment. Nigeria's preference for China over Western investors can be as a result of China's readiness to offer infrastructural development in exchange for drilling rights and also needed technology and expertise in critical areas of the Nigeria economy.

In July 2005, China entered into an USD 800 million crude oil deal with Nigeria, and Beijing was reconsidering USD 7 billion worth of investment in Nigeria within the period. This consideration gave birth to CNOOC agreeing on 9th January, 2006 to pay $2.3 billion for a stake in Nigerian oil and natural gas field (Edemode, 2010). The deal was described as China's largest ever overseas acquisition. Both the CNOOC and SINOPEC in their various career development policies have not ensured the optimal representation of the Nigerian workforce in their employment capacity and career development. It can be argued that the Nigerian content development is not a policy pursued by this oil multinationals. CNOOC and SINOPEC have failed to take advantage of the opportunities existing in the upstream and downstream sectors of Nigeria's oil and gas industry. As such the opportunities inherent in Nigeria's oil and gas industry are in the downstream and upstream sectors of the oil and gas industry.

In spite of the surmounting drive to satisfy her production industries at home considering their increasing energy demands and the resolve to exploit and explore Nigeria's natural resources, it has been argued in various forums that there has not been commensurate attempts by the Chinese to enhance Nigeria's human and technological performance capacity which will aid Nigerian local content drive in the oil and gas industry. Hurrel and Sengupta (2012) argue that the rise of new powers such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) has ensured an increasing macroeconomic gap between them and the rest of the developing countries, thus highlighting how backward the Third World or Global South really is. These big economies of the world keep aligning themselves and formulating such policies that can be described to be self serving and do not, to a large extent, put the interest of the developing countries of the world like Nigeria into consideration. According to Jimam (2009, pg.174):

> Esther Pan presents a compelling case on the place of oil in Sino-African relations when she argues that; China's voracious demand for energy to feed its booming economy has led it to seek oil supplies from African countries, particularly Sudan, Chad, Nigeria, Angola, Algeria, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Republic of Congo. It is an issue that has seen massive Chinese activity in the African oil industry. It is not a coincidence that Chinese interest significantly focuses on particular African States.

China's oil and gas market (both upstream and downstream) has been dominated by three national oil companies (NOC): China Petroleum and Chemical Group (SINOPEC), China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC). Within the Nigerian oil and gas industry, there exist operating contractual arrangements for Concession Agreements (Sole Risk); Joint Venture; Production Sharing Contracts (PSC) and Service Contract. The Addax Petroleum (Canadian oil Multinational Company) acquired by China Petroleum and Chemical Group (SINOPEC) is the only Chinese oil multinational company engaged in Production Sharing Contracts (PSC). There is nothing to show that China is interested in the development of Nigeria's local content. This is because there have not been proactive policies by the Chinese oil multinational companies to ensure that Nigeria does not remain only a reference for her continuous energy demands but a country with highly developed indigenous petroleum technology.

Conclusion

We agree that Nigeria-China oil relation within the period studied (2008-2018) is to the advantage of China and not to the advantage of Nigeria. This is because the Chinese policy of continuous exploration and exploitation of Nigeria's oil, without commensurately aiding Nigeria's local content oil development policy, presents China as an instrument for the continuous sustenance of the culture of deprivation and exploitation highlighted in imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. The difference now is that African countries like Nigeria are at the risk of another ugly experience from another power, now China, considering the unequal relationship existing between them and China. The deprivation and exploitation tendencies of China can be observed in her energy giant SINOPEC activities in the Nigerian oil and gas sector.

Recommendations

Based on our findings, we make the following recommendations:

1. Nigeria's oil local content development policy should be strengthened through research and development, reducing the over reliance on expatriates and the attendant capital flight that ensues from such bilateral relations with countries like China.
2. Nigeria's manufacturing capacity should be given attention through exploiting foreign direct investment adequately and a radical transformation of the Nigeria's economic structure through diversification of the economy.
3. Nigeria should learn from the successes and failures of bilateral relations entered with China by other states and their policies toward development, while also learning from their own experiences.

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