



## Validating perception on trade and economic governance: the case of Nigeria China trade interest in Kano state markets, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The trade and economic relations between Nigeria and China have witnessed tremendous improvement over the years from political to a more intense trade penetration of the Nigerian markets by China. However, these trade and economic relations were earlier established in the 1971. But China seemed to have succeeded in creating conditions necessary for Nigerian trade dependence by it crave for economic gain and development. The Chinese used the instruments of markets domination and economic favours to Nigeria, manipulation of product quality and price through the overbearing political influence over the Nigeria's policy institutions, investments, importations, etc. This study, using world system and dependency theories, investigates perception of trade and economic governance in Kano State Markets between the two countries making emphases to the China's trade interest in Kwari market Kano. It also assesses how China's interest influences the Nigerian trade policy mechanism and dependence on China using Kwari market as a reference point. The study used qualitative method of data collection and engaged the instrument of semi-structured interviews to gather information from various respondents. Nine respondents were selected from both the policy institutions (Ministry of Commerce) and Kano State markets particularly Kwari market via purposive sampling technique as its sample size. The data collected for the study were thematically content analysed. Thus, the finding reveals that the impacts of Chinese trade interest to dominate the Nigeria's markets, especially Kwari, influences its trade dependence on China. Similarly, China's overbearing political influence over the Nigeria's policy institutions and lack of structural policy mechanism by the Ministry of Commerce promote China's intense trade interest in Kwari market. In the end, the study offers policy recommendation to attract balance terms of trade and improve the Nigeria's weak policy institutions in order to achieve mutually beneficial relations.*

**Keywords:** Validation, Trade Governance, Interest, Perception, Nigeria, Kwari Market

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### 1.0 Introduction

This study focuses on validation of perception of trade governance between Nigeria and China while making reference to Chinese trade interest in Kwari market, Kano, Nigeria. This becomes necessary due

to the growing economic ties between Nigeria and China which demand for thorough analysis to assess the impact of Chinas trade interest in Nigeria's markets like Kwari via the strategic policy framework in regulating economic activities,



following the popular policy commitment of the Chinese “win-win” relationship. However, the Kano State Ministry of Commerce and Industry is somewhat dependent on the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment particularly in terms of policy formulation and implementation but it also performs the functions of monitoring compliance of commercial activities in the state markets. This entails that the Kano State Ministry of Commerce and Industry does not single-handedly manage the Nigeria-China trade relations as it lacks the structural mechanism to regulate trade activities between the two giants in the Nigeria’s market. The Kwari market is a non-formal and the largest textile market in sub-Sahara Africa which is not directly coordinated and managed by the Kano State Ministry but through some major associations like KACCIMA, KASTU and MAN (*Kano State Investors Handbook, 2016*).

More so, the Kano State government regards Kwari textile market to be an independent market in Kano which the Kano State Ministry of Commerce and Industry does not directly manage. Although Kano state is known for being a major Centre of commercial and manufacturing activities in the whole of West African sub-region even before Nigeria was fused into the European system of global commerce (*Kano State Investors Handbook, 2016*). But it grew to become Nigeria's second largest industrial and commercial centre that attract major investors including the Chinese, with over 500 medium and large scale industries across all branches of manufacturing activities such as textiles and apparels, plastic and rubber, paper and paper products, leather, food and beverages, basic industrial products, etc which the Ministry of Trade and Commerce oversees and regulates via

policy formulation and implementation (*Kano State Investors Handbook, 2016*).

However, the Nigeria-China economic relations cover many areas like politics, trade, investment, aid, oil and gas, technology, education, military and health to mention but a few. Emphasis would be given to the domestic factors that shape their relationship in terms of trade and how Nigeria views the role of China on the African continent. The Chinese government has described this relationship as a “win-win” situation while Nigeria as a partner remains quiet about the nature of the relationship (Agubamah, 2014). This work, using the world system and dependency theories, aims to show that the description by the Chinese government does not tally with the reality of Nigerian economic situation. But the burning questions remain whether China’s economic engagement in Nigeria is an opportunity or a challenge? Why can’t Nigerian domestic products and firms compete favourably with Chinese made products and industries? These constitute among others the fundamental concern for this research to investigate and eventually take position about the two giants’ relationships. Although the diplomatic relationship between Nigeria and the People’s Republic of China was formally established in February 1971 (Agubamah, 2014), the two countries first signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on the establishment of a strategic partnership in 2006 when the Chinese foreign minister visited Nigeria. Nigeria’s new relationship with China is not going to be smooth sailing because the structural economic dependency factor against Nigeria is still obvious.

While China’s economy is heavily diversified with the capacity building to export varieties of produce, Nigeria is still over dependent on oil as the commanding



height of its economy. Presently, Nigeria as a nation struggles to compete with China within the its domestic market, African market and Chinese market as well as against sharp business practices (Rindap, 2014). On the other hand, what Nigeria makes out of its present relations with China will depend more on how stable the political system is made, the security climate and the capacity of the leadership to affect a major structural economic transformation of the economy through sound policies. Therefore, China evidently needs Nigeria for energy source and a ready-made market for its cheap and colourful goods, hence, the importance of Kwari market in Kano State. In turn, Nigeria needs China to benefit from its rich industrial cluster models, technology transfer, strategic partnership and cheaper credit loans for infrastructural development. Furthermore, China's ever-growing economic ties with Africa and Nigeria, is inviting considerable attention. The expansion of trade and investment seems to have been generally welcomed in the continent. But concerns about how China's growing presence might affect the development of the African continent in which Nigeria and Kano State are parts, continue to trail the minds of Africans (Egbula & Qi, 2011). Although both countries expect to gain significantly from their economic engagement, there are however, a few stumbling blocks that could impede progress. Nigerians have expressed dissatisfaction with the labour practices of Chinese companies in Kano State, the quality of cheap imported goods into their markets and the impact of those imports on domestic producers. This is because the policy institutions do not help matters to check and control Chinese excesses in the State. Despite disputes on the attribution of responsibility for counterfeit and smuggled

goods to China, the two countries continue to assert their mutual friendship and goodwill. Ultimately, this research is designed to address these complex problems if the prevailing South-South coalition is to empower both countries to accomplish their economic goals (Egbula & Qi, 2011).

## **2.REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

This section examines the varying scholarly conceptual and theoretical literature on trade and economic relations between Nigeria and China. This covers wide range of policy governance on bilateral relationships where the Chinese influence exacerbated the Nigeria's trade dependency. Arguably, opinions and contradictions among scholars abound concerning the issue of Nigeria-China bilateral relations. While some argue that this relationship is for the good of Nigeria, others contend that China is only interested in the exploitation and acquisition of it natural resources. Therefore, this study reviews some of the contending opinions of scholars, their contributions and identify gaps in the literature which the study seeks to fill while focusing on the role played by the Nigeria's policy institutions on trade and economic governance. This study employs while organizing its literatures, the thematic review style as follows:

(a) Nature of Nigeria-China Economic and Trade Relations

(c) Institutional Mechanism for Economic and Trade Relations in Nigeria

### **2.1Nigeria-China Economic and Trade Relations at a Glance**

Trade and economic relations in the contemporary international system cannot be separated from politics. Nigeria's bilateral relations with China has gradually become an issue of domestic concern as Nigerians have become more aware of the lack of balanced trade with China (Muritala Oke,



2019). It has been observed, that this situation has led to a great economic disequilibrium, mainly to China's advantage. This signifies that the economic advantages have gone to China's way regardless of increase in trade volume between the two countries (Onwubiko, 2006, p. 43). Similarly, the expansion of Nigeria's economic interactions with China is constrained by several factors. These include the structural imbalance on the level of their trade relations, the inadequacy of the industrial infrastructure for promotion of trade relations, the incidence of flooding of the Nigerian market with substandard goods from China, the inability to implement various bilateral agreements between the two countries and the absence of competition of domestic industries, among others. However, review of related materials reveals that there has been cordial relationship between Nigeria and China despite the discernible lopsided nature of the relationship (Muritala Oke, 2019).

Scholars like (Jumbo, 2007, p.56, Soludo, 2006; Agbu,1994 & Danbala, 2014) argues that trade and economic relations between Nigeria and China have largely been viewed to have represented an orthodox form of trade imbalance which is the feature that characterizes developed and developing economies. This is obviously a reality going by the aim of this study when contrasted with noticeable degree of complementarities and the nature of trade relations between the two countries. These are reflected in the different levels of economic and trade progress and strength. But what the author seems to have failed to assess is how the policy regulatory mechanism constraints Nigeria and favours China's economic and trade gains within the facet of the entire bilateral relations. The authors arguments appeared to be a useful tool for this study on

the other hand especially since they admit the degree of commodity grouping which clearly shows China's interest in acquiring Nigeria's natural resources (Haruna, 2017). The Chinese imports consist of mainly primary resource while its exports to Nigeria consist of mainly cheap products to exploit the Nigerian markets like Kwari market.

Thus, the growth and expansion of the Chinese industrial base has provided motivation for China to explore the Nigerian economy, which provides huge markets for China with enormous procurement power (Muritala Oke, 2019). Therefore, the Chinese industrial strength has neglected and hampered the existing Nigerian manufacturing sector that could have stood on its own ever since the diplomatic links were established. This research is thus important as it tries to evaluate the role of the policy institutions governing these diplomatic linkages as they affect balance of trade in Nigeria (Viloria, 2009, Michael, 2006, p. 17 & Ibrahim & Sayuti, 2017). These studies have observed that, for many years, Nigeria has provided market opportunity for China's products. But what remains a source of major concern is the perceived negative role which the Chinese companies have exhibited and continue to show in the Nigeria and Africa in general. Consequently, this role negates the fulfillment of the Nigerian inward economic development for its citizenry. The author should have identified the domestic factors which would likely help understand the continuous negative role of the Chinese investors in Nigeria (Haruna, 2017). This would have indicated the lopsided nature of their diplomatic links. But even with regulatory mechanisms in place, the state of economic and trade decay continues to provide China with the absolute opportunities to take over every aspect of



manufacturing sector of Nigeria and utilizes in contrast the advantages gained by other trade partners. However, the writer does not emphasize on the importance of effective policies that would create balance in the Nigeria-China trade and economic relations to be achieved through well thought out trade policies (Muritala Oke, 2019). It is the hope of this work to examine the impact of this lopsided economic engagement that characterizes Nigeria and China relations through the governance of the Nigeria-China economic relations particularly on trade.

## **2.2 Institutional Mechanism for Economic and Trade Governance in Nigeria**

This part remains essentially important for this study as it attempts to assess existing literature on policy governance. However, there is limited or no available study that discusses policy performance of the Kano State Ministry of Commerce and Industry in Kwari market. Consequently, this work relies solely on some of the Federal and State ministries' reports presented by the former Minister of Commerce and Industry, Olusegun Aganga. Thus, the Department of Trade evolved as a mega department, following the merger of the Federal Ministries of Commerce and Industry because of restructuring and rationalization of departments arising from the public-sector reform of the immediate past administration (fmti.gov.ng). According to Olusegun Aganga, the Department of Trade has statutory responsibilities for the promotion, formulation, execution and implementation of domestic and external trade policies for Nigeria. Thus, the focus of the Department is to create an enabling environment for both domestic and international trade as well as investment to thrive. This is to facilitate the achievement of rapid economic development, healthy balance of payment and other benefits

accruable from international trade, such as specialization, market expansion and inflow of foreign capital. This policy thrust involves trade negotiations at both multilateral regional and bilateral levels, for better market access for Nigerian goods and services in the international markets as well as facilitating inter- and intra-state commerce. The Department of Trade is divided into multilateral trade, bilateral trade, trade promotion; and trade information and complaints where the World Trade Organization (WTO), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Intra-African Trade; and African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) have formed branches of the multilateral trade (<http://www.fmti.gov.ng>). Therefore, having reviewed these literatures on Nigeria-China bilateral relations that covers both economic and trade, the findings reveal mixed reactions. Some of the gaps which these reviews identified and which the study seeks to fill include how economic interest implicates Nigeria-China economic relations in terms of trade and that little or no much work has been done in this field using qualitative method of analysis, what is available is mostly quantitative in nature.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The research adopts qualitative design and method of data collection to describe, interpret and analyse data obtained based on the responses of the participants from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Kwari market in Kano State as observed by Kohlbacher (2005). This method was employed following its significance of openness to changes and refinement of research ideas. The research instrument used is a semi-structured interview which aims at gathering relevant information from the target respondents. Further, the input generated is used to answer the research





questions and to test the relevant hypotheses developed in this study. The area of this study is on Nigeria-China economic relations regarding trade in Kwari market, Nigeria. Subsequently, this research is largely guided by secondary sources consisting of government official documents, journals, articles, published books, magazines, newspapers, international organization official documents, websites, etc.

### **3.1 Sample**

The sample size of this study consists of trade policy stakeholders from the Kano State Ministry of Commerce and Industry and business merchants from Kwari market, Kano. The researcher used purposive sampling strategy based on the research goals, (Bryman, 2012). According to Bryman (2012) “Purposive sampling is seen as a non-probability form of sampling where the researcher does not seek to sample research participants on a random basis”. The reason for this was to obtain an in-depth explanation based on the participants’ experience from both the Ministry and Kwari market since the researcher should be clear on what the criteria are, and that will be relevant to the inclusion or exclusion of any unit of analysis. The researcher aims at using experience, position and level of education as criteria to highlight common experience of the respondents in their respective domain. On one hand, people with vast experience in terms of trade policy administration at the Department of Commerce who are relatively senior officials and who must have attended tertiary level of education were interviewed. Similarly, officials from Kwari market who have gathered enormous experience in trading activities and have also obtained at least secondary education were also interviewed. To this end, Bryman (2012),

points out that sample size must not be too large to avoid difficulty in undertaking case-oriented analysis and that data collected for this study were thematically analysed.

## **4. FINDINGS**

### **4.1 China and the Nature of its Interest in Kwari Market, Kano**

China’s interest in economic gain anchored on its going out strategy perpetually necessitates China to make a series of move to secure access to domain of natural endowment in African countries like Nigeria. Taylor (2006) argues that the essence of China’s trade and investment growth in African countries is propelled by an interest to procure cheap sources of raw materials to fuel its expanding economy.

However, because of these Chinese motives for economic gain and development, the respondents have argued that, Kwari market happens to be among many markets in Africa that fall within the Chinese grasp and where trade activities prove obviously lopsided. For instance, in an interview with some of the target respondents, they argued that, China’s interest in Nigeria is to have more access to the market and make a lot of gains that could be taken back to their country for economic development because substantial products traded in Kwari markets are coming from China.<sup>1</sup> This entails that significant favour and benefits go to the Chinese investors in the market of Kwari as they are fully involved during the daily business transactions to establish their dominance in the market. Another interviewee, explained that, Chinese investors are also in Kwari market because they are aware about the local’s weaknesses, negligence and absence of strict rule implementation on the part of Nigeria’s leaders due to corruption. They have now

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<sup>1</sup> Interview- respondent DU 13-14



gone beyond the role of distributor, playing the role of retailers who sell small quantity to earn a living<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, some interviewees posited that, China would always want to extend its search for economic gain in big markets like Kwari<sup>3</sup>.

In essence, the respondents repeated the same thing in different words, implying that China is creating conditions causing unemployment among the locals and market domination to perpetrate its economic interest, at the expense of Nigerian merchants. In terms of opportunities towards Chinese interest in Kwari market, the explanations generated from the interviews in a way encapsulate the patriotic tendencies of the marketers in Kwari as observed in their responses. They further asserted that, China is interested in the Nigerian market because it is the most populous country in Africa. Its economy is growing faster than any other country in Africa. China has interest in Nigerian markets because of its potential to grow and provide market for the Chinese mass-produced cheap goods. China would always want to extend its search for economic gain in big markets like Kwari because Nigerian's vast markets and weak economic policy give China the chance to engage in economic relations with a strategic country since it serves as the best market in sub-African region<sup>4</sup>.

Following opportunities that China cannot afford to misuse, it is perpetually expanding her interest of economic gain and development in the Nigerian markets as a result of some reasons. Simply put these comprises of, the loose nature of the Nigeria government that is always open to favours from economically buoyant countries like China who in return take advantage of its

undeveloped economic and political structure. This can be supported by Eneji's (2012) who maintains that, part of the reasons China gains trade surplus with Nigeria is due to the different economic structures between the two countries. Similarly, the perpetration of Chinese economic interest in Nigerian markets has been widely attested to by the respondents from among Kwari marketers.

In this regard, all respondents from the Ministry and Kwari market had unanimously admitted massive Chinese presence in Kwari market in pursuance of their economic interest. In the words of almost all respondents, they unanimously affirmed the glaring presence of Chinese investors in their midst where they argued respectively that, Nigerians" do have an idea about the Chinese presence in the local markets especially Kwari because recently they had received a number of complaints from the marketers in Kwari that the Chinese dominate almost everything, and they felt that they had to survey to analyze the situation and see what can be done in favour of the marketers. Some of them expressed words of gratitude's to their god to affirm their knowledge about the Chinese presence in their markets and are taking all the necessary steps to solve the problem. In fact, this issue is not only occurring in Kwari because the Chinese are also investing even in the production of bread and want to start producing pure water but that idea was put to a stop.<sup>5</sup> Nigerian current economic state within sub-Saharan Africa is characterized as the fastest growing economy stimulating China to pervasively penetrate more into its markets like Kwari. According to the respondents from Kwari market, due to China's trade monopoly and

<sup>2</sup> Interview- respondent DU 13-14

<sup>3</sup> Interview- respondent DU 13-14

<sup>4</sup> Interview- respondent 1-DU 13-14

<sup>5</sup> Interview- respondent DU 7-8 and DU 3-4



domination, their trade activities and penetration are becoming stronger. In their explanation, five out of the nine respondents respectively argued that, China benefits more than Nigeria.<sup>6</sup> They added that the Nigeria-China trade relations is characterized by an unequal economic gain. It is believed that when one benefits more than the other in trade relations, that could be termed as a lopsided relation as in the case of Nigeria and China. This can further be explained based on the opinion of the Chairman of Tofa Group of Companies who said that, “it is extremely disheartening that Chinese have taken over the distribution of textile materials in Kwari market Kano” (Musa, 2015). According to him, the Chinese imported these materials from their country into Nigerian markets where they rent shops to perform retail activities themselves. To him, this is entirely unhealthy for the Nigerian economy as it is widely believed among business merchants in Kwari market, that the Chinese act at the expense of their economy. The implication for this is that, it further worsens the conditions of youth unemployment because of the fact that the Chinese have taken over their chances of business, as most Nigerian youth do not have adequate capital compared to the Chinese to run businesses. In this instance, these youths and their dislodged traders in the market become heavily dependent on the Chinese acting as their agents. Danbala (2014) examined how China views the economic potentials of Nigeria within the purview of her pool of population in the continent of Africa as an important and strategic market outlet for its cheap manufactured goods. He maintains that, it has even gone to the extent where Chinese companies are now involved in

contracts and construction activities in Nigeria.

In addition, it may be pertinent to note that, the Chinese penetration and market take over in Nigeria has manifested more visibly in the last two decades according to the respondents and that its impact is now felt everywhere in Kwari market. In their explanation, one respondent observed that, the Chinese have been in this kind of practice in Kwari market for the past 15 years which eventually led to the recent protest of the Yan Marina (tie and dye) late last year 2015<sup>7</sup>. According to Garba (2015), the Chairman of the Kwari market association observed that, the Chinese influence in the pursuit of their interest has now reached to an extent where they determine price and supply of textile products in Kwari market. Similarly, he argues that, if they produce a particular design of a product locally, the Chinese would make a sample and reproduce the same product with reduced quality to be sold in the same market at a cheaper price. The perpetuation of the Chinese interests according to this research poses a major threat to the Nigerian markets like Kwari. Many have accused the Chinese of imitative innovation in producing certain materials which originally do not belong to them and which they export to Kwari market to sell at the expense of the local traders.

Ogunsanwo (2007) argues that, while Nigeria remains a good market for Chinese goods and investment, over flooding the Nigerian markets especially Kwari with cheap and low-quality Chinese products would lead to the demise in the capacity of nascent industries in the country. Nigeria provides large markets for China which has immense purchasing power. The implication

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<sup>6</sup> Interview- respondent DU 7-8

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<sup>7</sup> Interview- respondent DU 7-8





is a clear illustration according to the respondents for why local industries in Kano like the major textile industry which used to provide textile materials for the whole of West Africa called 'Nabbaba Badamasi company' are thwarted. One of the respondents argued that, local industries have been shut down as they cannot compete with the difficulties thereby increasing the rate of unemployment<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, he maintains that, because of the importation of cheap Chinese textile materials, cost of production has become higher and thus it is better to import<sup>9</sup>. In this light, it simply connotes to the fact that Nigerian manufacturers would prefer to import the cheap Chinese products than to produce locally due to high cost of production in the country. The Chinese industrial strength would always neglect and hamper the Nigerian manufacturing sector that could have stood on its own ever since the establishment of the Nigeria-China diplomatic relations in 1971.

To this end, while China is driven by the interest for economic gain that makes her exploration of Nigeria's Kwari market on the increase, global economic recognition remains essential for China in the never-ending rivalry with the West at the world stage, (Danbala, 2014). This is evident in the argument of the 8<sup>th</sup> respondent who posited that, nowadays China is trying to become a super power and because of this they use every opportunity they get to achieve what they want. The gain a country like China would make if it can get the Nigerian markets to sell its products is immense. China has taken advantage of the Nigerian markets especially Kwari market to generate more revenue for their country<sup>10</sup>. This

means that, asserting global economic recognition remains part of China's crave for economic development and place to market its manufactured products. This would continue to flow into Kwari market and Nigeria in general due to further political indebtedness of the Nigerian government that does not give much concern to those forces that would undermine the country's manufacturing sector. The respondents have revealed that, China's trade penetration into Kwari market is a clear symbol of its economic interest to dominate African countries, to drive benefit and assert its global position.

### **5. Conclusion**

This research reveals the impacts of Nigeria-China trade relations in Kwari market via the role of Kano State Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The findings show that Chinese trade penetration into the Nigerian markets especially Kwari is driven by its crave for economic expansion and development. Encouraged by its going out strategy, Africa's large economic potentials provide leverage for China to intensify exploration of economic benefits to enhance its internal economic development. As part of the Chinese pursuit of economic gain, penetration into Kwari market, Kano is a giant step in asserting global economic relevance in an unending rivalry with the West within the African continent (Danbala, 2014). Similarly, the research found that there are huge consequences surrounding the Nigeria-China trade relations in Kwari market. These impacts range from high level of trade disequilibrium, domination of trade activities in Kwari market, manipulations of product quality through negotiation, undermine of Nigerian productive capacity of local industries, import dependence on China, political impositions that create excessive desire for cheap Chinese products,

<sup>8</sup> Interview- respondent DU 8-9

<sup>9</sup> Interview- respondent DU 6-7

<sup>10</sup> Interview- respondent DU 11-12



among others. The finding demonstrates that there is a virtually weak and ineffective role played by the Kano State Ministry of Commerce and Industry in managing the Nigeria-China trade activities in Kwari market, hence the dependence of Nigerian markets on Chinese products, (Lyakurwa, 2009). Therefore, the study recommends that government must provide sound trade and economic policies that would guarantee efficient regulations in its trade relations. Nigeria's trade posture is considered separate from its foreign economic position (Alayande, 2020). This would mean increasing beneficial Concentrics and gaining more internal capabilities. In view of this dispensation, Nigeria must focus on strategic trade policy that focus on economic pragmatism that would guarantee domestic balance of power. This would help in the production efficient policy guides for the two countries (Nigeria-China).

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