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2024

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Mojela, Tshenolo. (2024). The economic and geopolitical implications of China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia: A comparative analysis [Masters dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg]. WIReDSpace. https://hdl.handle.net/10539/44924

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JOHANNESBURG

The economic and geopolitical implications of China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia: A comparative analysis

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Dissertation Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts (MA) in International Relations at the University of the Witwatersrand School of Social Sciences and Faculty of Humanities

Johannesburg, South Africa

28 June 2024

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work presented in this dissertation is my own, except where an explicit acknowledgement of sources and references is made. The statements and opinions of interview respondents are also duly recognised in this study. I, Tshenolo Mojela, affirm that my academic research complies with the University of the Witwatersrand's plagiarism policy.

Signed: 

Name: Tshenolo Mojela

Date: 28 June 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I want to express my deepest gratitude to God, without whom none of this would have been possible. His guidance and provision have been instrumental in leading me to complete this dissertation. All glory to Him.

I also extend my heartfelt thanks to my incredible mother, whose unwavering support has been my rock throughout this journey. I am profoundly grateful to the experts who participated in my research, as their invaluable time, resources, and insights have made an undeniable difference in this study.

My sincere thanks to Prof. Garth Shelton, my previous supervisor, for his support and participation in my research interviews.

I also want to express my gratitude to my colleagues, friends and family, who have always championed my educational journey.

Lastly, I extend my deepest appreciation to Mr. Gordon Freer, my dedicated supervisor, for his unwavering guidance, dedication, and invaluable feedback. At the start of this journey, Mr. Freer's weekly meetings were instrumental, and his availability to answer my questions has been truly invaluable.

And I would like to thank myself for my perseverance and determination to finish this journey intact. Though arduous, pressing on has indeed been worth it.

ABSTRACT

The BRI, launched by China in 2013, has significantly reshaped global economic and geopolitical landscapes through extensive infrastructure projects to enhance global connectivity. This dissertation examines the economic and geopolitical implications of the BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia, two pivotal African partners of the initiative. Despite a global decline in FDI to developing countries, Africa's FDI remained stable, with notable increases in BRI-related engagements. Nigeria and Ethiopia have received substantial investments, boosting their infrastructure and economic capacities while raising concerns about increased debt dependency and potential geopolitical shifts favouring China. Employing dependency theory, this research explores how the BRI influences Nigeria and Ethiopia's agency, economic dependencies, and sovereignty. This dissertation contributes to the broader understanding of the BRI's role in shaping Africa's geopolitical landscape and offers insights into the responses of African nations to this transformative global initiative. The findings are valuable for policymakers, scholars, and stakeholders interested in China's engagement strategy in Africa, informing the development of policies that leverage the benefits of the BRI while mitigating potential risks to ensure sustainable and equitable growth for African nations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and context of the BRI 2

1.2 Problem Statement 8

1.3 Theoretical lens of the study 8

1.4 Significance and Scope of the Study..... 12

1.5 Research question and sub-questions 14

1.6 Methodology 15

1.7 Structure of the paper 19

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction 21

2.1 Theoretical framework: Dependency theory 22

2.1.1 Dependency theory's criticism 28

2.2 Neocolonialism concept and soft power concept 32

2.2.1 Neocolonialism 32

2.2.2 Soft Power 35

2.3 Application to the Research 37

2.3.1 Neocolonialism and soft power concepts as lenses for the study 39

2.4 Conclusion 41

2.5 Research Methodology 42

2.6 Selection of Case Studies 45

2.6.1 Rationale 45

2.6.2 Sampling Criteria 46

2.6.3 Data Collection Methods 47

2.7 Document Analysis 47

2.7.1 Case Studies 47

2.7.2 Interviews 48

2.8 Ethical Considerations 48

2.8.1 Anonymity and Confidentiality 49

2.8.2 Reflexivity 49

2.9 Conclusion 50

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction 51

3.1 Africa's Infrastructure Crisis 53

3.1.1 Deficit and Impact 54

3.1.2 Challenges 54

3.1.3 Efforts and Initiatives 55

3.2 The BRI: A Geopolitical and Economic Endeavor 56

3.3 The BRI in Africa 59

3.3.1 Historical Evolution of China-Africa Relations in the 21st Century 60

3.4 African countries' scepticism towards the BRI 61

3.4.1 Assessing BRI Projects in Nigeria 63

3.4.2 Assessing the BRI in Ethiopia 65

3.4.3 China's Growing Influence in Nigeria and Ethiopia 67

3.5 Competition with Other Foreign Powers 69

3.5.1 Counterbalancing China's BRI 71

3.5.2 The EU's Global Gateway 73

3.5.3 The U.S Response 75

3.5.4 India and Japan's AAGC 76

3.5.5 Multifaceted competition: BRI, PGII and AAGC 78

3.6 African Agency and Its Role in China-Africa Relations 82

3.6.1 Nigerian and Ethiopian Agency 83

3.6.2 Implications for Sovereignty and Development 86

3.7 Chinese Debt Trap 88

3.8 Conclusion 92

CHAPTER 4: ETHIOPIA CASE STUDY

Introduction 95

4.1 Shaping the Geopolitical Landscape of Ethiopia 96

4.1.1 The Italian Occupation of 1935-1941 96

4.1.2 Post-WWII Period and Decolonisation 100

4.1.3 Cold War Dynamics 102

4.1.4 Eritrean War of Independence (1961-1991) 109

4.1.5 Border Conflicts and Regional Dynamics 113

4.1.6 Ongoing Challenges 116

4.2 The Evolution of China-Ethiopia Relations: A Historical Tapestry 117

4.2.1 Ethiopia's Geopolitics with the BRI 122

4.3 Economic Implications 125

4.3.1 Infrastructure Development 126

4.3.2 Hawassa Industrial Park 128

4.3.3 Impact of the BRI on Industries and key sectors 130
4.3.4 Debt Sustainability Concerns 132
4.3.5 Foreign Powers 134
4.4 Conclusion 138
CHAPTER 5: NIGERIA CASE STUDY
Introduction 142
5.1 Shaping the Geopolitical Landscape of Nigeria 144
5.1.1 British Colonial Era 144
5.1.2 1960: Nigeria's Independence 148
5.1.3 Civil War (1967-1970) 151
5.1.4 Military Rule 153
5.1.5 Return to democracy 154
5.1.6 Post 2000s 156
5.2 The evolution of China-Nigeria Relations: A Historical Tapestry 159
5.3 Economic Implications 167
5.3.1 Kano-Maradi railway project 167
5.3.2 Zungeru hydroelectric power project 169
5.3.3 Lagos-Ibadan expressway project 171
5.4 Nigeria's Geopolitics with the BRI 175
5.5 Conclusion 178
CHAPTER 6: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS
Introduction 183
6.1 Restating the Research Questions and Objectives 184

6.2 Description of Comparative Framework 185

6.3 Case Studies Presentation and Analysis 185

6.3.1 Ethiopia's Engagement with the BRI 186

6.3.2 Nigeria's Engagement with the BRI 187

6.3.3 Comparative analysis of the case studies 189

6.3.3.1 Integrating the theoretical framework 192

6.4 Discussion of Cross-Case Themes 199

6.4.1 Infrastructure Development 199

6.4.1.1 Electricity, Water, Sanitation and Transport Infrastructure 200

6.4.1.2 Long-Term Implications and Strategic Considerations 201

6.4.2 China’s Geopolitical Strategy in Africa 202

6.4.2.1 Responses of Nigeria and Ethiopia to the BRI 204

6.4.2.2 Geopolitical Dynamics and Competition 205

6.4.3 Competition with Other Foreign Powers 206

6.4.3.1 Counterbalancing China’s BRI 206

6.4.3.2 The U.S. Response 208

6.4.3.3 India and Japan’s AAGC 209

6.4.3.4 Multifaceted Competition: BRI, PGII, and AAGC 209

6.4.4 African Agency and Its Role in China-African Relations 210

6.4.4.1 Historical Context and Sovereignty 211

6.4.4.2 Structural and Institutional Factors 211

6.4.4.3 Economic Dependency and Negotiation Dynamics 212

6.4.4.4 Learning from Successful and Unsuccessful Projects 213

6.4.4.5 Socio-Cultural and Political Considerations 214
6.4.4.6 Security and Geopolitical Implications 214
6.4.5 Challenges and Criticisms 215
6.4.6 Dependency Theory and Economic Interdependencies 219
6.4.7 Future Developments and Trends in China-Africa Relations 224
6.4.7.1 Strategic Adaptation and Multilateral Engagement 224
6.4.7.2 Economic Diversification and Soft Power Initiatives 225
6.4.7.3 Financial Constraints and Strategic Planning 226
6.5 Conclusion 227
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 32
CHAPTER 8: REFERENCES 238
APPENDICES 261

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAGC - Asia-Africa Growth Corridor

AfDB - African Development Bank

AIIB - Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

ASEAN - Association of Southeast Asian Nations

AU - African Union

B3W - Build Back Better World

BRI - Belt and Road Initiative

CDB - Commercial Bank of China

CCP - Chinese Communist Party

CCCC - China Communications Construction Company

CCECC - China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation

CPEC - China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

CRCC - China Railway Construction Corporation

DFC - Development Finance Corporation

DRC - Democratic Republic of the Congo

EAC - East African Community

ECLAC - United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

ECOWAS - Economic Community of West African States

EEA - Ethiopian Economic Association

EIC - Ethiopian Investment Commission

EIZ - Eastern Industrial Zone

ELF - Eritrean Liberation Front

EPLF - Eritrean People's Liberation Front

EPDM - Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement

EPRDF - Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front

Exim Bank - Export-Import Bank

FDI - Foreign Direct Investments

FOCAC - Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

G7 - Group of 7

GCC - Gulf Cooperation Council

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

GERD - Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

HDI - Human Development Index

ICBC - Industrial and Commercial Bank of China

ICT - Information Communication Technology

IGAD - Intergovernmental Authority on Development

IMEC - India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor

IMF - International Monetary Fund

ITAN - Infrastructure Transaction and Assistance Network

JICA - Japan International Cooperation Agency

KMT - Nationalist Government Kuomintang

MEND - Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta

MoU - Memorandum of Understanding

NCNC - National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons

NNDP - Nigerian National Democratic Party

NPC - Northern People’s Congress

OAU - Organisation of African Unity

PGII - Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment

PIDA - Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa

PRC - People’s Republic of China

RAF - Royal Air Force

REC - Regional Economic Communities

ROC - Republic of China

SADC - Southern African Development Community

SDGs - Sustainable Development Goals

TAF - Transaction Advisory Fund

TPLF - Tigray People's Liberation Front

UAE - United Arab Emirates

USA - United States of America

USD - United States Dollar

USSR - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

ZLD - Zero-Liquid Discharge

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

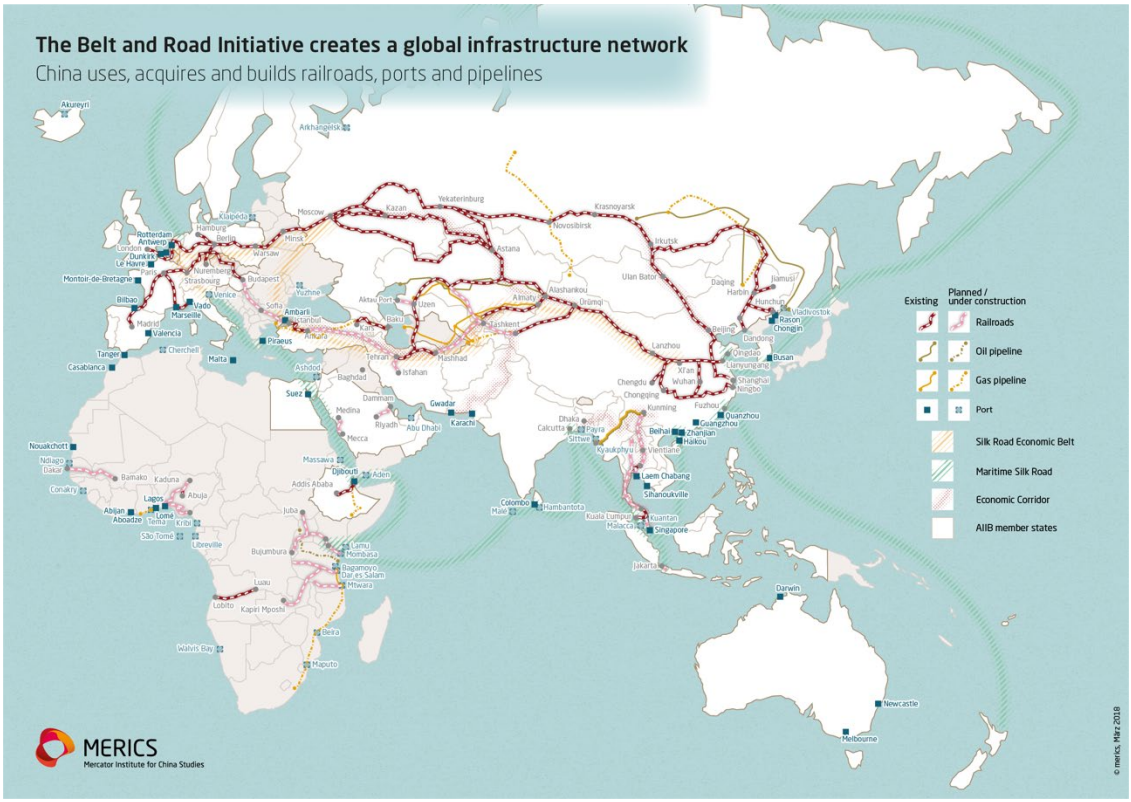
The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has emerged as a transformative force in the global economic landscape since its launch in 2013. Spearheaded by China, the BRI aims to enhance global connectivity through extensive infrastructure projects, fostering economic growth and integration across continents. While global foreign direct investments (FDI) to developing countries fell from USD 923.08 billion to USD 841 billion in 2023—a 9% decline—FDI in Africa remained more stable at an estimated USD 48 billion, highlighting the continent's growing strategic importance (Wang, 2024). In fact, in 2023, Africa emerged as the largest recipient of BRI engagement, with a 47% increase in construction contracts and a 114% rise in investments, resulting in USD 21.7 billion in BRI engagements, surpassing the Middle East's USD 15.8 billion, which had been the largest recipient the previous year (Wang, 2024). In line with these developments, Nigeria and Ethiopia have become central to China's BRI strategy in Africa, receiving substantial investments to boost their infrastructure and economic capacities.

The BRI has generated substantial interest and debate among scholars, policymakers, and the international community. Proponents argue that the initiative offers significant benefits for participating countries, including improved infrastructure, economic growth, and increased access to global markets (Chhibber, 2017). Critics, however, raise concerns about the potential drawbacks, such as increased debt dependency on China, the potential for neocolonial exploitation, and the geopolitical shifts resulting from enhanced Chinese influence (Du, 2016). This current research explores the economic

and geopolitical implications of the BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia, examining how the initiative influences their national sovereignty, economic dependencies, and regional power dynamics.

1.8 Background and context of the BRI

The BRI is a global infrastructure development strategy initiated by China in 2013 (Chang, 2019). The BRI aims to promote economic cooperation and connectivity between China and the rest of the world, particularly countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa (Cai, 2017). The BRI includes two main components: the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, forming a network of land and sea routes connecting China with other countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa (Chhibber, 2017).



(Retrieved from Mercator Institute for China Studies, 2020)

The BRI echoes the ancient Silk Road's legacy by promoting global economic connectivity. The ancient Silk Road had no national boundaries. For more than 15 centuries, merchants travelled freely along an extensive network of roads and sea routes, trading goods and enabling the transfer of knowledge between Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. In the process, trade and travel along the Silk Road changed the nature of manufacturing activity and services in much of the then-developed world, improved city-states' administration, and enabled the spread of business ideas (Djankov & Miner, 2016). Both initiatives facilitate cross-regional trade, cultural exchange, and economic cooperation on a significant scale, transcending historical and modern geopolitical boundaries.

Since its launch in 2013, the BRI has grown significantly to include over 3,000 projects in 152 countries and regions, including Nigeria and Ethiopia (Cai, 2017), including constructing roads, railways, ports, and other facilities (Chhibber, 2017). However, there have been debates about the impact of these projects on the national economies and the potential risks of debt distress for participating countries (Du, 2016). On the contrary, Xinhua (2023) argues that the BRI is transforming the economic competitiveness of its partner countries. A study done at the World Bank reported that the BRI is expected to add real income gains of between 1.2 and 3.4 per cent for participating nations. Furthermore, BRI transport projects could reduce travel times along economic corridors by 12 per cent, increase trade between 2.7 per cent and 9.7 per cent, and lift 7.6 million people from extreme poverty (Xinhua, 2023).

Djankov and Miner (2016) argue that the BRI consolidates China's economic priorities abroad, building on the success of the 1999 "Going Out" policy, which significantly increased China's trade with resource-rich countries in Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Additionally, they state that China has several reasons for promoting the BRI. Primarily, as the world's largest trading nation, China aims to reduce the costs of transporting goods, benefiting global trade by improving infrastructure and reducing travel times and costs.

Additionally, the BRI aims to diversify China's economic growth by decreasing its reliance on domestic infrastructure investment.

This shift allows Chinese construction companies and equipment manufacturers to find new markets overseas. The initiative also seeks to elevate the renminbi's status as a global reserve currency by financing projects using Chinese currency. Energy security is another motivation, with the BRI helping to secure China's energy supply through new pipelines and ports. Finally, the initiative aims to stimulate economic growth in participating countries, increasing demand for Chinese goods and services. President Xi Jinping has projected that annual trade with BRI countries will surpass $2.5 trillion by 2025.

Abrahamsen and Williams (2018) also support the claims made by Djankov and Miner and add that the BRI is being used as a process to gain raw materials from participating countries. They argue that China's BRI has led to a growing interest in Africa's mineral

resources, which African countries have viewed with suspicion. Moreover, Zafar and Ullah (2020) suggest that BRI projects in Pakistan have primarily focused on developing the country's infrastructure to facilitate China's access to its domestic natural resources. These examples indicate that while economic cooperation and connectivity are essential components of the BRI, they may also serve as a means for China to access strategic resources and materials.

Globally, thus far, the BRI has facilitated substantial infrastructure development, enhancing trade by reducing logistical costs and opening new investment opportunities (Hillman, 2018; World Bank, 2019). Politically, the BRI expands China's geopolitical influence, strengthens its soft power, and prompts strategic competition from other major powers, such as the U.S. and the E.U. (Chatzky & McBride, 2020; Kliman & Grace, 2018). The strategic expansion of Chinese influence through infrastructure and investment projects is perceived as challenging Western hegemony. This has led to initiatives like the U.S.'s "Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment" (PGII), India and Japan's "Asia-Africa Growth Corridor" (AAGC) and the E.U.'s Global Gateway, designed to offer alternatives to the BRI and counterbalance China's growing influence (Chatzky & McBride, 2020).

However, Tonchev (2018) states that the BRI exacerbates regional tensions in contested areas. The BRI aims to boost economic growth in Africa by improving trade logistics and industrial capacity through Chinese investments. Critical projects like the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway in Kenya illustrate this commitment (Brautigam, 2020; Sun, 2017). The

local impact varies, with criticisms about environmental damage and insufficient community benefits (Gadzala, 2015). In Asia, despite a 12% FDI decline in 2023 from the previous year, as reported by Wang (2024), the region remains attractive for greenfield projects. ASEAN economies also faced a 16% decrease in FDI, despite a 37% increase in greenfield investments (Wang, 2024).

Conversely, the Middle East saw a rise in FDI, particularly in the UAE, with a 28% increase in greenfield announcements (Wang, 2024). This underscores the growing economic ties and strategic investments between China and Middle Eastern countries, particularly within the BRI's scope. Notably, Saudi Arabia's collaboration with China to build oil refineries exemplifies this deepening economic relationship (China Briefing, 2024). In Latin America, FDI flows remained stable, although some countries like Brazil saw a significant decline in FDI by 22%, particularly in project finance (Wang, 2024). China's investments in ports and infrastructure projects in Brazil and Peru aim to enhance connectivity and trade, aligning with the BRI's objectives.

North America has limited direct engagement with the BRI, but strategic investments, particularly in Canada and Mexico, aim to enhance trade and economic cooperation. Geopolitical tensions have reduced direct U.S. investments in China; however, China Briefing (2024) states that some American investors might use financial hubs like the UAE to channel investments discreetly. Oceania, including Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Island nations, see BRI-related investments in infrastructure and natural resources.

These projects aim to improve connectivity and integrate these economies more closely with China (Ekman, 2018).

The BRI's influence on international trade is profound, offering the potential to diversify supply chains and reduce reliance on traditional trade routes (World Bank, 2019). However, it could lead to increased trade imbalances, with participating countries becoming more economically dependent on China (Jones & Zeng, 2019). In terms of political relations, the BRI heightens the strategic competition between China and the West while fostering new alliances such as increased investment from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (Borrell, 2020). These shifts affect the geopolitical landscape, influencing regional organisations and their dynamics (Ekman, 2018).

As one can imagine, the BRI has gained significant attention from scholars, policymakers, and the media due to its potential economic and geopolitical implications (Chang, 2019). On the one hand, the BRI offers opportunities for participating countries to improve their infrastructure, boost their economies, and increase their access to global markets (Chhibber, 2017). On the other hand, there are concerns about the BRI's potential to deepen China's influence and leverage over participating countries, mainly through its financing and investment mechanisms (Du, 2016). Given the extensive scope of the BRI, focusing on specific cases provides more profound insights. This research aims to uncover the specific economic and geopolitical impacts of the BRI on Nigeria and Ethiopia, including how the initiative influences their national sovereignty, economic

dependencies, and regional power dynamics. By examining these impacts, the study seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of the BRI's role in shaping the geopolitical landscape of Africa and the responses of African nations to this significant global initiative.

1.9 Problem Statement

China's BRI represents a significant shift in the global economic and geopolitical landscape, particularly in Africa, where Nigeria and Ethiopia have emerged as critical partners. However, there is a need for an in-depth understanding of the economic and geopolitical implications of China's implementation of the BRI in these two African countries. Despite the potential benefits of infrastructure development and increased connectivity, concerns have been raised regarding the extent to which the BRI influences the agency and sovereignty of Nigeria and Ethiopia in shaping their paths of development and international engagement. There is a gap in the literature regarding the specific impacts of the BRI on the power dynamics and decision-making processes within these countries, particularly concerning the involvement of other foreign powers and the potential erosion of national sovereignty. This research aims to address this gap by exploring the economic and geopolitical implications of China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia, analysing the extent to which it shapes their agency in international affairs and potentially impacts their sovereignty.

1.10 Theoretical lens of the study

This study will utilise dependency theory as its theoretical framework. Dependency theory, which explores the power imbalances and economic dependencies between

developed and developing nations, provides a valuable lens for analysing the dynamics between China and its African partners (Frank, 1967). By examining the relationships between China and Nigeria and China and Ethiopia, this research will investigate how the BRI has influenced these countries' power dynamics and agency. Dependency theory explores how economic dependencies can shape political and economic outcomes, offering insights into the broader implications of the BRI.

Dependency theory posits that economic relationships between countries are characterised by a core-periphery structure, where the developed "core" countries exploit the less developed "periphery" countries. This exploitation perpetuates a cycle of dependency and underdevelopment in the periphery while enriching the core. In the context of the BRI, China's extensive investments and loans to African countries can be seen through this lens, raising concerns that these countries might fall into more profound economic dependence on China. The significant debts accrued by countries like Kenya, Zambia, and Ethiopia due to BRI projects exemplify these dynamics. These debts could limit these countries' economic sovereignty and compel them to align their economic policies with Chinese interests, potentially exacerbating their dependency (Brautigam, 2020).

The concept of dependency extends beyond simple economic transactions; it also encompasses political and social dimensions. Countries heavily indebted to China may find their domestic and foreign policies increasingly influenced by Beijing. This could manifest in various ways, such as support for Chinese positions in international forums,

adoption of Chinese technology and standards, or even granting China strategic concessions, such as military bases or control over critical infrastructure (Hurley et al., 2018). This scenario is reminiscent of earlier patterns of dependency where former colonial powers exerted considerable influence over their colonies' political and economic decisions.

Nigeria and Ethiopia, often considered semi-periphery states within the global economic system, provide intriguing case studies for examining the nuances of dependency theory. As semi-periphery states, they possess significant regional influence and more diversified economies compared to their peripheral counterparts (Wallerstein, 1976). Nevertheless, their relationship with China under the BRI framework raises questions about whether they are leveraging their regional power to exploit their regions or if they are caught in a new form of dependency.

With its ambitious infrastructure projects funded by China, such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, Ethiopia exemplifies the dual nature of dependency. On one hand, these projects have the potential to transform Ethiopia into a regional hub, enhancing its economic stature and influence in the Horn of Africa. On the other hand, the substantial debt incurred to finance these projects may limit Ethiopia's economic independence and policy flexibility. If Ethiopia defaults on its loans, it might be forced to make strategic concessions to China, perpetuating a cycle of dependency (Sun, 2017).

Nigeria, as Africa's largest economy, plays a crucial role in West Africa's economic landscape. Its engagement with the BRI, including projects like the Lagos-Kano railway modernisation, positions Nigeria as a pivotal player in regional connectivity and development. However, the reliance on Chinese financing and construction expertise raises concerns about long-term economic sovereignty. Nigeria's significant oil revenues provide some buffer against dependency. Yet, fluctuations in global oil prices and the substantial debts associated with BRI projects could still render Nigeria vulnerable to external pressures (Gadzala, 2015).

The role of semi-periphery countries like Nigeria and Ethiopia in the context of the BRI also brings to light another aspect of dependency theory: the exploitation within regions. As these countries strengthen their infrastructure and economic capabilities through Chinese investments, they may exert more significant influence over neighbouring countries, potentially creating new forms of regional dependency. This dynamic mirrors the traditional core-periphery model on a regional scale, where semi-periphery states, bolstered by external support, may exploit their peripheral neighbours (Frank, 1967; Wallerstein, 1976).

In the case of Ethiopia, its enhanced connectivity and infrastructure might allow it to dominate trade routes and economic exchanges within the Horn of Africa. Similarly, Nigeria's strengthened position could increase economic dominance in West Africa. While beneficial to the semi-periphery states, this regional influence could exacerbate regional

inequalities and dependencies, mirroring the global core-periphery dynamics on a smaller scale (Kratz et al., 2019).

1.11 Significance and Scope of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the existing body of knowledge on China's BRI and its impact on African countries, specifically Nigeria and Ethiopia. Since the launch of the BRI, cumulative Chinese engagement under the initiative has surpassed the USD 1 trillion mark, with about USD 634 billion in construction contracts and USD 419 billion in non-financial investments (Wang, 2024). Africa has emerged as the largest recipient of BRI engagement, with a 47% increase in Chinese construction contracts and a 114% increase in investments, amounting to USD 21.7 billion in 2023 alone (Wang, 2024). Figures can be found in the appendix of this paper.

This study aims to fill a critical gap in the literature on the BRI's economic and geopolitical implications for Nigeria and Ethiopia. Previous research has often focused on the BRI's impact on individual African countries or regions rather than offering a comparative analysis. By examining Nigeria and Ethiopia, we can gain valuable insights into the similarities and differences in their responses to China's BRI and how these responses have influenced their economic and geopolitical relations with China and other global powers. This comparative approach will provide a nuanced understanding of the BRI's broader implications across Africa.

Nigeria and Ethiopia were chosen as case studies due to their substantial economic and geopolitical importance within Africa. Nigeria, with a GDP of approximately USD 252 billion (Agbetiloye, 2024), is the fourth largest economy in Africa and boasts a population of over 200 million, making it a key player in regional and continental affairs (World Economics, 2023; World Bank, 2022). Ethiopia, following in fifth with a GDP of approximately USD 205 billion (Agbetiloye, 2024) and a GDP growth rate averaging 9% over the past decade, is the second-most populous country in Africa with over 110 million people and is rapidly emerging as an economic hub in the Horn of Africa (World Bank, 2022). These characteristics make them ideal case studies for understanding the diverse impacts of the BRI.

China has invested heavily in both countries under the BRI framework. In Nigeria, investments include the construction of railways, such as the USD 1.5 billion Lagos-Ibadan railway, and power plants like the Zungeru Hydroelectric Power Project. In Ethiopia, notable projects include the USD 4 billion Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway and the development of industrial parks. These projects are expected to enhance connectivity, reduce transportation costs, and boost economic growth.

The findings of this study will be valuable for policymakers, scholars, and stakeholders interested in understanding China's engagement strategy in Africa. By analysing the BRI's impact on Nigeria and Ethiopia, this research will offer insights into how infrastructure investments can drive economic development, shape geopolitical dynamics, and influence national sovereignty. Additionally, the study will explore how these countries'

responses to the BRI can inform broader trends applicable to other African nations involved in the initiative. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective policies and strategies that leverage the benefits of the BRI while mitigating potential risks and ensuring sustainable and equitable growth for African nations.

1.12 Research question and sub-questions

Hypothesis:

This study predicts that China's implementation of the BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia will result in increased economic growth and development. Consequently, this will lead to a heightened level of interdependency on China as these countries rely on Chinese investments, infrastructure, and trade opportunities. The research aims to examine and substantiate this prediction through empirical analysis and case study investigations.

Research Question:

This research examines the economic and geopolitical implications of China's implementation of the BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia. This study's primary research question is: "What are the economic and geopolitical implications of China's implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative in Nigeria and Ethiopia?" This broad question will be explored through several sub-questions, including:

Sub-questions:

1. How has China's BRI affected the geopolitical landscape of Africa, particularly in relation to the involvement of other foreign powers?

2. What are Nigeria's and Ethiopia's distinct responses to China's BRI, and how do they compare?

1.13 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to specifically explore the BRI's complex and dynamic nature within the socio-economic and political contexts of Nigeria and Ethiopia (Yin, 2018). The focus is on understanding how the BRI influences economic development, infrastructure growth, power dynamics, and geopolitical relationships in these countries.

Qualitative research methods are particularly suited for exploring multifaceted phenomena like the BRI, as they allow for collecting rich, detailed data that reflect the perspectives, experiences, and interactions of various stakeholders (Creswell, 2013; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The primary methods include in-depth interviews, document analysis, and thematic analysis. These methods aim to uncover the underlying mechanisms and processes through which the BRI impacts Nigeria and Ethiopia, highlighting both positive and negative implications (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

Data Collection Methods

The data collection involved semi-structured interviews with experts and stakeholders familiar with the BRI's implementation in Nigeria and Ethiopia. Participants were identified through professional networking platforms like LinkedIn and referrals. Out of

approximately 15 experts contacted, only five accepted the interview invitation. These participants were academic researchers and experts in Sino-African relations and International Relations, offering specialised insights into the BRI's impacts. The relatively low response rate underscores the challenges of qualitative research but ensures that the collected data is rich and relevant.

Document analysis complemented the interviews by reviewing various reports, policy documents, academic articles, and media articles related to the BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia. This method provided additional context and background information, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the BRI's effects. Thematic analysis was employed to identify, analyse, and report patterns within the data, enabling the researcher to uncover the underlying mechanisms and processes through which the BRI impacts the two countries.

Selection of Case Studies

Nigeria and Ethiopia were selected as case studies based on their strategic significance as key participants in the BRI and their distinct socio-economic and political landscapes. Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and one of the top five economies in the continent, holds significant geopolitical influence and serves as a central hub for Chinese investments under the BRI (Ukeje & Nwajiuba, 2017). With its rapidly growing economy and strategic location in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia has attracted substantial Chinese investment in infrastructure development projects (Amsalu & Adele, 2020). The careful selection of these case studies ensures the research findings' relevance, depth, and

applicability, contributing to a nuanced understanding of China-Africa relations within the BRI framework. Specific criteria guided the selection of these case study sites, including the level of BRI Involvement, Economic Indicators, Geopolitical Considerations, and Regional Dynamics.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to rigorous ethical standards to ensure the integrity and credibility of the research findings. Informed consent was obtained from all interview participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the research aims, procedures, and potential risks before agreeing to participate (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Participants were provided with detailed explanations of the study's purpose, procedures, expected outcomes, and their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Consent forms were distributed electronically, outlining the terms of participation and confidentiality agreements.

Measures were implemented to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, where necessary. However, for this research, since the participants were academic experts, they were comfortable with the names mentioned in the study. All data collected, including interview transcripts and documents, were securely stored. Access to sensitive information and data information was restricted to the researcher and authorised personnel only, with data stored in password-protected files.

Limitations

The case study approach has its limitations. One major limitation is the issue of generalisability. Findings from the case studies of Nigeria and Ethiopia may not be easily extrapolated to other African countries or regions involved in the BRI. Each country has unique socio-political and economic contexts, and the impact of the BRI can vary significantly based on these factors. Therefore, while the case studies provide in-depth insights into Nigeria and Ethiopia, they may not fully capture the broader implications of the BRI across different African settings.

Another limitation is the potential for researcher bias. Qualitative research, particularly case studies, often relies heavily on the researcher's interpretation. This can introduce subjective biases in the selection of data, the framing of questions, and the analysis of findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). Although triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking can help mitigate these biases, they cannot be entirely eliminated. Additionally, the availability and reliability of data can pose challenges, as some information might be sensitive or difficult to access, affecting the comprehensiveness of the research.

Moreover, the time-intensive nature of qualitative case studies can limit the scope of the research. Conducting in-depth interviews, extensive document analysis, and thorough thematic analysis requires substantial time and resources. This can constrain the ability to include more case studies or delve deeper into certain aspects of the BRI's impact (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It's important to note that the dynamic and evolving nature of

the BRI means that findings may quickly become outdated as new developments occur, keeping the audience aware of the challenges in studying it.

In summary, the qualitative case study approach adopted in this research is well-suited to comprehensively explore the economic and geopolitical implications of China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia. Through rigorous data collection and analysis, the study aims to contribute valuable insights to the existing literature on the BRI and its impact on African countries, instilling confidence in the thoroughness of the research process.

1.14 Structure of the paper

This paper is structured to explore the BRI's comprehensive impact on Nigeria and Ethiopia.

Chapter 1 introduces the research topic, its significance, and the key research questions guiding the study.

Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical framework of dependency theory and outlines the research methodology, including the rationale for case study selection, data collection methods, and analytical approaches. These elements lay a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed literature review, covering the historical context of the BRI, and existing studies on the BRI's impact on Africa. It explores the evolution of China's

foreign policy towards Africa, the significance of the BRI in China-Africa relations, and the challenges and criticisms associated with China's engagement.

Chapters 4 and 5 provide in-depth case studies of Ethiopia and Nigeria, respectively. Chapter 4 investigates the economic and geopolitical implications of the BRI in Ethiopia, examining infrastructure developments, investment in critical sectors, and debt sustainability concerns.

Chapter 5 analyses similar themes in Nigeria, focusing on infrastructure projects and their impact on economic ties and geopolitical dynamics. Chapter 6 offers a comparative analysis, synthesizing the data and findings from the case studies to identify broader trends and implications. It discusses the application of dependency theory in understanding the power dynamics between China and the African nations and addresses the core research questions.

Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation by summarising the key findings, discussing their implications for policymakers and stakeholders, and suggesting areas for future research. This structured approach ensures a logical flow and thoroughly examines the BRI's multifaceted impacts on Nigeria and Ethiopia. By offering a detailed and comparative analysis, the study aims to enhance our understanding of how these African nations can leverage the opportunities and address the challenges presented by China's expanding influence, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced discourse on international development and geopolitical strategy.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter lays the essential groundwork for this paper, offering an in-depth exploration of the theoretical framework and research methodology that will steer the analysis of China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia. The primary theoretical framework applied in this research is the dependency theory. The chapter outlines the core tenets of dependency theory and its application to assess the economic and geopolitical implications of China's BRI projects in Nigeria and Ethiopia. It also critically examines the criticisms and limitations associated with this framework. Furthermore, the study is anchored in two central theoretical concepts: neocolonialism and soft power, which are integral to comprehending contemporary international relations and the strategies of global powers.

Furthermore, this chapter provides an overview of the research methodology, which is primarily qualitative. This qualitative approach, combined with case studies, ensures a comprehensive investigation of the economic and geopolitical consequences of the BRI in the two African nations. By integrating these theoretical concepts and a rigorous qualitative research methodology, this study aims to offer a thorough understanding of China's BRI and its implications for Nigeria and Ethiopia.

2.1 Theoretical framework: Dependency theory

Dependency theory, a pivotal theoretical framework in this study, offers profound insights into the global economic landscape. It is rooted in the critique of modernisation theory, a significant evolution in economic theories, and it illuminates the enduring inequalities between developed and underdeveloped nations. By focusing on asymmetrical power relations and scrutinising the historical legacies of colonialism, neocolonialism, and unequal trade dynamics, it provides a holistic lens to understand the complexities of global economic inequality and poverty. In analysing China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia, dependency theory offers indispensable tools for examining the economic and geopolitical ramifications of these investments within the broader framework of global structural dependencies.

The dependency theory emerged in the late 1950s as a response to the shortcomings of modernisation theory in explaining the unequal relationships between developed and underdeveloped countries (Amin, 1976). According to the dependency theory, underdeveloped countries are dependent on developed countries for their economic growth, and their relationship is characterised by asymmetrical power relations (Rodney, 1972).

Several influential figures contributed to the development of dependency theory, including Raúl Prebisch, a prominent Argentine economist, and André Gunder Frank, an American economic historian. Prebisch's work with the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in the 1950s shaped the theory. He argued

that the terms of trade between developed and underdeveloped nations were biased against the latter, as the prices of primary commodities, often exported by developing countries, tended to decline concerning manufactured goods produced by industrialised nations. This deteriorating trade relationship fuelled concerns about economic inequality and structural dependency (Prebisch, 1950).

André Gunder Frank further developed these ideas in his 1967 book, "Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America." Frank argued that underdevelopment was not a result of a lack of development but rather a structural outcome of the global capitalist system. He contended that the wealth of the developed nations was intrinsically linked to the exploitation and dependency on the underdeveloped nations, forming a core-periphery dynamic. This idea laid the foundation for core concepts within dependency theory (Frank, 1967).

Main Argument of Dependency Theory

Dependency theory, a critical framework within international relations and economics, comprehensively analyses the global economic order and the relationships between developed and underdeveloped nations (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979). At its core, this theory posits that underdeveloped countries find themselves in a dependent and subordinate position within the global economic system. This dependence stems from a historical legacy of colonialism, neocolonialism, unequal terms of trade, and the exploitation of resources (Prebisch, 1950). According to dependency theory, these factors perpetuate economic inequality and poverty in developing nations.

One of the central tenets of dependency theory is the concept of the 'centre or core' and the 'periphery' (Frank, 1967). The 'centre' represents the developed, industrialised nations, and it is from this core that the unequal relationships in the global economic landscape emanate. The 'periphery', on the other hand, comprises the underdeveloped, often resource-rich nations. This core-periphery model underscores the way in which wealth and power are concentrated in the core, as they extract resources from the periphery and exercise control over economic and political structures. The asymmetry in global economic power, as highlighted by the role of the core in the core-periphery model, is a key aspect of dependency theory.

Dependency theory's key principles:

Dependency theory, as outlined by Cardoso & Faletto (1979), is underpinned by several fundamental principles that together form a comprehensive framework. One of these principles is structural inequality, which suggests that the global economic system is structured to benefit developed nations at the expense of developing ones. This is achieved through the leverage of economic power by developed nations, which is used to perpetuate this inequality through trade practices, investment patterns, and international policies. Underdevelopment, as opposed to undevelopment, is a condition where resources are actively used but primarily benefit the core rather than the periphery (Amin, 1976).

China's investments in Nigeria and Ethiopia in the context of the BRI serve as practical examples of the structural inequality principle of dependency theory. While these investments can stimulate infrastructure development and economic growth, they often lead to significant debt and a reliance on China. For instance, Ethiopia's large-scale projects, such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway (Li, 2021), funded by Chinese loans, can enhance connectivity and burden the country with substantial debt, thereby limiting its economic sovereignty and reinforcing structural inequalities. The terms of these investments typically favour China, highlighting the entrenched structural inequality of dependency theory (Prebisch, 1950) and its impact on the economic sovereignty of developing nations.

Secondly, core-periphery dynamics describe how core nations exploit peripheral nations through economic dominance, reinforcing the latter's underdevelopment. The core nations (developed countries) extract resources and economic benefits from the periphery (developing countries), perpetuating a cycle of dependency and inequality (Frank, 1967).

China's role in the BRI can be viewed through this lens. As a semi-periphery country (Li, 2021) with core-like attributes, China exerts significant economic influence over African countries through the BRI. The construction of infrastructure projects by Chinese companies, often using Chinese labour and materials, limits the local economic benefits and creates a dependency on Chinese expertise and technology. This dynamic reinforces

the core-periphery relationship, with China as the dominant economic force and African nations as dependent recipients of Chinese investment (Li, 2021).

Thirdly, dependency theory asserts that peripheral nations rely heavily on foreign investment, technology, and expertise for economic development. This dependence creates a cycle where these nations struggle to achieve autonomous and diversified economic growth (Ferraro, 1996).

For example, the total stock of FDI from China in Nigeria was approximately 2.3 billion USD in 2022, a decrease from 2.7 billion USD in the previous year (Statista, 2024). Similarly, in Ethiopia, the total stock of Chinese FDI amounted to around 2.6 billion USD in 2022, down from 2.8 billion USD in 2021 (Statista, 2024). These investments are crucial in financing infrastructure projects and economic initiatives, contributing to economic growth and increasing dependency on Chinese capital and expertise. The terms and conditions of these investments often favour China, reinforcing economic disparities and perpetuating the dependency of Nigeria and Ethiopia on external financing and technology.

Fourthly, unequal exchange refers to the trade relationships between core and periphery nations, where peripheral countries export raw materials and import finished goods. This results in unfavourable terms of trade and economic imbalances, perpetuating underdevelopment (Rodney, 1972).

Trade data between China and Nigeria, as well as Ethiopia, illustrate an unequal exchange. In 2022, China exported $12.2 billion worth of goods to Nigeria, including non-knit women's suits, rubber footwear, and broadcasting equipment. Conversely, Nigeria's exports to China were valued at $1.56 billion, predominantly consisting of petroleum gas, crude petroleum, and lead ore (OEC, 2024). Similarly, Ethiopia exported $321 million worth of goods to China, primarily coffee and cotton yarn, while China exported $3.59 billion worth of goods to Ethiopia, including refined petroleum and broadcasting equipment (OEC, 2024). This trade pattern aligns with the principle of unequal exchange, reinforcing economic disparities and dependency.

Lastly, external control in dependency theory involves significant influence by core nations over peripheral nations' economic and political decisions through investment, aid, and international institutions. This control limits the autonomy of peripheral countries and perpetuates their dependency (Sayigh, 1991).

China's involvement in the BRI exemplifies this principle, as Chinese investments often come with strategic and political expectations. African countries may align their policies with Chinese interests or adopt Chinese standards and practices, reflecting significant external influence. Strategic concessions, such as long-term infrastructure leases to Chinese entities, indicate external control that aligns with dependency theory.

In essence, dependency theory presents a holistic perspective on the complex issues of global economic inequality, poverty, and underdevelopment (Frank, 1967). It recognises

the historical roots of these disparities. It offers a critical lens to analyse how powerful nations exploit and maintain their dominant positions in the global economic system. Furthermore, applying the principles of dependency theory to the BRI relationships reveals that the economic and geopolitical engagements fostered by the BRI often adhere to the dynamics described by dependency theory. The BRI fosters structural inequalities, reinforces core-periphery dynamics, creates dependency on foreign investment, perpetuates unequal exchange, and leads to external control over domestic affairs. Therefore, the BRI, in many ways, aligns with the core tenets of dependency theory, suggesting that these relationships may perpetuate the very inequalities and dependencies that the theory critiques. Thus, dependency theory applies to this research, providing a valuable framework for analysing the BRI's impact on Nigeria and Ethiopia.

In the context of the research on the economic and geopolitical implications of China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia, dependency theory is an invaluable framework for understanding the dynamics at play and assessing the consequences of China's investments in these developing nations (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979). It allows for a comprehensive analysis of economic and geopolitical dimensions within the broader context of global structural inequalities and dependency (Prebisch, 1950).

2.1.1 Dependency theory’s criticism

While dependency theory offers valuable insights into global economic inequalities, it is not without its critics. This section delves into the criticisms levelled against dependency theory, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of economic relationships in

today's globalized world. Some critiques suggest that the theory is overly simplistic and does not account for the agency of underdeveloped countries. Scholars have challenged the theory's perceived oversimplification and failure to acknowledge the agency of developing countries. Scholars such as Arturo Escobar (1995), James Ferguson (1990), and Timothy Mitchell (1988) have critically evaluated the assumptions and limitations of dependency theory, highlighting the significance of the agency possessed by developing countries in determining their trajectories of development. They advocate for a more nuanced comprehension of the intricate dynamics and complexities of power relations within the global economy (Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 1990; Mitchell, 1988). Additionally, critics point to the evolving nature of global economic dynamics, particularly with the rise of emerging economies like China.

Similarly, Robert Wade (1990), Ha-Joon Chang (2002), and Ching Kwan Lee (2007) have researched the agency exhibited by developing countries when engaging in negotiations and navigating their relationships with influential actors, such as China. Their studies explore how developing countries exert agency through policy decisions, bargaining tactics, and national development strategies (Wade, 1990; Chang, 2002; Lee, 2007; George, 2018). This critique can be applied to China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia. While it is true that China holds significant economic and political power over these countries, Nigeria and Ethiopia have the agency to decide whether to participate in the BRI and the terms of their participation.

Krueger (1974) and Evans (1995) argue that the dependency theory is outdated and not applicable in today's globalized economy. Moreover, Gu (2020) and Xu and Davis (2012) argue that China's investments in African countries are a win-win situation, with both sides benefiting from increased economic ties. For example, China provides Ethiopia with much-needed investment and infrastructure development, while Ethiopia provides China with natural resources and a market for Chinese goods.

A further critique of the dependency theory is that it fails to acknowledge the role of internal factors within underdeveloped countries that contribute to their economic struggles. These include factors such as corruption, poor governance, and social instability (Bhagwati, 1978). In the case of Nigeria and Ethiopia, both countries have experienced political turmoil and widespread corruption. This suggests that the dependency theory may not be the sole or even primary explanation for their economic condition; however, this does not lessen its applicability to the case studies.

Another critique of the dependency theory is its limited applicability in today's global economic landscape. With the rise of emerging economies such as China, the economic relationships between countries are no longer simply defined by a binary of developed and underdeveloped. Instead, the global economy has multiple power centres and economic actors (Mohan, 2013). This suggests that while dependency theory may need to be adapted to account for these new dynamics, its core principles of dependency and structural inequality remain relevant in explaining the complexities of contemporary economic relationships.

In China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia, dependency theory has also faced criticism. Xu and Davis (2012) argue that the BRI represents a departure from traditional patterns of dependency in which developed countries dominate the economic relationships of underdeveloped countries. They suggest that the BRI is characterised by a degree of mutual benefit in which both China and the recipient countries stand to gain from the economic relationships. For example, Chinese investment has been instrumental in developing infrastructure projects such as ports and railways in Nigeria. However, this criticism may overlook the essence of dependency theory, which posits that while both parties may benefit, the exchange is inherently unequal, with the developed state gaining more from the relationship than the developing state. In the case of the BRI, although Nigeria and Ethiopia gain from infrastructure development and investment, China reaps greater economic and strategic benefits, thus maintaining an unequal exchange and continuing the patterns of dependency described by the theory.

However, it is also important to note that China's engagement in Nigeria and Ethiopia through the BRI has been subject to controversy. Some critics have argued that the BRI has led to further entrenching existing power structures in these countries, with Chinese investment primarily benefitting ruling elites and exacerbating inequality. This suggests that while the dependency theory may not fully account for the complexities of contemporary economic relationships, power dynamics are still at play in China's engagement with Nigeria and Ethiopia.

2.2 Neocolonialism concept and soft power concept

While dependency theory provides a framework for understanding the structural inequalities and economic dependencies between developed and developing nations, these dynamics often manifest through the mechanisms of neocolonialism and the exercise of soft power. This section delves into two significant concepts, neocolonialism and soft power, within the framework of dependency theory. Understanding these concepts is crucial for dissecting the complexities of global power dynamics and their implications for international relations and the study. Neocolonialism extends the ideas of dependency theory by illustrating how former colonial powers and emerging economic giants like China maintain control over developing nations through economic means rather than direct political rule. Soft power, on the other hand, refers to the ability of a country to influence others through cultural, ideological, and economic means, further entrenching dependency relationships without overt coercion. In the context of China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia, these concepts reveal how modern forms of economic and cultural influence continue to perpetuate the unequal exchange and dependencies outlined by dependency theory.

2.2.1 Neocolonialism

The term "neocolonialism" emerged as a crucial concept associated with the broader framework of dependency theory. This concept gained prominence in the mid-20th century, primarily as a response to the changing dynamics of global power and colonialism's transformation rather than outright abolition. Neocolonialism represents a complex and enduring form of economic and political dominance exercised by former

colonial powers or powerful nations over newly independent countries. Essentially, it signifies a contemporary extension of colonialism, wherein control and influence are maintained through economic, political, and cultural means rather than direct territorial conquest (Rodney, 1972).

The concept of neocolonialism can be traced back to scholars and leaders who were critical of the decolonisation processes that unfolded in the post-World War II era. Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, played a significant role in popularising the term. In his 1965 book "Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism," Nkrumah offered a scathing critique of Western powers' continued influence in newly independent African nations. Nkrumah argued that while formal colonialism was waning, a more insidious form of control persisted through economic and political mechanisms. This included foreign investments, loans, and international trade, which granted former colonial powers substantial leverage over newly independent countries' economic policies and political decision-making. Nkrumah's work captured the essence of neocolonialism, emphasising the persistence of foreign domination under a different guise.

While Nkrumah's critique remains influential, examining whether his observations hold true in contemporary contexts is essential. The economic domination described by neocolonialism is evident in how multinational corporations and powerful nations control vital industries and resources in developing countries. This control enables the extraction of wealth and resources, often to the detriment of local economic development (Nkrumah, 1965). However, some argue that globalisation and the rise of new economic powers, like

China, complicate the traditional neocolonial narrative. While significant, China's investments in Africa are often portrayed as mutually beneficial rather than purely exploitative. This raises questions about whether modern economic relationships are more complex than the traditional neocolonial model suggests.

Neocolonialism also highlights the political dimensions of influence, whereby former colonial powers or superpowers shape weaker nations' domestic and foreign policies. This influence can manifest through diplomatic pressure, international alliances, or covert intervention (Emmanuel, 1972; Ake, 1996). For example, international alliances such as the BRI or PGII aim to expand one or more countries' influence in a region or country. These alliances raise critical questions about the balance of power and the sovereignty of participating nations. While some see these partnerships as opportunities for growth and development, others view them as mechanisms of control and dependency, reminiscent of neocolonial practices.

Furthermore, the concept recognises the cultural component of neocolonialism, as the dominant powers often export their values, languages, and consumer culture, which can lead to the erosion of local traditions and identities (Fanon, 1963). The spread of Western cultural norms and consumer products can be seen as a form of cultural imperialism, subtly imposing the values and lifestyles of powerful nations on less developed regions. However, this cultural influence is not unidirectional; developing nations often adapt and reinterpret these influences uniquely, creating a more complex cultural dynamic than neocolonialism initially accounted for.

2.2.2 Soft Power

However, amidst these power dynamics, a newer concept has emerged—soft power—a term popularized by Joseph Nye in the late 20th century (1990). Soft power offers a fresh lens to understand international relations, emphasizing the significance of attraction, persuasion, and influence as pivotal foreign policy instruments. While neocolonialism operates through overt political pressure and cultural imposition, soft power operates subtly, employing the allure of ideas and values to shape global discourse and diplomatic strategies. This juxtaposition underscores the evolving landscape of power in international relations, where traditional notions of dominance give way to the nuanced interplay of coercion and persuasion.

Joseph Nye, a prominent American political scientist, first introduced the term "soft power" in the early 1990s. Nye's work, particularly his book "Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power" published in 1990, laid the theoretical foundations for this concept. Nye recognized that the conventional notion of power primarily revolved around military strength and economic dominance. While these 'hard power' elements remained critical, Nye argued that a less tangible but equally influential dimension of power was at play in international relations. This dimension, which he coined 'soft power,' was built upon a nation's ability to shape the preferences of others through attraction and co-option rather than coercion (Nye, 1990).

The concept of soft power hinges on several fundamental elements. At its core, it recognizes that a nation's soft power resources emanate from its culture, political values,

foreign policies, and the appeal of its societal and political systems (Nye, 2004). It acknowledges that when nations are admired, respected, and seen as legitimate actors on the global stage, they possess more excellent soft power capabilities. These capabilities enable them to shape international outcomes, foster alliances, and advance their interests through non-coercive means.

One essential aspect of soft power is the appeal of a country's culture and ideas, which includes elements like art, music, films, literature, and educational institutions. Nations that effectively export their culture and ideas can influence global public opinion and build goodwill (Nye, 2004). The spread of American culture and the global popularity of Hollywood movies are often cited as examples of this phenomenon. Another aspect of soft power is a nation's foreign policies and international image. When a country is perceived as responsible, cooperative, and committed to common global goals, it can attract other nations to its diplomatic initiatives and build coalitions (Nye, 2004; Mawdsley, 2019).

However, soft power's effectiveness and ethical implications remain subject to debate. Critics argue that soft power can be a form of manipulation, subtly imposing the values and agendas of powerful nations on others. The use of soft power by countries like China through initiatives such as Confucius Institutes and global media expansion raises questions about whether these efforts genuinely promote mutual understanding or serve as tools of influence and control. In this sense, soft power can be seen as a modern

extension of the earlier neocolonial strategies, using cultural and ideological means to achieve similar ends.

In essence, soft power recognizes that the ability to influence others depends on the perception of a nation's virtues and the attractiveness of its policies rather than coercion or financial incentives. It complements traditional hard power resources such as military capabilities and economic strength, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of a nation's overall power potential. The interplay between soft power and neocolonialism in the context of China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia provides a nuanced perspective on how contemporary forms of influence and control operate, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges these dynamics present for developing nations.

2.3 Application to the Research

This section applies dependency theory, neocolonialism, and soft power concepts to analyse China’s BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia. Dependency theory illuminates economic and geopolitical impacts, while neocolonialism reveals persisting imbalances. Soft power explores China’s diplomatic strategies. Despite their strengths, these frameworks have limitations, such as oversimplification and subjective perceptions. However, they remain crucial for understanding power dynamics in the BRI context. By delving into these theories, this research offers insights into the multifaceted implications of China’s investments in Africa.

In the context of the research on “The economic and geopolitical implications of China’s BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia: A comparative analysis,” dependency theory offers a valuable analytical framework to explore the economic and geopolitical consequences of the BRI projects in these African nations. Dependency theory emphasises structural inequality and the perpetuation of global economic disparities and provides a comprehensive lens through which to assess the multifaceted impacts of China’s investments in these developing nations (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979).

Economic Implications: Dependency theory is particularly relevant when analysing the economic implications of the BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia. It offers a critical perspective on how these projects may affect the terms of trade, resource extraction, and economic inequalities in these countries (Prebisch, 1950). By applying dependency theory, the research can scrutinise whether the BRI contributes to genuine economic development or exacerbates existing dependency on global economic structures (Frank, 1967).

Geopolitical Implications: The theory is equally pertinent in evaluating the geopolitical implications of China’s BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia, which influence their domestic and international policies. Dependency theory underscores the influence of powerful nations on the foreign policies and international relationships of weaker countries (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979). It provides a valuable framework for analysing how China’s initiatives may impact the agency and sovereignty of Nigeria and Ethiopia in the international arena. This includes assessing how these countries navigate their interests within the broader context of global structural inequalities and dependencies (Prebisch, 1950).

2.3.1 Neocolonialism and soft power concepts as lenses for the study

Neocolonialism and soft power are valuable lenses within the broader framework of dependency theory as they provide specific perspectives to analyse different aspects of the relationship between developed and developing countries.

Neocolonialism as a Lens: Neocolonialism, an extension of colonialism in contemporary times, is a valuable lens within dependency theory for several reasons. It helps illuminate the persisting economic and political imbalances between powerful nations and less-developed countries. In the case of the BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia, neocolonialism can reveal how China's investments and economic engagements may lead to economic dependencies and potential exploitation, akin to historical colonial relationships. This lens is crucial for understanding whether BRI projects promote genuine development or perpetuate asymmetrical power relations.

However, it is essential to acknowledge dependency theory's and neocolonialism's limitations for a comprehensive analysis. While dependency theory and neocolonialism provide valuable insights into economic and political disparities, they can sometimes oversimplify complex relationships and overlook the agency of developing nations. For instance, critiques of dependency theory highlight its tendency to overlook internal factors such as governance and corruption in perpetuating underdevelopment (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979), as mentioned in 2.2. Similarly, neocolonialism has been criticised for its ambiguity in definition and difficulty in establishing direct causality between external actions and socio-economic conditions (Vandewalle, 2001). Despite these weaknesses,

dependency theory and the neocolonialism concept remain pertinent frameworks for understanding power dynamics, particularly in the context of BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia.

Soft Power as a Lens: As conceived by Joseph Nye, soft power complements the neocolonialism concept within dependency theory. It emphasises the role of influence, attraction, and persuasion rather than coercion in international relations. In the context of the BRI, soft power helps explain how China seeks to cultivate positive perceptions and partnerships in Nigeria and Ethiopia. It is a valuable lens for assessing how China employs its cultural appeal, diplomatic initiatives, and cooperative foreign policies to shape the preferences of these nations, building positive relationships that may benefit its economic and geopolitical interests.

One limitation is its reliance on subjective perceptions and interpretations of attractiveness and influence. As Nye (2004) noted, soft power operates through the power of attraction and persuasion, which are inherently subjective and prone to biases. This subjectivity can undermine the credibility and effectiveness of soft power strategies, particularly in cross-cultural contexts (Hoffmann, 2013). Moreover, soft power may be less effective in environments characterised by hostility or conflict, where coercive forces may overshadow attraction and persuasion (Jervis, 2006). Ethical concerns also surround soft power strategies, especially when they involve cultural imperialism or the imposition of values on other nations (Bleiker, 2009). Critics argue that soft power, if not wielded responsibly, can be perceived as manipulative or exploitative, undermining its legitimacy and effectiveness in the long run.

2.4 Conclusion

Theoretical frameworks such as dependency theory are foundational for comprehending global economic disparities and power dynamics. Dependency theory's emphasis on the core-periphery model and historical context provides a comprehensive lens for analysing China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia. Despite its limitations, dependency theory remains invaluable in unpacking economic inequality and structural dependency on a global scale. Critiques of dependency theory highlight its evolving nature and the need for nuanced perspectives, acknowledging the agency of developing countries and internal factors within underdeveloped nations. Neocolonialism and soft power concepts offer nuanced perspectives on global power relations, revealing economic exploitation and emphasising attraction and persuasion in shaping international relations. By incorporating these frameworks, this research comprehensively understands China's BRI's economic and geopolitical implications, contributing to a nuanced analysis of its impact on global economic relationships.

2.5 Research Methodology

The research methodology section serves as the blueprint for the systematic inquiry undertaken in this study on the economic and geopolitical implications of China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia. This chapter elucidates the methodological framework guiding the investigation, encompassing the research design, selection of case studies, data collection methods, ethical considerations, validity and reliability strategies, and data management protocols. Each sub-section delineates the pivotal components of the research methodology, elucidating the rationale behind methodological choices, operational procedures, and quality assurance measures. By meticulously outlining the research methodology, this chapter ensures transparency, rigour, and coherence in the conduct and reporting of the study, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings.

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to investigate China's BRI's economic and geopolitical implications in Nigeria and Ethiopia. The qualitative case study design allows for an in-depth exploration of the complex and dynamic nature of the BRI phenomenon within the specific socio-economic and political contexts of Nigeria and Ethiopia (Yin, 2018). By utilising this approach, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how the BRI influences economic development, infrastructure growth, power dynamics, and geopolitical relationships in these African countries.

Qualitative research methods are well-suited for exploring multifaceted phenomena such as the BRI, as they allow for collecting rich, detailed data that capture the perspectives,

experiences, and interactions of various stakeholders involved (Creswell, 2013; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and thematic analysis, this study seeks to uncover the underlying mechanisms and processes through which the BRI impacts Nigeria and Ethiopia, shedding light on its positive and negative implications (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

To gather these insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts and stakeholders familiar with the BRI's implementation in Nigeria and Ethiopia. The interviewees were identified through professional networking platforms such as LinkedIn and through referrals. Out of approximately 15 experts who were emailed and asked to participate, only five accepted the interview invitation. These participants were academic researchers and experts in Sino-African relations and International Relations, providing specialised perspectives on the BRI's impacts. The relatively low response rate highlights one of the challenges in qualitative research, emphasising the need to carefully select and engage with respondents to ensure rich and relevant data.

The choice of a case study approach is particularly appropriate for this research, given its focus on specific cases (Nigeria and Ethiopia) within a larger socio-political context. By conducting detailed case studies, the research aims to generate contextually rich insights that can inform broader theoretical understandings of the BRI's effects on African countries (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, the comparative nature of the case study design allows for identifying similarities and differences between Nigeria and Ethiopia in their responses to the BRI, enhancing the depth and breadth of the analysis (Stake, 1995).

However, the case study approach does have its limitations. One major limitation is the issue of generalizability. Findings from the case studies of Nigeria and Ethiopia may not be easily extrapolated to other African countries or regions involved in the BRI. Each country has unique socio-political and economic contexts, and the impact of the BRI can vary significantly based on these factors. Therefore, while the case studies can provide in-depth insights into Nigeria and Ethiopia, they may not fully capture the broader implications of the BRI across different African settings.

Another limitation is the potential for researcher bias. Qualitative research, particularly case studies, often relies heavily on the researcher's interpretation. This can introduce subjective biases in the selection of data, the framing of questions, and the analysis of findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). Although triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking can help mitigate these biases, they cannot be eliminated. Additionally, the availability and reliability of data can pose challenges, as some information might be sensitive or difficult to access, which can affect the comprehensiveness of the research.

Moreover, the time-intensive nature of qualitative case studies can limit the scope of the research. Conducting in-depth interviews, extensive document analysis, and thorough thematic analysis requires substantial time and resources. This can constrain the ability to include more case studies or to delve deeper into certain aspects of the BRI's impact (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The dynamic and evolving nature of the BRI also means that findings may quickly become outdated as new developments occur.

In summary, the qualitative case study approach adopted in this research is well-suited to comprehensively explore China's BRI's economic and geopolitical implications in Nigeria and Ethiopia. Through rigorous data collection and analysis, the study aims to contribute valuable insights to the literature on the BRI and its impact on African countries.

2.6 Selection of Case Studies

The selection of case studies is pivotal in clarifying China's BRI's economic and geopolitical implications in Nigeria and Ethiopia. This section delineates the rationale behind choosing Nigeria and Ethiopia as case studies, emphasising their strategic significance as critical participants in the BRI. By examining these distinct socio-economic and political landscapes, this study provides comprehensive insights into the multifaceted dynamics of BRI implementation in diverse African contexts. The careful selection of case studies ensures the research findings' relevance, depth, and applicability, contributing to a nuanced understanding of China-Africa relations within the BRI framework.

2.6.1 Rationale

Nigeria and Ethiopia have been selected as case studies for this research based on their strategic significance as participants in the BRI and their distinct socio-economic and political landscapes. Both countries play pivotal roles in Africa's regional dynamics and have emerged as critical partners in China's BRI projects, as already stated in this study's "significance and scope of the study" section.

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa and one of the largest economies on the continent, holds significant geopolitical influence and serves as a central hub for Chinese investments under the BRI (Ukeje & Nwajiuba, 2017). Similarly, Ethiopia has attracted substantial Chinese investment in infrastructure development projects with its rapidly growing economy and strategic location in the Horn of Africa (Amsalu & Adele, 2020).

2.6.2 Sampling Criteria

Specific criteria guided the selection of case study sites to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the economic and geopolitical implications of the BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia. These criteria include:

Level of BRI Involvement: Countries substantially involved in BRI projects were prioritised to capture economic and geopolitical impacts.

Economic Indicators: Factors such as GDP growth, FDI, and trade volumes were considered to assess the BRI's economic implications in each country.

Geopolitical Considerations: The strategic importance of Nigeria and Ethiopia within their respective regions and their geopolitical relations with China and other foreign powers influenced the selection process.

Regional Dynamics: The broader regional context, including regional integration initiatives and cross-border dynamics, informed the African continent's selection of Nigeria and Ethiopia as representative case studies.

2.6.3 Data Collection Methods

This section shifts to the fundamental aspect of data collection methods, which constitute the foundation of qualitative research. These methods are pivotal in capturing textual data essential for analysis, mainly through thematic analysis. By employing qualitative data collection techniques, researchers aim to achieve a multifaceted understanding of various phenomena, including individuals' experiences, the dynamics of social norms and cultural practices, and the contextual intricacies surrounding specific issues or programs (Gill et al., 2008).

2.7 Document Analysis

In addition to document analysis, case studies and interviews were employed to contextualise the implementation of the BRI, identify trends, and understand policy dynamics. Various sources, including policy documents, reports, academic literature, and media articles, were systematically reviewed and analysed. This comprehensive approach enabled the research to triangulate findings from different sources, enhancing the validity and reliability of the study (Bowen, 2009).

2.7.1 Case Studies

These case studies provided a nuanced understanding of the real-world impact of BRI projects, shedding light on their outcomes within the unique contexts of Nigeria and Ethiopia. This approach uncovered the complexities of BRI implementation through detailed analysis, including its effects on local economies, geopolitical dynamics, and

societal structures. By contextualising the findings within specific projects, this study offered valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of China's engagements in Africa.

2.7.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the primary method for data collection, allowing for in-depth exploration of the economic and geopolitical implications of China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia. The set questions, the same questions asked of all the interviewees, will be included in the appendix for referral. As stated above, the interviewees were identified through professional networking platforms such as LinkedIn and through referrals. Out of approximately 15 experts who were emailed and asked to participate, only five accepted the interview invitation. The semi-structured format provided flexibility to delve into specific topics while allowing the five experts to elaborate on their experiences, perceptions, and decision-making processes related to the BRI (Guest et al., 2006). Each interview was conducted via Google Meet, with audio and visual recording, following ethical guidelines and obtaining informed consent from participants.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Prior informed consent was obtained from all interview participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the research aims, procedures, and potential risks before agreeing to participate (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The consent process included providing participants with a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, expected outcomes, and their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Consent forms were distributed electronically via email, clearly outlining the terms of participation and

confidentiality agreements. The consent forms, recordings, and transcriptions are all on a password-protected Google Drive. The interviews were recorded first and then transcribed using Microsoft 356; then, they were decoded using a graph with the guidance of the set questions the participants were asked. Then, to help answer the research questions, the graph with the information was put into themes, which were used in the comparative analysis chapter.

2.8.1 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Measures were implemented to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants throughout the research process, should they wish to be anonymous. However, for this study, participants' identities are not concealed because they are professionals who have permitted not to have their names replaced with pseudonyms in written reports or publications to safeguard their confidentiality. All data collected, including interview transcripts and documents, were securely stored. Access to identifiable information was restricted to the researcher and authorised personnel only, and data were stored in password-protected files, specifically Google Drive.

2.8.2 Reflexivity

The researcher maintained reflexivity throughout the study, critically examining their biases, perspectives, and positionalities to ensure the integrity and credibility of the research findings. Reflexivity involves an ongoing process of self-awareness and self-critique, acknowledging the researcher's influence on data collection, interpretation, and analysis (Finlay, 2002).

2.9 Conclusion

The research methodology chapter lays the groundwork for systematically investigating China's BRI's economic and geopolitical implications in Nigeria and Ethiopia. Through a qualitative case study approach, this study delves into the multifaceted dynamics of the BRI phenomenon within the specific socio-economic and political contexts of the selected countries. By employing qualitative research methods such as document analysis, case studies, and semi-structured interviews, the research aims to capture rich, detailed data that elucidate the underlying mechanisms and processes shaping the BRI's impact. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality, are paramount to upholding the integrity and credibility of the research findings. Effective data management practices ensure the secure storage, accessibility, and ethical handling of research data, thereby enhancing transparency, rigour, and coherence in the conduct and reporting of the study. Overall, the research methodology chapter ensures that the study adheres to rigorous standards of inquiry, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of the economic and geopolitical implications of China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The BRI, a transformative force, is pivotal in reshaping global infrastructure development, economic cooperation, and geopolitical dynamics. Nowhere is its impact more keenly observed than in Africa, a continent grappling with profound infrastructure deficits amidst soaring economic aspirations. As prominent players on Africa's stage, Nigeria and Ethiopia emerge as focal points in understanding the intricate relationship dynamics between China and Africa under the BRI. This chapter delves into the interplay between China's BRI, African agency, and the implications of the looming debt trap in Nigeria and Ethiopia. African agency, defined here as the autonomous decision-making capacity of individual African nations rather than a monolithic entity, plays a central role. It signifies Africa's ability to actively shape its international relations, whether in dealings with China or other global powers. This concept challenges outdated views of Africa as passive in global affairs and underscores its evolving role as a proactive participant in shaping its destiny (Shaw, 2016).

Within this framework, the literature review explains the multifaceted dynamics that define China-Africa relations within the broader context of the BRI. From addressing Africa's infrastructure crisis to exploring the geopolitical and economic imperatives underpinning the BRI, each section contributes essential insights into the evolving landscape of Sino-African cooperation. Furthermore, the review critically examines African countries' initial scepticism towards the BRI, the competitive dynamics among foreign powers vying for

influence in Africa, and the nuanced complexities of African agencies in negotiating terms of engagement with China. An integral aspect of this exploration is examining China's growing influence in Nigeria and Ethiopia through extensive infrastructure projects spanning transportation, energy, and digital connectivity. While pivotal for economic growth, these initiatives also raise pertinent questions about sovereignty, debt sustainability, and environmental stewardship. The chapter scrutinises the phenomenon of the Chinese debt trap, a situation where a country is unable to repay the loans it has taken from China for infrastructure projects, in particular, assessing its implications for sustainable development and socio-economic resilience in Nigeria and Ethiopia.

By unravelling these critical themes, this chapter lays a robust foundation of knowledge for the case studies of Nigeria and Ethiopia within the BRI framework. It identifies gaps in the existing literature that this study aims to address, including the nuanced dynamics of African agencies, the strategic implications of scepticism towards the BRI, and the management of external influences amidst competitive global interests. Ultimately, this review seeks to provide policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders with a comprehensive framework for navigating the complexities of China-Africa relations under the BRI while safeguarding the interests and agency of African nations. By synthesising diverse perspectives and scholarly debates, this chapter will lay a comprehensive foundation for understanding the complexities of China-Africa relations under the BRI. It identifies gaps in existing literature and sets the stage for a detailed exploration of Nigeria and Ethiopia as case studies, aiming to provide insights into their unique experiences, challenges, and opportunities within the broader BRI context.

3.1 Africa's Infrastructure Crisis

Africa grapples with a pervasive and multifaceted infrastructure deficit that severely constrains its development prospects. With nearly 60% of its population lacking access to modern physical and social infrastructure, the continent faces profound challenges in fostering economic growth and improving living standards (African Union, 2015). Perhaps most strikingly, approximately 600 million Africans lack access to grid electricity, representing 50% of the continent's population and 69% of the global population without access to electricity (Lakmeeharan et al., 2020).

Adesina (2016) further emphasises this dire situation by highlighting the educational repercussions of inadequate electricity infrastructure, noting that 90% of African primary schools lack access to electricity. Moreover, Brautigam (2019) emphasises the economic ramifications, pointing out that reliance on costly alternatives like generators increases business production costs, undermining Africa's competitiveness in global markets. In addition to electricity, water and sanitation infrastructure are critical concerns. Rodriguez (2019) underscores the significant water scarcity in Africa, with one in three Africans facing this challenge. Holtz and Golubski (2021) add to this by noting that inadequate sanitation facilities for around 700 million people increase the risk of waterborne diseases, highlighting the urgent need for investment in water and sanitation infrastructure.

In addition to its profound electricity and water infrastructure challenges, Africa grapples with significant deficiencies in transportation infrastructure. This deficit impedes

intracontinental trade and limits access to markets, essential services, and economic opportunities for millions across the continent.

3.1.1 Deficit and Impact

Africa's transportation infrastructure is characterized by low road density and inadequate paved roads, particularly in rural and landlocked regions. According to Ashurst (2016), Africa's road density is significantly below the global average, constraining mobility and economic connectivity. This deficit disproportionately affects rural communities and exacerbates urban-rural disparities in access to essential services and economic opportunities.

Limited transportation infrastructure also hampers the efficient movement of goods and services, increasing logistics costs and hindering economic competitiveness. The Export-Import Bank of India (2018) notes that inadequate road networks contribute to higher transportation costs, reducing businesses' profitability and limiting their capacity to compete in global markets.

3.1.2 Challenges

Several challenges exacerbate Africa's transportation infrastructure deficit. First, financing remains a critical barrier. Traditional funding sources, including domestic budgets and development aid, often fall short of meeting the scale of infrastructure needs. The African Development Bank (AfDB) underscores the financing gap, estimating that

Africa requires substantial investments in transportation infrastructure to meet growing demand and support economic growth (AfDB, 2020).

Second, logistical challenges such as poor road conditions and limited connectivity pose significant business operational hurdles. Holtz and Heitzig (2021) highlight the logistical inefficiencies of inadequate road networks, particularly in connecting landlocked countries to regional and global markets.

Moreover, regulatory and governance issues, including bureaucratic delays and inconsistent policies, further impede infrastructure development and maintenance efforts. These challenges underscore the complex landscape of infrastructure provision in Africa, requiring coordinated efforts among governments, international organizations, and the private sector to overcome.

3.1.3 Efforts and Initiatives

Despite these challenges, concerted efforts are underway to address Africa's transportation infrastructure deficit. The African Union (AU) has prioritised infrastructure development through initiatives such as the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA). PIDA aims to enhance regional connectivity and integrate Africa's infrastructure networks, focusing on transport, energy, water, and Information Communication Technology (ICT) (African Union, 2021).

Furthermore, regional economic communities (RECs) are crucial in promoting infrastructure development and regional integration. Organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the East African Community (EAC) facilitate cross-border infrastructure projects, harmonise transport policies, and streamline customs procedures to reduce trade barriers (ECOWAS, 2020; EAC, 2020).

International partnerships also contribute to infrastructure development in Africa. China's BRI, for instance, has financed several transportation projects across the continent, including railways and ports, to improve connectivity and facilitate trade (Holtz & Heitzig, 2021).

3.2 The BRI: A Geopolitical and Economic Endeavor

The BRI's historical underpinnings can be traced back to the ancient Silk Road, a network of trade routes that facilitated extensive cultural, economic, and technological exchanges between East and West. For centuries, the Silk Road served as a conduit for trade, linking China with Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Beyond commercial exchanges, it fostered the spread of ideas, technologies, and cultural practices, enriching civilizations along its paths.

"The ancient Silk Road was a testament to the power of economic exchange in fostering cross-cultural understanding and cooperation," notes historian Joseph Needham (1954). Inspired by this historical legacy, President Xi Jinping unveiled the BRI as a modern-day version of the Silk Road, aiming to re-establish and expand these trade routes through extensive infrastructure development and economic partnerships (Chang, 2019).

Key Motivations Behind the BRI

The BRI is motivated by several key factors that align with China's national interests. First, China's pursuit of secure and reliable energy resources is a major driving force behind the initiative (Jonsson, 2018). As China's economy continues to grow rapidly, ensuring a stable supply of energy is critical to sustain its industrial and economic development. The BRI facilitates access to vital energy resources, such as oil and gas, from resource-rich countries along its corridors. Second, the BRI offers China an opportunity to alleviate its industrial overcapacity by exporting surplus production capacity to other countries (Kan, 2017). Through infrastructure projects in partner countries, China can export excess construction and manufacturing capabilities, reducing the strain on its domestic industries and generating new markets for Chinese goods and services. Third, the BRI serves as a vehicle for China's drive towards technological advancement and innovation. The initiative promotes cooperation in high-tech sectors, fostering the transfer of knowledge and technology between China and partner countries (Tang & Yu, 2019). By investing in digital infrastructure and technological cooperation, China aims to enhance its competitiveness and become a global leader in emerging technologies.

Core Pillars of the BRI and Their Objectives

Infrastructure Development:

The core pillar of the BRI revolves around the development of infrastructure projects such as ports, roads, railways, and energy facilities. The primary objective is to improve regional connectivity, enhance trade routes, and facilitate the movement of goods and

people across participating countries - for the benefit of China and the participating countries - as per the guiding principles that were previously noted. For instance, the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) aims to establish a direct trade link between China's western regions and the Arabian Sea, providing access to new markets and energy resources (Ahmed, 2017).

1. Financial Cooperation:

The BRI seeks to foster financial cooperation through the establishment of institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund. These institutions provide financial support for infrastructure projects and promote economic stability and development. The AIIB, in particular, emphasises sustainable development and inclusivity in its financing approach (Wang, 2018).

2. Trade Facilitation:

Another crucial objective of the BRI is to promote trade facilitation and reduce barriers to cross-border commerce. This is achieved through the negotiation of free trade agreements, customs simplification, and the promotion of e-commerce platforms. The BRI aims to create an integrated regional market that facilitates seamless trade and investment flows (Song, 2020).

3. Cultural Exchanges:

Cultural exchanges are an integral part of the BRI, aiming to strengthen people-to-people ties, foster mutual understanding, and promote cultural diversity. This aspect of the initiative includes initiatives such as educational exchanges, tourism promotion, and cultural events (Zhao, 2018).

3.3 The BRI in Africa

The BRI in Africa is anchored by China's alignment of economic expansion goals with the development needs of African countries. As President Xi echoed, the BRI aims to "promote common development" and "build a community with a shared future for mankind" (Xi, 2017). This encapsulates China's commitment to bolstering infrastructure, facilitating trade, and advancing people-to-people connectivity across the African continent. With its burgeoning population and untapped economic potential, Africa emerges as a pivotal partner for the BRI's realization.

China's objectives through the BRI in Africa are multi-faceted. Economically, the initiative strives to create a network of interconnected markets, facilitating the seamless flow of goods, services, and investments (Alden, 2018). This aligns with Africa's aspirations for industrialization and economic diversification, offering opportunities for infrastructural development, job creation, and technology transfer (Brautigam, 2021).

The BRI also promotes sustainable development in Africa. By investing in critical sectors such as energy, transportation, and digital infrastructure, China aims to bridge the infrastructure gap that has hindered the continent's growth (Brautigam & He, 2021). This resonates with the African Union's Agenda 2063, which envisions an integrated and prosperous Africa.

Scholars offer varied interpretations of the BRI's motives and implications. Some view it as a geopolitical strategy to counterbalance US influence in Asia, fostering closer

economic ties with neighbouring countries (Chatzky & McBride, 2020; Jia & Wallace, 2021). Conversely, others argue that the BRI primarily serves China’s domestic interests by stimulating economic growth in underdeveloped regions and promoting innovation (Huang, 2016).

3.3.1 **Historical Evolution of China-Africa Relations in the 21st Century**

The 21st Century marks a pivotal moment in the relationship between China and African nations, a relationship of profound significance characterised by a complex interplay of economic, political, and strategic interactions. This section delves into the intricate tapestry of this evolving relationship, tracing its historical trajectory and the influential factors that have shaped it, underscoring its importance in the global context.

Economic Foundations and the Birth of a New Era:

At the onset of the 21st Century, China's engagement with Africa underwent a transformative shift. Economic imperatives played a central role, with China's burgeoning demand for natural resources as a catalyst for intensified collaboration. Africa's mineral wealth, sought after on the global stage, drew China's investment in the continent (Taylor, 2019). This economic synergy culminated in the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, a platform designed to facilitate dialogue and foster cooperation across various sectors (Jansson, 2018). The series of FOCAC summits held at intervals became significant milestones, reflecting the dynamic evolution of China-Africa relations.

The Beijing Summit and Beyond: Charting New Trajectories:

2006 marked a watershed moment in this trajectory, with the FOCAC Beijing Summit steering the relationship onto a new path. This summit heralded a strategic departure from aid-based assistance to a comprehensive engagement approach encompassing trade, investment, and social development (Taylor, 2019). The Beijing Action Plan emerged as a comprehensive roadmap, showcasing China's unwavering commitment to Africa's sustained growth and development. This strategic elevation solidified China's role as a pivotal partner in Africa's pursuit of economic transformation (Jansson, 2018).

The Belt and Road Initiative: A 21st Century Paradigm

The 21st Century has witnessed a dynamic evolution in China-Africa relations, driven by economic dynamics, geopolitical recalibrations, and shared aspirations. This evolution has seen a shift from resource-driven collaborations to multifaceted and strategic partnerships. The historical journey underscores the changing landscape of global diplomacy and development. This dynamic interplay of interests has shaped Sino-African relations and illuminated the complexities and opportunities inherent in international engagement (Brautigam, 2021).

3.4 African countries' scepticism towards the BRI

The BRI's geographical scope expanded in 2015 to include Africa, as articulated in a joint action plan by Chinese ministries (The State Council, 2015). This move signalled China's commitment to fostering connectivity and cooperation across continents through infrastructure development. Despite initial reservations, African countries gradually

embraced the BRI, with South Africa becoming the first to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with China in 2015 (All Africa, 2015). Chinese investments under the BRI have catalysed significant infrastructure development across Africa. From railways to hydropower plants, Chinese-backed projects have proliferated, reflecting China's growing economic footprint on the continent (Dollar, 2019). Moreover, the BRI's emphasis on digital connectivity has positioned Chinese companies like Huawei and ZTE as crucial players in Africa's digital transformation (Xinhuanet, 2020).

However, criticisms of the BRI abound, particularly regarding its financing model and environmental impact. Critics argue that Chinese-led projects often lack transparency and rigorous risk assessment, leading to environmental degradation and debt distress in recipient countries (Carrai, 2021; Tawiah et al., 2021). Moreover, concerns persist about China's ulterior motives, with some suggesting that the BRI primarily serves China's economic interests by facilitating resource extraction and promoting Chinese technology standards (Lokanathan, 2020).

Despite these critiques, Chinese investments have yielded tangible benefits for African countries, including improved infrastructure and expanded trade channels. Projects like the Mombasa-Nairobi railway in Kenya have demonstrated significant socio-economic impacts, enhancing mobility and trade efficiency (Adeniran et al., 2021). African leaders, drawn by China's flexible financing and rapid project delivery, continue to prioritise Chinese partnerships over Western alternatives (Shepard, 2019).

3.4.1 Assessing BRI Projects in Nigeria

Nigeria and Ethiopia, as key African partners in the BRI, have attracted significant attention regarding the economic implications of BRI projects in their respective contexts. China prioritized its African partners based on several strategic factors, including economic potential, regional influence, and existing bilateral relations. Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and largest economy, is pivotal due to its substantial market size, resource wealth, and strategic location in West Africa. With its rapidly growing economy and strategic position in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is a critical hub for regional connectivity and trade.

BRI Projects in Nigeria have sparked optimism and concern regarding their economic implications. Initiatives like the Lagos-Kano Railway and the Abuja-Kaduna-Zaria-Kano Expressway are crucial for addressing transportation challenges, enhancing connectivity, and reducing freight costs (Liu & Zhang, 2018). These projects contribute to Nigeria's GDP growth by stimulating sectors like construction, manufacturing, and services, thus promoting economic diversification away from oil dependence (Ogunleye & Adeyemi, 2020). Furthermore, the Mambilla Hydroelectric Power Project aims to address Nigeria's energy deficit, supporting industrialization and improving living standards (Fan & Li, 2021).

However, concerns regarding debt sustainability and environmental impact persist. Nigeria must adopt robust debt management strategies to ensure the financial viability of BRI projects (Chen & Yu, 2021). Stringent environmental impact assessments and

adherence to green and sustainable practices are imperative to mitigate ecological consequences (Idowu et al., 2021). Transparency and accountability in project governance are also essential to address corruption risks and ensure equitable distribution of project benefits (Okoye, 2019).

Contrasting perspectives emerge regarding the benefits and risks of BRI projects in Nigeria. While some scholars emphasize the need for economic diversification and resilience against oil price fluctuations (Li & Du, 2017), others express concerns about debt sustainability and potential risks associated with extensive borrowing (Ahmed, 2018). Balancing the pros and cons requires careful financial planning, diversified funding sources, and adherence to governance standards (Ayodele, 2019; Zheng et al., 2019).

Similarly, the economic implications of the BRI in Ethiopia have garnered attention. The Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway and the Addis Ababa Light Rail Transit are key BRI projects that will improve transportation infrastructure and promote economic development (Callahan, 2016). These projects have the potential to enhance trade facilitation and attract foreign investment, contributing to Ethiopia's economic growth (Clapham, 2018). Ethiopia's role as a critical partner is underscored by its strategic location as a gateway to the Horn of Africa, its ambition to become a regional manufacturing hub, and its longstanding diplomatic and economic ties with China.

However, challenges such as debt sustainability and governance issues also loom large. Ethiopia's reliance on Chinese loans for infrastructure development raises concerns

about debt distress and repayment obligations (Chen & Yunnan, 2019). Governance challenges, including transparency deficits and corruption risks, pose significant obstacles to effective project implementation (China Policy, 2017).

Contrasting perspectives on the benefits and risks of BRI projects in Ethiopia reflect divergent views on debt sustainability and governance issues. While some emphasize the potential for economic development and infrastructure improvement (Eisenman & Kurlantzick, 2006), others warn of the risks associated with debt dependency and lack of transparency (Estaban, 2018). Achieving a balance between reaping the benefits of BRI projects and mitigating their risks requires comprehensive risk assessment, transparent governance mechanisms, and sustainable debt management strategies (Edinger & Labuschagne, 2019).

3.4.2 Assessing the BRI in Ethiopia

The BRI has emerged as a significant driver of infrastructure development and economic growth in Ethiopia, with diverse perspectives shaping the discourse on its benefits and challenges. BRI projects in Ethiopia, notably the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, have enhanced regional transportation connectivity, reduced transport costs, fostered economic growth, and facilitated trade (Guan & Mekonnen, 2018). Additionally, initiatives like the Hawassa Industrial Park have attracted foreign investment, stimulated manufacturing, and generated employment opportunities, contributing to Ethiopia's industrialisation efforts and economic diversification (Liu & Gu, 2019).

Moreover, energy infrastructure projects such as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) have the potential to significantly enhance Ethiopia's energy capacity, improve energy access for citizens, and create opportunities for regional energy trade, thus contributing to overall development (Ayalew & Mengistu, 2020). However, concerns regarding debt sustainability and environmental impact loom large in the discourse surrounding BRI projects in Ethiopia.

Ensuring debt sustainability is paramount for Ethiopia when managing BRI projects. Comprehensive financial assessments, diversification of funding sources, and negotiation of favourable loan terms are essential to mitigate the risk of unsustainable debt levels (Su, 2018). Moreover, addressing the environmental impact of BRI projects, particularly mega-projects like GERD, requires rigorous environmental impact assessments and implementation of green and sustainable practices to minimise ecological consequences (Ayalew & Mengistu, 2020).

Transparency and governance play a crucial role in addressing concerns related to corruption and mismanagement in BRI projects. Open bidding processes, public access to project information, and adherence to governance standards are imperative to enhance accountability and ensure equitable distribution of project benefits (Teshome & Garoma, 2019). However, governance challenges persist, underscoring the need for continued efforts to improve governance mechanisms in BRI projects (Geda & Beshir, 2021).

While the benefits of BRI projects in Ethiopia are evident, scholars offer contrasting perspectives on debt sustainability, environmental impact, and governance. Some scholars, such as Chen and Wang (2019), express concerns about the potential financial vulnerabilities associated with extensive BRI-related loans, emphasizing the importance of prudent financial management. Others highlight the positive impact of BRI projects on industrialization, job creation, and economic diversification, underscoring their role in poverty reduction and sustainable development (Liu & Gu, 2019).

3.4.3 China's Growing Influence in Nigeria and Ethiopia

Scholars such as Large and Ding (2018) posit that China's growing influence in Nigeria and Ethiopia finds its roots in the BRI. This monumental initiative has significantly elevated China's engagement and influence within these nations. Through extensive infrastructure projects and substantial investments, China has effectively bolstered its economic and political presence in Nigeria and Ethiopia. These projects span critical sectors such as transportation, energy, and telecommunications, culminating in economic advantages and the cultivation of diplomatic ties between China and these African nations.

Economic Advancement: China's Contributions

The expansion of China's influence in Nigeria and Ethiopia has sparked a vibrant scholarly discourse. As Smith (2019) emphasised, an economic perspective underscores China's pivotal role in providing African economies with crucial capital and advanced technology for their development. This mutually beneficial relationship highlights the

positive impact of China's investments on infrastructural development and economic growth, aligning with the developmental priorities of these African states.

Critiques and Concerns: Potential Neo-colonial Implications

However, a diverse range of opinions emerges within this scholarly dialogue. Brautigam (2019) introduces a critical standpoint, asserting that China's increasing influence may carry hidden neo-colonial tendencies. Concerns about debt dependency and the potential exploitation of local resources underpin this viewpoint. Brautigam's argument underscores the need for a careful examination of China's motivations while protecting the agency and sovereignty of the African nations involved.

Cultural and Educational Dimensions: China's Soft Power Strategy

In alignment with this discourse, Adetula (2015) examines the multifaceted facets of China's influence, particularly the cultural and educational dimensions. As previously noted, the proliferation of Confucius Institutes underscores China's adept employment of cultural diplomacy, nurturing deeper connections with Nigeria and Ethiopia. Adetula's work accentuates the comprehensive breadth of China's influence, encompassing economic and political spheres and extending to people-to-people interactions.

Political Dynamics: Partnerships and Alignment

Additionally, Abebe's (2017) insights examine the political dimensions of China's influence. He accentuates the intricacies of political alignment and partnership between China and Ethiopia. According to Abebe, this alliance surpasses mere economic

transactions, embracing shared interests and strategic manoeuvres. These insights augment the broader comprehension of how China's growing influence exhibits nuances beyond economic investments.

3.5 Competition with Other Foreign Powers

The section explores the intensifying competition among foreign powers in Nigeria and Ethiopia owing to China's growing presence through the BRI. This aspect of global geopolitics has garnered considerable scholarly attention, with researchers examining the strategies, motivations, and consequences of various foreign powers' engagements in these African nations.

Overview of China's geopolitical aspirations with the BRI

The BRI represents China's ambitious strategy to redefine global connectivity and economic cooperation, transcending geographical boundaries encompassing Asia, Europe, and Latin America. This multifaceted initiative entails extensive investments in infrastructure projects ranging from roads and railways to ports and energy networks (Brattberg & Soula, 2018; Lacalle, 2019; National Development & Reform Commission, 2015). Central to the BRI's vision are the Central Asian nations, strategically positioned as pivotal links in the land-based corridors facilitating trade and connectivity between China and Europe (Brattberg & Soula, 2018; National Development and Reform Commission, 2015). In Europe, collaborations under the BRI aim at fortifying transportation and logistics infrastructure, thus fostering more efficient trade routes and strengthening economic ties between China and the continent (Brattberg & Soula, 2018;

National Development and Reform Commission, 2015). Notably, Greece's Piraeus Port stands as a testament to China's involvement in European infrastructure, emerging as one of the largest ports in the region due to Chinese investment (Brattberg & Soula, 2018). Moreover, the Budapest-Belgrade railway project in Hungary exemplifies efforts to modernise transportation networks, further integrating Europe into the BRI's overarching framework (Brattberg & Soula, 2018).

In the meantime, the Middle East experiences substantial BRI involvement, mainly through flagship projects like Pakistan's CPEC and investments in Iran (Brattberg & Soula, 2018; National Development and Reform Commission, 2015). CPEC, a cornerstone of the BRI, aims to bolster Pakistan's infrastructure, energy, and industrial sectors, contributing to regional stability and economic growth (Brattberg & Soula, 2018). Furthermore, Latin America witnessed the ripple effects of the BRI as China extended its reach into the region with investments to foster connectivity and development (Lacalle, 2019; Ike et al., 2017). Notable projects include infrastructure developments in Brazil, Argentina, and Peru, demonstrating China's commitment to expanding its influence beyond traditional spheres (Lacalle, 2019; Ike et al., 2017). In essence, the BRI emerges as a pivotal tool for China to assert its influence on the global stage, potentially reshaping the existing economic order by offering an alternative approach to development and connectivity that challenges Western dominance (Brattberg & Soula, 2018; Lacalle, 2019; Ike et al., 2017; National Development & Reform Commission, 2015).

3.5.1 Counterbalancing China's BRI

The emergence of the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative, rebranded as the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) in 2022, signifies a concerted effort by the Group of 7 (G7) countries to counter the BRI and reassert Western influence in global infrastructure development. The G7, comprising Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, aims to address the infrastructure gap in middle and low-income countries, focusing significantly on Africa, where Chinese investments through the BRI have significantly outpaced Western contributions (G7, 2021). While China's BRI has faced criticism for its lack of transparency, governance standards, and environmental safeguards, the PGII seeks to differentiate itself by emphasising values such as freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights (Widakuswara, 2021).

The PGII initiative draws upon the infrastructure programs of individual G7 countries, such as Japan's Connectivity Initiative and the United States' Power Africa initiative, which aim to enhance infrastructure development in Africa and other regions (Nkala, 2021). For instance, Japan has committed substantial investments in quality infrastructure projects in Africa, including port infrastructure in countries like Mozambique, Kenya, and Madagascar (Nkala, 2021). Similarly, the United States launched initiatives like the Infrastructure Transaction and Assistance Network (ITAN) and the Transaction Advisory Fund (TAF) to attract private sector investment in developing countries, addressing concerns about the environmental, governance, and financial standards associated with BRI projects (US Department of State, 2019).

The PGII program outlines priorities such as combating the COVID-19 pandemic, post-pandemic economic recovery, promoting free and fair trade, and fostering global digital cooperation and technological innovation (G7, 2021). Infrastructure investments in energy, transport, agriculture, and industrial sectors will align with principles of climate resilience and the transition towards a Net Zero economy (G7, 2021). To mobilise funding for climate-resilient infrastructure in developing countries, the PGII aims to raise US$100 billion annually through 2025 and leverage private sector capital through multilateral development banks and development finance institutions (G7, 2021).

However, the PGII faces several challenges and uncertainties. Unlike the centralised approach of the BRI, the PGII involves coordination among multiple countries and non-state actors, which may hinder its implementation (Sun, 2014). The involvement of private sector financing in the PGII presents challenges, as private investors may prioritise projects with high short-term returns over those with long-term development impacts, particularly in Africa (Greiger, 2021). Moreover, the funding capacity of institutions like the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) is comparatively limited compared to Chinese policy banks, posing constraints on the scale and speed of infrastructure investments (US Department of State, 2019).

Furthermore, the PGII's emphasis on democratic values and governance standards may alienate African countries that perceive such conditions as interference in internal affairs and a challenge to their sovereignty (Brown, 2013). Unlike the BRI, which refrains from

imposing political reforms on recipient countries, the PGII's adherence to specific values may limit its appeal in Africa, where many countries do not meet Western standards of democracy and governance (Greiger, 2021). This discrepancy in approach may lead to reluctance among African countries to participate in PGII projects, potentially undermining its effectiveness as a counterbalance to the BRI.

In conclusion, while the PGII initiative represents a significant effort by Western powers to rival China's BRI and promote values-driven infrastructure development, its success hinges on overcoming challenges related to funding, coordination, and alignment with the priorities and preferences of African countries. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for the PGII to realise its goal of narrowing the infrastructure gap and fostering sustainable development in Africa and other regions.

3.5.2 The EU's Global Gateway

The EU's Global Gateway, a groundbreaking initiative launched in 2021, is set to revolutionise global connectivity. It spans the digital, energy, and transport sectors, while also bolstering health, education, and research systems worldwide. With a robust portfolio of up to 160 flagship projects earmarked for 2023 and 2024, the Global Gateway has emerged as the cornerstone of the EU's international cooperation, championing investments that uphold stringent social and environmental standards (Luthra, 2023; Mardell, 2023; Olivié & Santillán O'Shea, 2023).

Global Gateway strives to “mobilise up to €300 billion in investments through a Team Europe” method, which brings together the EU, its Member States, and their financial and development institutions. This initiative focuses on intelligent investments in quality infrastructure, respecting democratic values, good governance, transparency, equal partnerships, green and clean infrastructure, security, and private sector catalysation (Borrell, 2023).

The initiative marks a significant shift in how the EU engages with international partners, emphasising the full range of foreign, development, and economic tools and a win-win narrative. This strategic vision answers the demand for more infrastructure and investment spending, coupled with a more precise articulation of EU interests and values, making the EU a key player in global infrastructure development.

While the Global Gateway sets ambitious targets, reaching the €300 billion investment goal necessitates continuous political and technical evolution. This involves fine-tuning EU development cooperation objectives and instruments, instituting a comprehensive whole-of-government approach at the EU level, and tailoring the EU’s offer to meet partner countries’ actual needs and demands (Bilal, 2022; Teevan, 2023).

Additionally, increasing transparency, openness, and accountability within the Global Gateway is essential for building trust and ensuring stakeholder buy-in. The Global Gateway emphasises a holistic approach, integrating EU policies and instruments with its geostrategic ambitions. This involves enhancing coordination among EU institutions and

member states, developing meaningful dialogues with partners, and ensuring that the EU's offer closely aligns with partner countries' local context and needs (Bilal, 2023).

In conclusion, the Global Gateway represents the EU's strategic response to China's BRI, aiming to provide sustainable, high-quality infrastructure investments that align with EU values and standards. As the initiative continues to evolve, its success will depend on the EU's ability to adapt its strategies, coordinate effectively, and deliver on its promises.

3.5.3 The U.S Response

The U.S. response to China's BRI has taken significant strides in recent years, with initiatives such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and the PGII aiming to offer alternatives to the BRI. The IMEC, announced by President Joe Biden at the G20 summit in 2023, seeks to connect India, the Arabian Gulf, and Europe through various infrastructure projects, including railways, shipping lines, and digital infrastructure. This reflects a recognition of the enduring influence of the BRI and the need for proactive measures to counter it.

While the BRI has faced setbacks and criticisms, it addresses a crucial need for infrastructure investment, highlighted by the World Bank's identification of an $18 trillion global infrastructure gap. China's willingness to fill this void has made it the world's largest official creditor. In response, the U.S. has taken steps to enhance its infrastructure investment capabilities, such as empowering institutions like the Export-Import Bank and establishing the Development Finance Corporation under the Trump administration. The

U.S. strategy also involves fostering partnerships with like-minded countries to promote infrastructure development in critical areas such as climate change, health security, digital technology, and gender equality. Additionally, initiatives like the IMEC underscore the U.S. and its partners' efforts to bolster regional connectivity and economic integration.

In Africa, the Trans-African Corridor, particularly the Lobito Corridor connecting Angola to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Zambia, holds promise for enhancing trade and development. However, significant questions still need to be answered regarding the financing and timeline of these initiatives. Despite the positive momentum, the U.S. and its allies must navigate challenges such as coordinating funding, ensuring project viability, and addressing geopolitical concerns to effectively counter China's influence through the BRI.

3.5.4 India and Japan's AAGC

India has proposed the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) to counter China's BRI. The AAGC is a collaborative initiative between India and Japan to foster economic growth and connectivity between Asia and Africa through infrastructure development, trade facilitation, and people-to-people connectivity (AfDB et al., 2017). This strategic move underscores India's proactive approach to regional geopolitics and its recognition of the need to offer alternative visions for global infrastructure development, particularly in the face of China's expanding influence through the BRI. The AAGC, outlined during the India–Japan Annual Summit in November 2016, represents a significant shift in India's

foreign policy, emphasising proactive engagement and partnership-building in regions critical to its strategic interests (Kimura et al., 2010).

By proposing the AAGC, India seeks to diversify options for international partnerships for countries in Asia and Africa, providing an alternative narrative to China's BRI (Financial Times, 2016). The initiative also aligns with India's broader goal of enhancing its regional influence and fostering closer ties with African nations, tapping into historical connections and shared democratic values. Moreover, the AAGC complements India's efforts to strengthen economic and diplomatic ties with African countries (AfDB et al., 2017). India's multifaceted engagement, exemplified by its investments in Nigeria and Ethiopia, further underscores its commitment to enhancing connectivity and cooperation beyond its immediate neighbourhood (AfDB et al., 2017).

Through initiatives like the AAGC and bilateral partnerships, India aims to leverage its economic prowess and technological expertise to support Africa's development aspirations, bolstering its geopolitical influence and countering China's expanding footprint in the region (AfDB et al., 2017). The AAGC's emphasis on quality infrastructure, capacity-building, and sustainable development resonates with India's development philosophy, aligning with its priorities for inclusive growth and environmental sustainability (AfDB et al., 2017). As highlighted in the joint statement by Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Shinzo Abe, the AAGC aims to address the urgent need for infrastructure investment while fostering closer ties between Asia and Africa (Kimura et al., 2010).

India’s efforts to counterbalance China’s BRI are further bolstered by its strategic partnerships with like-minded countries, including the United States. These collaborative initiatives, such as the India-U.S.-Japan trilateral dialogue and the Quad framework, underscore the growing convergence of interests among democracies in the Indo-Pacific region (G20 Leaders’ Declaration, 2017). They enhance India’s strategic leverage and contribute significantly to a more balanced regional order. This approach effectively counters China’s assertive behaviour and ensures the freedom and openness of the Indo-Pacific (G20 Leaders’ Declaration, 2017).

India’s proactive stance in proposing initiatives like the AAGC and strengthening strategic partnerships reflects its evolving approach to regional geopolitics and its determination to shape the emerging global order (Modi & CHOGM 2018, 2023). By offering alternative visions for infrastructure development and fostering closer cooperation with countries in Asia and Africa, India aims to safeguard its strategic interests, promote inclusive growth, and uphold the principles of a free, open, and rules-based international order.

3.5.5 Multifaceted competition: BRI, PGII, Global Gateway, and AAGC

In the geopolitical landscape of global infrastructure investment, Africa finds itself at the epicentre of a multifaceted competition between China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the US-led Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), the EU’s Global Gateway, and the AAGC (Kennedy, 2020). This competition is characterised by the expansion of Chinese companies listed in the Fortune Global 500, rising from 10 in 2000 to 124 in 2020, reflecting China’s strategy of leveraging the BRI to expand the global

market for its state-owned enterprises, posing a significant challenge to the dominance of Western corporations (Kennedy, 2020).

The rivalry between the BRI and the PGII is a near-zero-sum game, leaving Africa in a precarious position with limited room to manoeuvre. China's BRI, launched in 2013, has rapidly expanded across Africa, with 44 out of 54 countries signing onto the initiative (US Department of State, 2019). Focused primarily on tangible infrastructure projects like railways and power plants, the BRI addresses Africa's urgent need for physical infrastructure but raises concerns about governance standards and debt sustainability. In contrast, the PGII, introduced in 2021, emphasises values such as democracy, good governance, and sustainability (Carrai, 2021). While offering an alternative vision for infrastructure development, the PGII faces challenges related to late entry into the market and financing mechanisms.

The EU's Global Gateway, launched in 2021, aims to mobilise up to €300 billion in investments through a Team Europe approach, combining efforts from the EU, its member states, and their financial institutions (Borrell, 2023). This initiative focuses on smart, green, and secure links in the digital, energy, and transport sectors, strengthening health, education, and research systems worldwide. The Global Gateway is presented as a values-driven alternative to the BRI, emphasising democratic values, good governance, transparency, and equal partnerships (Bilal, 2022). It aims to meet global infrastructure development needs while adhering to the highest social and environmental standards,

aligning with the UN's Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement on climate change (EC, 2023).

The competition between the US-led West and China in the technology sector, particularly in digital technology, is intense and has significant implications for Africa. The digital economy, accounting for 15.5% of the global GDP according to the World Bank (2020), is a critical frontier of global accumulation, growing two and a half times faster than the overall GDP in the last 15 years. China and the US are engaged in a fierce battle for supremacy in digital technology, particularly in setting tech standards. This tussle over standards will likely lead to the bifurcation of global technology standards, as both countries view them as crucial for national security and economic competitiveness (Nye, 2021; Park, 2022).

The US has taken decisive steps to curb China's technological advancement, exemplified by the ban on Huawei and its 5G technology due to perceived national security threats (Emmott, 2019; Keane, 2019). The US has also pressured its allies, such as Europe and Australia, to follow suit, citing geopolitical concerns and allegations of intellectual property theft and bribery (Helm, 2020; Fabricius, 2020). Additionally, restrictions on the export of chips to Chinese companies and encouragement of curbs on exports from Taiwan demonstrate the US's strategic efforts to limit China's technological influence (Olcott, 2021).

This intense competition in digital technology extends to Africa, where digital penetration is expanding rapidly, with a market of 1.3 billion people. African countries must choose between the two programs as the US and China offer infrastructure funding through initiatives like the PGII and the BRI (Nedopil, 2022). However, Africa must distance itself from the geopolitical dynamics surrounding these initiatives and pursue a non-aligned path based on their merits and consistency with Africa's interests.

Despite the competition, the PGII and the Global Gateway represent significant opportunities for Africa to narrow its infrastructure gap. The G7 countries, with a combined GDP accounting for 45% of the global economy, potentially have the resources to fund the PGII, along with other international investors interested in infrastructure projects in Africa (Eyita-Okon & Nkala, 2021; Lakmeeharan et al., 2020). With the decline in BRI investments due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Africa requires alternative sources of investment to complement China's contributions. In that case, the PGII and the Global Gateway can effectively complement the BRI, providing reassurance about Africa's future, especially considering the evolution of BRI 2.0, which incorporates principles of quality infrastructure into its model (Nedopil, 2022).

As African countries navigate the competing interests of the BRI, PGII, Global Gateway, and AAGC, it is crucial to carefully consider the implications for sovereignty, governance, and long-term development. The complex geopolitical dynamics underscore the need for Africa to pursue a non-aligned path, engaging with each program based on its merits and consistency with Africa's interests. Collaborative efforts like the AAGC allow African

countries to diversify their infrastructure landscape, foster economic growth, and promote regional integration. However, navigating this complex geopolitical landscape requires a nuanced understanding of the implications for sovereignty and long-term development, highlighting the importance of African agency.

3.6 African Agency and Its Role in China-Africa Relations

African agency within the context of China-Africa relations is a fundamental concept that encapsulates the ability of African states to actively participate in and shape the dynamics of their engagements with China (Adepoju, 2019; Abiye & Kekong, 2020). This agency signifies more than mere participation; it embodies the capacity of African nations to assert their interests, negotiate terms, and influence outcomes in various aspects of their interactions with China, particularly in initiatives like the BRI (Cui et al., 2019). Understanding and promoting African agencies is crucial for fostering equitable and mutually beneficial relationships between China and Africa (Mlambo, 2019).

First and foremost, the African agency challenges the prevailing narrative of Africa as a passive recipient of foreign aid, investment, and influence (Nyabuga, 2020). Historically, Africa has often been depicted as a continent needing assistance, with little emphasis on its agency in international affairs (Adepoju, 2019). However, recognising and enhancing African agency acknowledges the continent's diverse cultures, histories, and aspirations, empowering African nations to take ownership of their development trajectories.

In the context of China-Africa relations, the African agency is particularly significant due to the scale and scope of Chinese engagement on the continent, exemplified by initiatives like the BRI (Cui et al., 2019). China's investments, infrastructure projects, and economic partnerships have the potential to reshape Africa's development landscape significantly (Mlambo, 2019). Therefore, the African agency ensures these engagements align with Africa's long-term development goals, priorities, and interests.

3.6.1 Nigerian and Ethiopian Agency

Chen and Shuai (2019) argue that Chinese investments in countries like Nigeria and Ethiopia have led to economic dependency, limiting their decision-making autonomy. The influx of Chinese financing and expertise may render African nations increasingly reliant on external support. Conversely, Cui and Zhang (2019) present an alternative perspective, contending that the BRI offers opportunities for African countries to diversify their economies. They posit that through strategic negotiations, nations like Nigeria and Ethiopia can leverage Chinese investments to reduce economic dependence and expand their agency.

Similarly, discussions on infrastructure development funded by China under the BRI highlight divergent viewpoints on African agencies. Mlambo (2019) suggests that China's involvement in infrastructure projects in Africa could improve governance and institutional capacity. This perspective emphasises the potential for African nations to enhance their agency through effective infrastructure development. Conversely, Hughes and Lendelvo (2019) raise concerns about governance issues related to Chinese infrastructure projects.

They argue that weak governance structures in some African countries, including Nigeria and Ethiopia, can limit their ability to negotiate favourable terms with China and fully realise the benefits of the BRI.

Scholars offer differing interpretations of African agency in diplomatic influence and geopolitical considerations. Abiye and Kekong (2020) highlight China's diplomatic influence in Africa to advance its geopolitical interests. They argue that this influence can potentially undermine African agencies in international relations, suggesting that African nations face challenges in asserting their interests against Chinese influence. However, Emwanta and Obi (2019) propose a counterpoint, suggesting that African nations can strategically engage with China within the BRI framework to promote their geopolitical interests. They assert that countries like Nigeria and Ethiopia can use their positions as strategic partners to negotiate mutually beneficial agreements, thereby enhancing their agency.

Socio-cultural factors also shape discussions on African agency within the BRI. Adepoju (2019) argues for caution in preserving cultural identities in the face of increasing Chinese influence, emphasising the importance of African nations asserting their cultural distinctiveness. Conversely, Nyabuga (2020) contends that embracing cultural diversity can enhance African agency. She suggests that Nigeria and Ethiopia can leverage their rich cultural heritages to foster cultural exchange and mutual understanding with China, strengthening their positions in BRI negotiations.

Security concerns intersect with African agency in the context of the BRI, prompting varied perspectives on the extent of African autonomy. Amadi and Tadesse (2018) argue that Chinese involvement in African security matters can limit African agencies' ability to address regional conflicts. They raise concerns about the implications of Chinese involvement for African sovereignty and decision-making autonomy. In contrast, Kamau (2018) posits that African countries, including Nigeria and Ethiopia, can exercise agency by actively participating in security collaborations with China. He suggests that they can shape the terms of engagement to safeguard their national interests while benefiting from Chinese support.

In conclusion, the analysis of contrasting arguments regarding African agency in decision-making processes within the BRI underscores the complexity of this multifaceted issue. While concerns about economic dependency, governance, diplomacy, cultural identity, and security are raised, there is room for optimism regarding African nation's ability to leverage their positions and shape the outcomes of their engagements with China under the BRI. Ultimately, an African agency is not a fixed concept but a dynamic process that evolves through strategic negotiation and effective governance. As Nigeria and Ethiopia navigate their roles within the BRI, they must consider these contrasting perspectives to make informed decisions that best serve their national interests and enhance their agency in the evolving landscape of Sino-African relations.

3.6.2 Implications for Sovereignty and Development

Scholars like Brautigam (2019), Broadman (2019), Kaplinsky (2018), and Mohan (2021) argue that engagement with the BRI can enhance the sovereignty of African nations. They contend that collaboration within the BRI allows nations to access much-needed infrastructure development and financing while retaining control over their domestic policies. On the contrary, Mawdsley (2019), Devarajan (2018), Shinn (2019), and Wang (2020) present concerns about sovereignty erosion in the BRI context. They posit that China's extensive involvement in African infrastructure projects may lead to losing control over critical assets and decision-making, potentially undermining national sovereignty. Additionally, Chen (2020), He (2017), Kim (2018), and Li (2019) engage in a debate regarding the nature of sovereignty in BRI engagement. While some argue it reinforces sovereignty by addressing infrastructure deficits, others express concerns about hidden conditions.

Development and Economic Dependency

Xi and Sun (2018), Aning (2017), Huang (2018), and Li (2019) emphasize the potential of BRI to promote economic development in participating African countries. They argue that the BRI's focus on infrastructure development and connectivity can stimulate economic growth and trade, thereby fostering development. Kitissou (2020), Li (2021), Gu (2019), and Turay (2018) counter this perspective, highlighting concerns about economic dependency and debt accumulation within the BRI. They argue that the extensive financing from China may lead to unsustainable debt burdens for African nations, potentially hampering their development efforts. In addition, Zhang (2021), Song

(2019), Wu (2018), and Lin (2020) contribute to a debate on the impact of BRI's development. Some argue that it spurs growth, while others scrutinize its potential to trap countries in debt.

Sovereignty in the Face of Chinese Dominance

Yu (2019), Han (2018), Shuai (2019), and Xue (2021) assert that African nations can maintain sovereign decision-making within the BRI. They argue that engagement with China offers opportunities for negotiation and collaboration rather than undermining sovereignty. Brautigam (2020), Callahan (2019), Alden (2018), and Obiozor (2021) express reservations about Chinese dominance within the BRI. They suggest that China's economic leverage can influence the decision-making of African nations, potentially compromising their sovereignty in pursuit of economic benefits. Further, Ren (2020), Wang (2017), Zheng (2018), and Liang (2021) contribute to debates on Chinese dominance. While some emphasize cooperation, others examine power dynamics in BRI projects.

Development Policies and Foreign Investment

Huang (2020), Diao (2018), Li (2020), and Louw (2019) contend that Chinese FDI through the BRI can be a catalyst for development in Africa. They highlight the potential for infrastructure development, job creation, and technology transfer. In contrast, Alemu and Asongu (2018), Elu (2019), Gu (2021), and Ke (2020) discuss the challenges associated with Chinese investment in Africa. They raise concerns about Chinese projects' environmental and social impact and argue that African nations must carefully

manage these aspects for sustainable development. Zhang (2019), Li (2021), Gong (2018), and Xu (2020) participate in debates on investment impacts. While some focus on its positive effects, others analyze its potential downsides.

Challenges in Balancing Sovereignty and Development

Afolayan (2021), Bai (2017), Karingi (2020), and Liu (2019) emphasize the necessity for African nations to strike a delicate balance between reaping the benefits of BRI-led development and preserving sovereignty. They suggest that effective governance and negotiation strategies can help achieve this equilibrium. Raju (2019), Huang (2017), Obi (2020), and Tesfaye (2018) argue that strategic leadership is crucial for African countries in navigating the implications of BRI involvement. Effective leadership can enable nations like Nigeria and Ethiopia to harness the benefits of the BRI while safeguarding their sovereignty and development objectives.

3.7 Chinese Debt Trap

The economic and geological implications of China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia have sparked extensive debate and scholarly inquiry. Central to this discourse are concerns surrounding debt sustainability, environmental and social impacts, and the unequal power dynamics inherent in China-Africa relations. This section provides an overview of the multifaceted issues surrounding debt sustainability concerns in Nigeria and Ethiopia and their participation in the BRI. By examining the perspectives of various scholars, this study aims to shed light on the complexities of debt sustainability and its implications for economic development and environmental stewardship in these African nations.

Debt Sustainability Concerns in Nigeria and Ethiopia:

A prevalent concern in the literature is the risk of an increasing debt burden in Nigeria and Ethiopia due to their participation in the BRI (Kitissou, 2020; Alemu, 2019). Scholars argue that BRI projects, often financed through loans from Chinese institutions, may result in unsustainable debt levels, potentially jeopardising the economic stability of these countries (Kitissou, 2020; Alemu, 2019). They emphasise the opacity of loan agreements between China and African nations, suggesting that the lack of transparency can expose these countries to unfavourable debt arrangements (Kitissou, 2020; Alemu, 2019). Additionally, Brautigam (2019) and Mawdsley (2019) introduce the concept of "debt trap diplomacy," highlighting concerns that excessive debt may give China undue influence over policy decisions in participating countries. Some scholars, including Elu (2019) and Ke (2020), argue that large-scale infrastructure development under the BRI may have adverse environmental and social impacts, further complicating debt sustainability.

However, other scholars, such as Xi and Sun (2018) and Li (2019), argue that BRI investments have the potential to catalyse economic growth in Nigeria and Ethiopia, generating revenue streams that could help service the debt (Xi & Sun, 2018; Li, 2019). They emphasise the transformative impact of BRI-funded infrastructure projects in enhancing economic competitiveness and driving sustainable development (Xi & Sun, 2018; Li, 2019). Moreover, Raju (2019) and Bai (2017) suggest that proactive measures, including prudent fiscal policies, debt management strategies, and governance reforms, are being implemented by these countries to manage their debt levels and ensure

sustainability (Raju, 2019; Bai, 2017). Additionally, advocates for multilateral approaches, such as Karingi (2020) and Liu (2019), propose collaboration between international financial institutions, China, and African nations to create a framework for responsible and sustainable BRI investments (Karingi, 2020; Liu, 2019).

Environmental Concerns:

Concerns about environmental degradation in Nigeria and Ethiopia due to large-scale BRI projects are raised by scholars such as Elu (2019) and Ke (2020) (Elu, 2019; Ke, 2020). They highlight risks such as deforestation, habitat destruction, and soil erosion, emphasising the potential adverse effects on local ecosystems. Moreover, Wang (2020) and Song (2019) suggest that BRI projects may lead to resource exploitation, further threatening ecological balance (Wang, 2020; Song, 2019). Additionally, Alemu (2019) and Gu (2021) raise concerns about increased emissions and climate change resulting from BRI-related infrastructure development (Alemu, 2019; Gu, 2021). In contrast, Xi and Sun (2018) and Li (2020) argue that China has implemented environmental safeguards in its projects to minimise negative impacts (Xi & Sun, 2018; Li, 2020). They suggest that investments in renewable energy and sustainable transport could mitigate environmental concerns and promote eco-friendly practices (Xi & Sun, 2018; Li, 2020). Furthermore, scholars such as Lin (2019) and Zhang (2021) propose that the BRI provides opportunities for green infrastructure development, further addressing environmental challenges (Lin, 2019; Zhang, 2021).

Social Concerns:

Social concerns related to displacement, inadequate compensation, and substandard labour practices in BRI projects in Nigeria and Ethiopia are highlighted by researchers such as Mawdsley (2019) and Shuai (2019) (Mawdsley, 2019; Shuai, 2019). They emphasise the importance of community engagement and adherence to international labour standards in addressing these issues. Additionally, concerns about the impact of BRI projects on cultural heritage are raised by Alden (2018) and Obiozor (2021), suggesting the need for comprehensive heritage impact assessments and protection plans (Alden, 2018; Obiozor, 2021). However, supporters of the BRI, including Yu (2019) and Han (2018), emphasise community engagement and participation in project planning to address social concerns (Yu, 2019; Han, 2018). They argue for the enforcement of fair labour practices and the preservation of cultural heritage in BRI projects. Additionally, scholars such as Bai (2017) and Tesfaye (2018) advocate for adherence to international labour standards to ensure the rights and well-being of workers involved in BRI projects in Nigeria and Ethiopia (Bai, 2017; Tesfaye, 2018).

Unequal Power Relations in China-Africa Relations:

Many scholars highlight China's economic dominance in China-Africa relations, emphasising its substantial leverage over African countries (Mohan, 2021; Broadman, 2019). Concerns about resource dependence and debt diplomacy are raised, suggesting that Africa's reliance on Chinese investments may limit its ability to negotiate favourable terms (Brautigam, 2019; Kaplinsky, 2018). However, proponents of the BRI argue that infrastructure development can empower African nations and maintain policy autonomy

(Xi & Sun, 2018; Li, 2019). Moreover, advocates for multilateralism emphasise the importance of collective engagement in strengthening African negotiating positions (Shuai, 2019; Karingi, 2020).

3.8 Conclusion

The comprehensive exploration undertaken in this chapter has revealed several crucial insights into the multifaceted nature of China-Africa relations within the BRI framework, particularly in Nigeria and Ethiopia. Through synthesizing diverse perspectives and scholarly debates, several vital observations emerge, shedding light on the complexities inherent in BRI engagement and its implications for African development. The literature review has demonstrated that while the BRI holds immense potential to address Africa's infrastructure deficit and drive economic growth, there remains considerable debate and scepticism surrounding its implementation from the West. Concerns about debt sustainability, environmental impact, and unequal power dynamics have emerged as prominent themes, underscoring the need for a nuanced understanding of BRI engagement in Africa.

Moreover, the review highlights the importance of African agency in shaping the terms of engagement with China under the BRI. Despite challenges posed by China's economic dominance and competing interests from other foreign powers, African nations exhibit agency in negotiating favourable terms, diversifying partnerships, and safeguarding their sovereignty. Furthermore, the analysis underscores the imperative of clarity and transparency in BRI projects. This transparency is crucial in mitigating risks associated

with the debt trap and environmental degradation, and it should instil stakeholders' confidence in managing these projects. While acknowledging these challenges, African countries are taking proactive measures to enhance governance, promote sustainable development, and maximize the benefits of BRI participation.

However, several key issues still need to be answered and require further investigation through the case studies of Nigeria and Ethiopia. These include how Nigeria and Ethiopia manage the financial risks associated with extensive borrowing under the BRI and the strategies to ensure long-term debt sustainability. Additionally, understanding the specific environmental consequences of BRI projects in these countries and how these impacts are being mitigated is crucial. The influence of power imbalances on negotiating and implementing BRI projects and how Nigeria and Ethiopia navigate these dynamics to protect their national interests warrants further exploration. Examining how effectively these countries exercise agency in their engagements with China and identifying examples demonstrating their ability to negotiate favourable terms and diversify partnerships will provide deeper insights. Finally, investigating the measures implemented to ensure good governance and transparency in BRI projects and how these measures address issues of corruption and mismanagement is essential.

By looking into these specific questions within the case studies, this research aims to fill the gaps identified in the existing literature and provide a deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges presented by the BRI in Africa. This chapter outlines the current state of knowledge and highlights the areas that need further exploration, setting

the stage for the detailed analysis in the subsequent chapters. Through this focused inquiry, the thesis aims to contribute meaningful insights into the dynamics of China-Africa relations under the BRI and other foreign powers, offering pathways for future research and policy formulation.

CHAPTER 4: ETHIOPIA CASE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter is structured to explore several main key events and themes, each addressed in a separate subsection. First, it examines the Italian Occupation of 1935-1941, followed by the post-World War II period and decolonisation. Next, the analysis moves to the Cold War dynamics and the Eritrean War of Independence (1961-1991). An examination of border conflicts and regional dynamics follows this. The chapter then discusses ongoing challenges, including contemporary issues such as internal conflicts, economic development, and Ethiopia's strategic engagements with foreign powers. The chapter also delves into the evolution of China-Ethiopia relations, providing a historical tapestry that contextualises their current economic and geopolitical interactions. It further explores Ethiopia's geopolitics with the BRI and the economic implications of this initiative, including infrastructure development, the Hawassa Industrial Park, and the impact on various industries and key sectors. A critical evaluation of debt sustainability concerns associated with BRI participation is also conducted.

By exploring these critical events and their interconnectedness, this chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of Ethiopia's geopolitical evolution and its implications for current and future engagements, particularly within the framework of the BRI. The chapter synthesises the insights from these historical analyses, offering a nuanced perspective on Ethiopia's strategic trajectory and its role in the broader geopolitical landscape.

4.2 Shaping the Geopolitical Landscape of Ethiopia

The 20th and early 21st centuries have witnessed Ethiopia's complex and dynamic geopolitical landscape, shaped by many historical, political, and regional factors. This exploration explores critical historical events significantly influencing Ethiopia's geopolitical trajectory. By understanding these events, this study provides a comprehensive foundation for analysing Ethiopia's current involvement in the BRI. This case study illuminates the historical context that has shaped Ethiopia's strategic decisions, regional engagements, and global positioning, thereby offering insights into the multifaceted dimensions of its participation in the BRI.

4.2.1 The Italian Occupation of 1935-1941

The first examined period deals with the Italian occupation. The Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935–1936 resulted in Ethiopia’s subjugation to Italian rule and is recognised as a precursor to World War II. This event underscored the inadequacies of the League of Nations, the first international organisation in the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War 1. Its’ primary objective was to maintain world peace and prevent future conflicts through collective and diplomatic cooperation (Henig, 2010; Eloranta, 2011). An organisation in which Italy and Abyssinia, the former name of Ethiopia before 1945, were members. Notably, when its decisions lacked support from major powers, Ethiopia, an independent state in a predominantly European-controlled Africa, had previously resisted Italian attempts at conquest in the 1890s. The pretext for Italian intervention arose from a border incident between Ethiopia and Italian Somaliland in December 1934.

Potter (1936) states that in late 1934, there was a clash between Ethiopian and Italian forces near the Walwal oasis. The details of the incident remain contentious, with both sides providing different accounts of what transpired. The conflict at Walwal escalated tensions between Italy and Ethiopia, and Benito Mussolini, the leader of Italy, used it as a justification for military intervention. Mussolini seized upon the border clash as a justification to advance his expansionist agenda and fulfil Italy's long-standing desire for imperial expansion in East Africa. Mussolini opted for a more aggressive approach by rejecting diplomatic resolutions and arbitration offers. On October 3, 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia, initiating the Italo-Ethiopian War. Under the command of Generals Rodolfo Graziani and Pietro Badoglio, Italian forces, equipped with superior weaponry, systematically advanced against the ill-equipped Ethiopian army. However, the leadership and resilience of Emperor Haile Selassie, who sought exile, and the Ethiopian people were evident. Their decisive victory near Lake Ascianghi on April 9, 1936, culminated in the capture of Addis Ababa on May 5. Emperor Haile Selassie sought exile, while in Rome, Mussolini proclaimed Italy's King Victor Emmanuel III as Emperor of Ethiopia and appointed Badoglio as viceroy.

Despite Ethiopia's pleas, the League of Nations condemned the invasion in 1935, imposing economic sanctions on Italy. However, these sanctions proved ineffective due to a lack of widespread support. The League's response, while a significant diplomatic move, highlighted the limitations of international cooperation in preventing aggressive actions by powerful states. Although British disapproval of Mussolini's aggression was evident, particularly considering their interests in East Africa, other major powers

displayed minimal opposition. The war solidified Italian imperialist claims, escalating tensions between fascist states and Western democracies. Furthermore, it emerged as a focal point for post-World War II African nationalist movements, rallying against colonial powers (Mockler, 1984; Sbacchi, 1997).

Italian ambitions to colonise Ethiopia can be traced back to the nineteenth century, with Prime Minister Francesco Crispi envisioning the settlement of a substantial Italian population in the region. Building on Crispi's plan, Baron Raimondo Granchetti proposed transferring Venetians and Sicilians to Ethiopia, aiming to leverage the industrious qualities of Venetians and the climatic adaptability of Sicilians to establish an Italian colony. This vision of colonisation was not limited to the fascist government, as Catholic leaders had earlier considered it beneficial. The Duke of Aosta envisioned Italian colonists as agents of progress, bringing civilisation to the perceived backward Ethiopian people and enhancing the territory's productivity (Mockler, 1984).

Professor Santi Nava provided a broader perspective, arguing that Italian colonisation was crucial for the nation's survival and increased power. Ministers of Africa, Lessona, and Teruzzi specifically outlined colonisation objectives, emphasising the need for agricultural autarchy in Italian East Africa and providing essential resources for Italy, previously imported at a considerable cost. Ethiopia was envisioned as a source of wheat, meat, hides, vegetable oils, cotton, coffee, wool, wood, rubber, and minerals. Furthermore, Italian colonisation aimed to establish a robust local economy that would

export traditional Ethiopian products to foreign countries, providing Italy with essential foreign currency (Zewde, 1993).

The primary driver for the conquest of Ethiopia was to alleviate Italy's demographic pressures by providing a new home for Italian immigrants. Further, as an extension of the Italian peninsula, Ethiopia would position Italy as a power with strategic interests in the Red Sea, Mediterranean, and Indian Ocean. This strategic positioning was crucial for Italy's geopolitical ambitions. Some critics may say China is doing the same thing, although disguised as a mutually beneficial or win-win situation with Ethiopia, especially with the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway project. Additionally, the colonisation aimed to station a substantial number of men in East Africa to defend against potential aggressors, particularly France or Great Britain, who might influence Ethiopian Patriots to resist Italian rule (Allain, 2006; Mallett, 2000).

Despite Italian expansion primarily serving its interests, there was an acknowledgement that it should also benefit the Ethiopian people. Lessona emphasised against exploiting local resources, highlighting the humanitarian, social, and political imperative for Italy to improve Ethiopian living conditions and transform its economy from subsistence to surplus (Pankhurst, 1999).

The five-year occupation of Ethiopia was marked by military pursuits, focusing on elusive rebels and preparations for World War II. Uncertain military conditions, political complexities, and apathy toward colonial matters deterred Italian farmers from migrating

to Ethiopia. Despite failing to colonise Ethiopia fully, Italy contributed to scientific crop research, attempted to assess the country's agricultural potential, introduced improved agricultural methods, familiarised Ethiopians with mechanised agriculture, and propelled Ethiopia into the machine age (Sbacchi, 1977).

Italy's occupation of Ethiopia in the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935–1936 had enduring consequences, reshaping the nation's geopolitical landscape. The establishment of Italian East Africa, encompassing Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Italian Somaliland, left a lasting imprint on Ethiopia's territorial organisation. The disruption of traditional borders and governance structures persisted post-liberation, influencing diplomatic ties and regional dynamics. The internal upheaval exacerbated ethnic tensions, impacting identity and governance. In the post-colonial era, Ethiopia grappled with reclaiming territories and fostering national unity, negotiating the legacy of Italian occupation. Today, Ethiopia's complex geopolitical reality reflects historical colonial impact and ongoing efforts to manage diversity amid territorial challenges.

4.2.2 Post-WWII Period and Decolonisation

The second examined period deals with Ethiopia’s independence and decolonisation. After Italy’s ally, Germany experienced initial successes in the Second World War, Mussolini declared war on Britain in June 1940 (Antonsich, 2000). From its Ethiopian base, Italian aggression threatened British possessions in East Africa, British-controlled Egypt, and the crucial Suez Canal supply route, targeting border posts in Kenya and Sudan. In response, General Archibald Wavell, the British Commander-in-Chief Middle

East, devised a three-pronged counter-offensive with air support from the Royal Air Force (RAF). During the East African Campaign of World War II in 1941, British and Allied forces, including those from the USA, France, and the Soviet Union, launched offensives against Italian-held territories in East Africa, aiming to liberate the occupied nations and defeat the Axis forces in the region. Ethiopian and Allied forces, led by Emperor Haile Selassie, played a significant role in resisting the Italian occupation. The campaign culminated in the successful liberation of Addis Ababa on May 5, 1941, when British and Commonwealth troops drove the Italian forces out of Ethiopia.

The success of the East African Campaign contributed to the broader Allied victory in North Africa and the Middle East during World War II. Italy's defeat in East Africa marked the end of its colonial ambitions in Ethiopia and the restoration of Ethiopian sovereignty (Zewde, 1993). Emperor Haile Selassie resumed leadership, and the country reestablished its independence. Italy's departure during World War II significantly shaped the post-war geopolitical landscape of East Africa (Mockler, 1984). The territorial changes resulting from Italy's occupation had profound and lasting implications for Ethiopia, influencing its modern history and geopolitical reality (Zewde, 1993).

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the post-war geopolitical landscape of East Africa (Mockler, 1984). The territorial changes resulting from Italy's occupation had profound and lasting implications for Ethiopia, influencing its modern history and geopolitical reality (Zewde, 1993). The profound and lasting implications of Italy's occupation of Ethiopia included redrawing its borders, which affected ethnic and regional dynamics, and the modernisation of its military and administrative structures, which influenced its post-war governance and development. These changes also contributed to the conflicts that later played out between Ethiopia and Somalia and between Ethiopia and Eritrea. These issues will be addressed in detail further in this chapter.

4.2.3 Cold War Dynamics

Following its independence, Ethiopia's role in the Cold War as a regional hotspot forms the focus of the third examined period.

During the Cold War, "a zero-sum global struggle between two ideologies, championed by two superpowers (the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, known as Soviet Union (USSR)), which occurred within a nuclear weapons' environment..." (Metaferia, 2009), confrontation was meticulously avoided, with conflicts arising through proxy wars fought by Third World surrogates rather than the superpowers. The Horn of Africa stands out as a rare instance where the Cold War manifested uniquely, as the clients of superpowers engaged in direct armed conflicts incited and armed by the superpowers. This distinct regional dynamic added complexity to the broader Cold War landscape, emphasising the global reach and influence of superpower rivalries.

An African proverb aptly captures the consequences of the Cold War rivalry in the Horn of Africa: “When two elephants fight, the grass is the one that gets hurt.” Kigen contends that as the Soviets and Americans vied for supremacy during the Cold War, Ethiopians and Somalis found themselves embroiled in a deadly conflict. In their competition, the superpowers fueled the strife by offering political, military, and economic support to their respective clients, exacerbating local divisions. Consequently, client states diverted substantial resources towards arms and military development, diverting funds that could have otherwise been invested in much-needed socio-economic development.

During the Cold War, the strategic use of foreign aid and military assistance by the USA and the Soviet Union played a crucial role in shaping the geopolitical landscape in Ethiopia. Emperor Haile Selassie, envisioning the modernisation of Ethiopia in the post-World War II era, implemented various measures to propel the country forward. These included the establishment of Ethiopia’s first university, the introduction of a new constitution to extend the power of the parliament, increased provision of public goods such as hospitals and infrastructure, and the strengthening of diplomatic ties, particularly with the United States (Asserate, 2014, 2015; Clapham, 1969; Metaferia, 2009). As the Cold War intensified, Haile Selassie strategically aligned Ethiopia with the United States, participating actively in the global fight against communism. This alignment was manifested through Ethiopia’s voting record in the United Nations against Eastern bloc policy interests and the contribution of Kagnew Battalions to the American-led United Nations force in the Korean War between June 1951 and April 1954 (Vestal, 2011).

Understanding the potential influence of the Soviet Union in Ethiopia, the United States initiated foreign aid to the country in the early 1950s. Haile Selassie, demonstrating remarkable diplomatic acumen, visited the Eastern Bloc in 1959 and secured $100 million in credits, underscoring Ethiopia's ability to play superpowers against each other to maximise its interests. With Somalia gaining independence in 1960, posing a threat of Communist infiltration, the U.S. government responded swiftly by providing more development assistance to Ethiopia, solidifying its commitment to Ethiopia's anti-communist stance (Marcus, 2002). The USAID program in Ethiopia during the 1960s became a comprehensive initiative covering various sectors, including communication, education, and military assistance, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the relationship between Ethiopia and the United States (McVety, 2012).

One critical aspect of U.S. involvement in Ethiopia was promoting Ethio-American connection and communication. This was evident in significant programs like the restoration of the road network, with the founding of the Imperial Highway Authority in 1951. The USAID program was economically motivated and increasingly driven by military concerns. Haile Selassie's focus on military and security issues in U.S.-Ethiopian relations and his neglect of food shortages resulted in U.S. pressure for agrarian reform during the 1958 and 1966 famines. Although Ethiopia's neighbouring country, Somalia, was a traditional Soviet ally, Ethiopia's strategic importance led the U.S to provide foreign aid to counter potential Soviet influence (Marcus, 2002).

However, the decline of Haile Selassie's regime was marked by economic challenges and growing opposition. Despite modernisation attempts, Ethiopia remained one of the poorest countries globally, leading to discontent among urban elites and the rural population. Economic failures and the inability to address food shortages and improve education opportunities demoralised Ethiopians. "The preponderance of Americans in almost all aspects of Ethiopian life bred resentment, especially among the students, who viewed the whole situation as being within the global framework of American imperialism. Anti-Americanism grew particularly strong in the late 1960s and early 1970s." (Zewde, 1991, p. 189). As a result, the increasing opposition, primarily driven by urban movements and students, demanded political reforms such as a free press, labour unions, and land reform along Marxist-Leninist principles (Asserate, 2014, 2015).

By the early 1970s, U.S.-Ethiopian relations deteriorated gradually under President Richard Nixon. The USA, previously a significant ally, began reassessing its support due to several key factors. Firstly, Ethiopia's failure to effectively address the severe famine that struck the region highlighted the government's inefficiency and inability to manage internal crises. This humanitarian disaster drew international criticism and diminished confidence in the Ethiopian leadership. Secondly, the changing political dynamics in the Horn of Africa, including the rise of revolutionary movements and shifting alliances, led the U.S. to reconsider its regional strategic interests.

Moreover, the Nixon administration prioritised human rights in its foreign policy agenda. Ethiopia's human rights record, marked by political repression and the suppression of

dissent, increasingly conflicted with U.S. values and objectives. This discrepancy contributed to the decline in U.S. support for Ethiopia. Additionally, the broader geopolitical context, including détente with the Soviet Union and the realignment of U.S. foreign policy priorities towards other regions, further reduced America's focus on Ethiopia. These factors collectively marked a significant turning point in U.S.-Ethiopian relations, illustrating the vagaries of foreign interest and the impact of internal and external dynamics on international alliances.

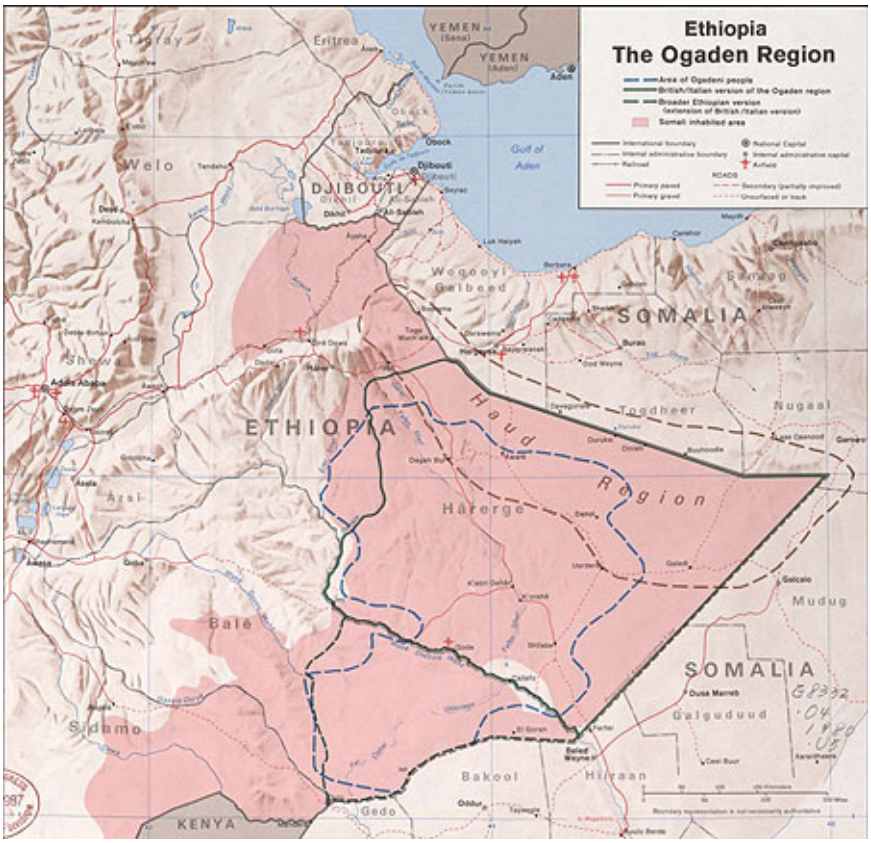
In September 1974, a Marxist group, the Derg, led by Major Mengistu Haile Mariam, staged a coup d'état against Emperor Haile Selassie. The coup marked the end of the Solomonic dynasty, and Haile Selassie spent the last few months of his life imprisoned in the Grand Palace. Zewde (1994) argues that Selassie's "greatest crime was to rule far too long" (p. 43) and thus lose touch with Ethiopian society. The rise of Mengistu Haile Mariam ushered in a new era for Ethiopia, characterized by socialist policies and alignment with the Soviet Union. Mengistu's ascent to power occurred within a context of changing global alignments during the Cold War. Carter's administration, initially concerned about the Derg regime's human rights record, withheld military aid grants in 1977, signalling a shift in U.S. support (Patman, 1990; Westad, 2005; Yordanov, 2016).

The deteriorating relations between the USA and Ethiopia prompted Mengistu to seek closer ties with the Soviet Union during his official visit to Moscow in May 1977. This visit resulted in significant Soviet military assistance, including a historic $504 million arms agreement, marking one of the most prominent Soviet accords with an African country

(Yordanov, 2016). The Soviet military's involvement and the subsequent Soviet-Ethiopian Friendship Treaty underscored the profound ideological shift that Mengistu was committed to. His embrace of a Marxist-Leninist political philosophy and distancing Ethiopia from Western influence was a significant departure from the past.

Amidst these geopolitical shifts, the Horn of Africa became a hotspot for Cold War rivalries, particularly during the Somali-Ethiopian Ogaden War, also known as the second Ogaden War, from July 1977 to March 1978. Somalia, initially a Soviet ally, invaded Ethiopia over the disputed Ogaden region. The Soviet Union, condemning the invasion, severed ties with Somalia and provided massive support to Ethiopia, including Cuban troops and military advisors.

This intervention marked a significant escalation in Cold War tensions, with the United States alarmed at the large-scale Soviet and Cuban involvement in Africa. This episode exemplifies how foreign powers often manipulate their involvement in other countries to further their geopolitical objectives. This historical lesson is crucial for Ethiopia, particularly in its modern engagements with China. As Ethiopia navigates its relationship with China, it must remain vigilant against becoming a pawn in more giant strategic games, ensuring its sovereignty and long-term national interests are safeguarded against foreign manipulation. The Ogaden region, which was disputed, is depicted in the picture below.



(Retrieved from “Office of the Historian”)

Throughout the 1980s, the waning of U.S. influence in Ethiopia contrasted with the strengthening of Soviet influence. In the initial stages of 1989, the collaboration of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement (EPDM) resulted in the formation of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), with the primary goal of removing Mengistu from power (Tareke, 2009). As the late 1980s unfolded, the Derg regime’s survival became increasingly dependent on the policies and fate of the Soviet Union. However, Ethiopia’s diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union experienced a gradual deterioration, partly attributed

to the ascent of Mikhail Gorbachev as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985 (Yordanov, 2016).

Gorbachev's reforms in the 1980s played a pivotal role in bringing about the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. As the guerrilla movement in northern Ethiopia launched a significant offensive against the Derg regime in April 1988, Mengistu sought increased military assistance during his visit to Moscow (Tareke, 2009; Westad, 2005). The decline in Moscow's military support to the Derg regime can primarily be attributed to two factors: firstly, the Soviet Union's predominant engagement in the Afghanistan War (1979-1989), and secondly, Gorbachev's aversion to Mengistu, influenced by insights from the KGB (Soviet security agency) regarding the human rights record of Mengistu's regime (Westad, 2005).

In 1990, with the dissolution of the Iron Curtain, the longstanding alliance between the Soviet Union and Ethiopia ended. Following losing the Soviet Union as Ethiopia's principal ally, China emerged as a potential partner. Despite the potential for robust Sino-Ethiopian relations, such ties failed to materialize as the TPLF-EPRDF alliance led by Meles Zenawi and the EPLF under Isaias Afewerki orchestrated a revolution, toppling the Derg regime in May 1991.

4.1.4 Eritrean War of Independence (1961-1991)

Between the aftermath of World War II and the early 1950s, there existed significant discord among Western powers regarding the fate of Eritrea, with debates revolving

around its independence versus its integration into Ethiopia's federalisation scheme (Welde Giorgis, 2014; Wrong, 2005). The United States exhibited minimal enthusiasm for Eritrea's bid for independence, as evidenced by U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles' assertion during a Security Council debate that while acknowledging the importance of considering the opinions of the Eritrean people, strategic imperatives in the Red Sea basin necessitated its alignment with Ethiopia, a U.S. ally (cited in Kaplan, 2003, p. 56).

Following the adoption of U.N. General Assembly Resolution 390 A(V) in 1950, which federated Eritrea with Ethiopia as "an autonomous unit (...) under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown" starting from September 1951, Haile Selassie disregarded the UN-mandated autonomy, perceiving Eritrea as an integral part of Ethiopian territory (Welde Giorgis, 2014; Wrong, 2005; Zewde, 1991). Selassie's stance instigated a thirty-year-long conflict between the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Ethiopian government from 1961 onward. In 1962, Eritrea was forcibly annexed by Ethiopia, effectively nullifying the 1950 U.N. resolution granting Eritrea semi-autonomous status, and it became Ethiopia's fourteenth province (Welde Giorgis, 2014; Wrong, 2005; Zewde, 1991). This annexation occurred despite the USA's desire to establish a communication centre near Asmara, now Eritrea's capital, which Selassie rebuffed to ensure his regime's survival. Nevertheless, Zewde (1991) contends that despite Selassie's initial reluctance, the USA developed the Asmara radio station into a vital "military communication and intelligence-gathering complex," which Selassie saw as mutually advantageous.



Map of Eritrea, showcasing the Red Sea (New World Encyclopaedia)

Despite Selassie's resistance, rebel factions like the ELF persisted in their fight for Eritrean autonomy. Selassie's opposition stemmed from concerns that Eritrea's autonomy would render Ethiopia landlocked, depriving it of access to the Red Sea and the Assab port, crucial for economic and strategic reasons. Additionally, Ethiopia required arms to defend itself against recurring conflicts, particularly along the Ogaden region, and to counter threats from neighbouring Somalia (Kigen, 2004). In 1970, internal strife within the ELF led to factionalism, resulting in the emergence of various splinter groups.

Concurrently, the ELF engaged in a bitter civil war with factions that later coalesced to form the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). Despite this internal discord, both organisations eventually reconciled in 1974, spurred by popular pressure, and collaborated in joint military operations against the Ethiopian government (Henze, 2001; Keller, 1992).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Derg regime's attempts to quash Eritrean independence movements proved futile despite numerous offensives. The Derg's reliance on Soviet military support waned following the Soviet Union's decision not to renew defence agreements in the late 1980s, precipitating a decline in Ethiopian military morale (Henze, 2001). The subsequent erosion of Soviet support facilitated the EPLF's advances, culminating in Mengistu's resignation in May 1991 and a caretaker government in Addis Ababa. With Ethiopian forces in retreat, the EPLF assumed control of Eritrea, and on May 28, 1993, Eritrea was formally admitted to the United Nations (Henze, 2001).

However, the aftermath of Eritrea's independence saw a rapid deterioration in relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which were initially amicable but were soon overshadowed by escalating border disputes. This friction ultimately erupted into the destructive Eritrean-Ethiopian War, a conflict that lasted from 1998 to 2000 and resulted in significant loss of life and resources on both sides. The war left unresolved tensions that persist to this day. Particularly contentious is the border issue, which remains a source of ongoing dispute despite the cessation of hostilities. Additionally, maritime access, a critical factor in

Ethiopia's desire to retain control over Eritrea, continues to fuel tensions and poses a significant threat to regional stability.

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4.1.5 Border Conflicts and Regional Dynamics

As already stated, the EPLF and the EPRDF formed a coalition after the overthrow of the Derg regime. Economic interdependence, however, strained relations as Eritrea's independence rendered Ethiopia landlocked and reliant on access to Eritrean and Djiboutian ports for trade. Ethiopia's dissatisfaction with this dependency heightened as

Eritrea adopted its currency, the Nacfa, in 1997 (ACCORD, 2006), complicating bilateral trade transactions. Moreover, disputes over delineating the 620-mile shared border exacerbated tensions, particularly regarding areas like Badme, Tsorona-Zalambessa, and Bure, where administrative boundaries had shifted over time (Africa Research Group, 1999; International Crisis Group, 2003).

Efforts to resolve border disputes through local committees and bilateral arbitration proved ineffective, leading to continued tensions. Despite initial optimism for regional cooperation and economic integration, divergent economic interests and unresolved territorial issues strained relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea, ultimately paving the way for the eruption of conflict in the following years (Neethling, 2004).

The conflict erupted on May 6, 1998, between Ethiopia and Eritrea, described as one of the deadliest in the Horn of Africa, with ramifications extending to neighbouring countries such as Djibouti, Somalia, and Sudan. Ethiopia, unprepared for the Eritrean invasion, was caught off guard, given the amicable relations following the overthrow of the Mengistu regime. Relations between the two nations from 1993 to 1997 focused on regional security, trade, and citizenship matters, with minor boundary disputes and policy differences not anticipated to escalate into a major war (Richard, 2011; Shaw, 2007).

Eritrean forces' occupation of Badme, a pivotal border town, sparked initial skirmishes, prompting intervention attempts by third parties like Rwanda and the United States. These parties proposed impartial border rulings, but Eritrea rejected withdrawal terms, leading

to failed diplomatic efforts by the US/Rwanda team and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Ethiopia accepted peace proposals, but when Eritrea finally agreed, Ethiopia viewed it as a tactical delay and launched an intensive offensive to regain territory. After three phases of war, fighting ceased in June 2000 (Lencho, 2006; Schultz, 2014; Ethiopian Weekly Press, 2000).

The GERD and Somaliland

For centuries, Ethiopia has grappled with various persistent challenges that have shaped its socio-political landscape and regional dynamics. Since the 2000s, among these challenges is the Tigray Conflict, which erupted in November 2020, pitting the Ethiopian government against the TPLF and other regional forces (Gebrekidan, 2020). This conflict has precipitated a humanitarian crisis characterised by mass displacement, food insecurity, and allegations of human rights violations, underscoring the fragility of Ethiopia's internal security landscape. In addition to internal strife, Ethiopia's ambitions for hydroelectric development, epitomised by the GERD, have engendered diplomatic tensions with downstream countries like Egypt and Sudan (Mohammed, 2021). Disputes over water rights, reservoir filling, and the potential downstream impact have underscored the intricate interplay between resource management, regional geopolitics, and transboundary water governance.

Moreover, Ethiopia's engagement with its regional neighbours has been marked by complexities and challenges, exemplified by the controversy surrounding the MoU between Ethiopia and Somaliland regarding access to the sea for commercial traffic

(Bloomberg, 2021; Zane, 2024). While Somaliland has signalled its willingness to grant Ethiopia access through a port, the need for clarity regarding the port location and broader geopolitical implications underscores the intricacies of regional dynamics in the Horn of Africa. The implications of this deal extend beyond bilateral relations, sparking domestic unrest within Somalia and straining relations between Ethiopia and Somalia. Given the historical tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia, including the Ogaden War in the late 1970s, any move perceived as encroaching on Somalia's sovereignty can exacerbate existing animosities and potentially escalate into further conflict.

The sensitivity of territorial disputes and deep-seated national sentiments surrounding sovereignty and territorial integrity further complicate the situation, posing significant challenges to diplomatic relations and regional stability. Somalia's recent reactions, including describing the deal as an 'act of aggression' and recalling ambassadors, highlight the volatile nature of the region and the potential for severe diplomatic fallout. Additionally, protests in Mogadishu against the deal underscore the Somali government's domestic pressures to manage relations with Ethiopia and address public sentiments. The potential for further conflict in the region is a stark reminder of the volatility and uncertainty that characterises the Horn of Africa.

4.1.6 Ongoing Challenges

Ethiopia's internal stability has been undermined by political instability and ethnic tensions rooted in historical grievances and power struggles (Mueller, 2020). The transition from authoritarian rule to a more inclusive political system has been fraught with challenges,

manifesting in recurrent bouts of unrest and violence, which pose significant obstacles to Ethiopia's democratic consolidation and nation-building efforts. Amid these multifaceted challenges, Ethiopia's quest for sustainable development and economic growth faces persistent hurdles, including governance deficiencies, institutional weaknesses, and poverty alleviation imperatives (Kassahun, 2021). Efforts to combat corruption, improve public service delivery, and foster inclusive development models are imperative for Ethiopia to navigate the complex nexus of socio-political, economic, and regional dynamics shaping its trajectory in the 21st century. In this context, addressing Ethiopia's ongoing challenges requires a comprehensive and nuanced approach that integrates conflict resolution mechanisms, governance reforms, and sustainable development strategies. Moreover, fostering regional cooperation, dialogue, and mutual understanding is indispensable for mitigating tensions, enhancing stability, and promoting prosperity in the Horn of Africa. The BRI proposed by China might present additional opportunities or challenges for Ethiopia's development trajectory, further shaping its regional engagements and economic future.

4.2 The Evolution of China-Ethiopia Relations: A Historical Tapestry

China and Ethiopia’s historical ties form a crucial foundation for their contemporary relationship that adds a profound layer beyond economic and geopolitical but extends to ideological dynamics. Examining the temporal threads of this relationship through the lenses of different authors offers a nuanced understanding of the evolution. It highlights the economic and geopolitical implications in the context of the BRI. In the early 20th century, China’s support for Ethiopia during the Italian invasion marked a pivotal moment.

During Ethiopia's resistance to Italian occupation, China, under Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Government Kuomintang (KMT), the Republic of China (ROC), sent a medical mission known as the "Ethiopian Red Cross" to provide aid and support (Shinn, 2014). This fostered and laid the foundation of solidarity and friendship between the two nations. What is important to note about the ROC or KMT is that it pursued a political ideology that blended Chinese nationalism with anti-communism. Chiang and the KMT aimed to unify China under a centralised government. It challenges whether the KMT supported Ethiopia due to its anti-communist ideology, broader Sino-Soviet split, and lack of genuine solidarity between the two nations.

Despite not formalising diplomatic ties due to China's then ongoing Civil War with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) led by Mao Zedong and its struggles against Japanese aggression, Ethiopia appreciated China's solidarity during this challenging period (Jean-Pierre, 2012). However, in the late 1940s, during the "Chinese Revolution of 1949", when Mao Zedong's government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) took control over Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist government, and after the end of World War 2 when Japan surrendered, and China restored its sovereignty. Chiang and KMT retreated to Taiwan and became a separate political entity from the PRC.

Ohlson et al. (1994) argue that this revolution also ushered a reluctance in Ethiopia's recognition of the PRC, underscored by the delicate diplomatic dance influenced by the Cold War treaty. Thus, the complex Cold War geopolitical dynamics influenced Ethiopia's decision not to recognise the PRC. In the global context, in the early 1950s, countries

were facing pressure from superpowers to align with their respective blocs. The United States, a key ally of Ethiopia then, favoured the KMT because it was anti-communist (Office of the Historian). Furthermore, KMT in Taiwan maintained diplomatic recognition from several countries and held China's seat at the United Nations until 1971.

The bilateral relations between China and Ethiopia have undergone distinct phases, marked by evolving dynamics and diplomatic nuances, spanning from the Mao Zedong era (1949-late 1970s) to Deng Xiaoping's leadership (1977-1990) and extending into the post-Cold War era (Venkataraman & Gamora, 2009). Thus, Ohlson et al. (1194) stipulate that the period between the 1950s involved Ethiopia engaging in a balancing act, accepting agricultural assistance from Taiwan while establishing trade relations with the PRC. However, the foundation for formal diplomatic ties was laid in the 1960s-1970s, with crucial moments such as China's Prime Minister Zhou Enlai's visit to Ethiopia in 1964 and Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie's reciprocal visit to Beijing in 1971, where he recognised China's "One China policy" and acknowledged Taiwan as part of China (Gamora, 2011).

This acknowledgement marked a turning point because this meant Ethiopia was severing their ties with Taiwan and the friendship it had built. Furthermore, it is to be noted that in 1971, The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758, passed in 1971, dissolved the ROC, granted PRC Veto power, and proclaimed it as the only representative of China to the UN. This was monumental. Ethiopia was part of the UN at the time, and it is not a coincidence that the same year that the UN granted the PRC a permanent seat at the UN

Security Council coincided with Ethiopia's decision to accept the One-China Policy. This decision was influenced by the evolving global consensus, diplomatic pragmatism, changing Cold War dynamics, and the pursuit of an independent foreign policy. It reflected Ethiopia's recognition of the shifting geopolitical landscape and the importance of aligning with the emerging powers of the time.

However, Gideon, Gamora, & Mathews (2010) argue that although Ethiopia recognised the PRC, the subsequent years saw limitations in diplomatic relations, particularly in the late 1970s when Ethiopia aligned itself with Western powers during the Cold War, distancing itself from China. The diplomatic landscape further transformed with the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974, bringing Mengistu Hailemariam to power, aligning with Marxism-Leninism, and forming a close alliance with the Soviet Union until 1991 (Gedion et al., 2010). Despite the weakened Sino-Ethiopian relations until the mid-1980s, official visits resumed as the Sino-Soviet conflict concluded in the mid-1980s (Françoise, 2017).

The 1988 bilateral trade, investment, and technical cooperation agreements signalled a thaw in relations (Thakur, 2009). The crucial turning point came after the fall of Mengistu's government in 1991 when Ethiopia established strategic diplomatic relations with China (Daniel, 2020). This decision was rooted in Ethiopia's recognition of the need for reliable economic support from China's rapid economic growth, and the ensuing decades witnessed Ethiopia's emphasis on securing Chinese investment and trade, aligning its foreign policy with China's economic ascension (Françoise, 2017).

This shift was driven by Ethiopia's recognition of China's economic prowess and the need to tap into the benefits of China's growth. Françoise (2017) states that the Chinese economy witnessed significant expansion, evolving into one of the world's largest and fastest-growing economies. This transformation propelled China to become a global economic powerhouse, impacting various manufacturing, technology, and trade sectors. The economic reforms elevated China's domestic economic capabilities and positioned it as a critical player in the international arena, fostering diplomatic and economic relationships with countries worldwide. Ethiopia's recognition of China's economic growth and transformation post-1991 reflected an awareness of the opportunities for collaboration and support in various economic endeavours.

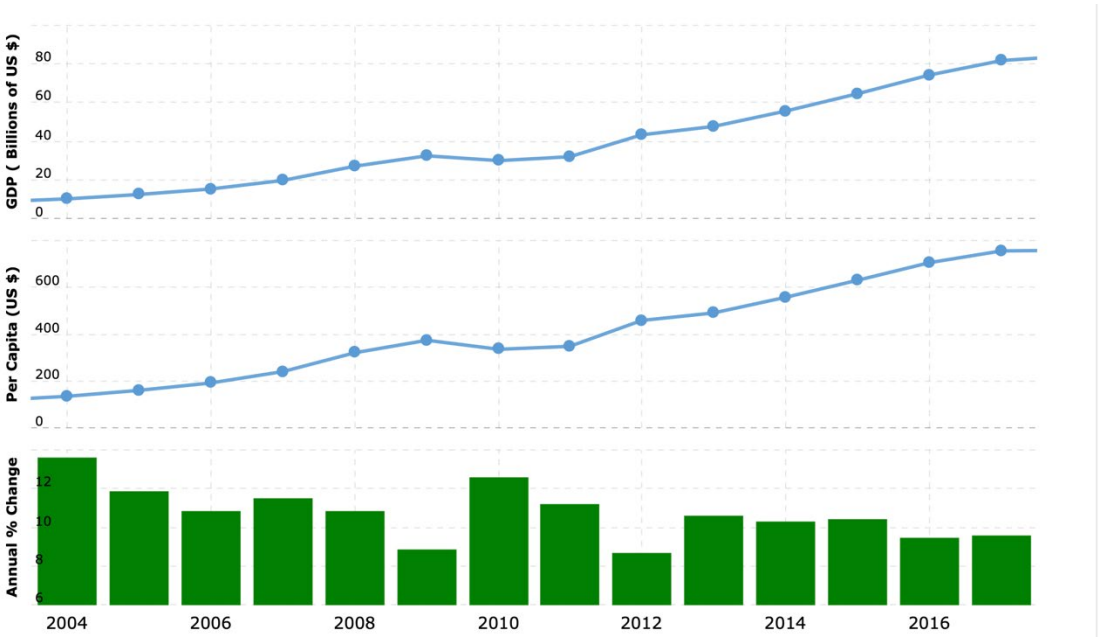
In the early 21st century, Xi Jinping's leadership further strengthened this bond, emphasising China's commitment to Ethiopia's development goals, prominently featured through the BRI. Furthermore, Ethiopia's interest in China's economic growth paved the way for strategic partnerships (Adem & Hackenesch, 2000). The upgrading of relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2017 marked a new phase in enduring diplomatic relations (Daniel, 2020). In this historical context, the BRI is not merely an economic strategy but a continuation and expansion of a longstanding relationship. It plays a pivotal role, offering Ethiopia an avenue to secure reliable economic support from China's expanding economic influence (Daniel, 2020). Ethiopia's interest, as expressed by Françoise (2017), in Chinese financial aid, infrastructure projects, and active involvement in economic development underscored the alignment of its foreign policy with

China's economic trajectory. What this means for Ethiopia's independence and sovereignty is worth thinking about.

While the BRI, as noted by Adem and Hackenesch (2000), Daniel (2020), and Françoise (2017), is a strategic partnership, it is worth questioning the nature of the projects under this initiative on whether they promote or undermine Ethiopian independence and sovereignty? In this context, Ethiopia, like any sovereign nation, retains the ability to navigate these engagements to protect its national interests, maintain autonomy in decision-making, and safeguard its sovereignty. This includes negotiating terms of engagement, balancing relationships with multiple international partners, and implementing policies that align with Ethiopia's long-term development goals and strategic interests. Haile Selassie's 1971 visit, initially a turning point, is now part of a larger historical narrative that has seen Ethiopia and China navigate complex geopolitical terrains to foster a multifaceted partnership.

4.2.1 Ethiopia's Geopolitics with the BRI

Ethiopia's rapidly growing economy has become a pivotal factor, drawing China's attention as a promising economic partner. The African Development Bank's report highlights Ethiopia's remarkable economic growth, averaging 11.53% annually between 2004 and 2017 (see the picture below) and over 9% from 2012 to 2022 (as stated in the introduction chapter), positioning it as one of the world's fastest-growing economies (African Development Bank, 2019). This aligns seamlessly with China's export-oriented economy, seeking new markets and investment opportunities.



(source: Macrotrends)

Furthermore, Ethiopia's vast population, exceeding 110 million, adds another layer of appeal. This large consumer base presents a significant market for Chinese goods and services, aligning with China's strategy of expanding its global economic footprint by tapping into extensive consumer bases (Ren, 2020). The strategic location of Ethiopia, bordering the Red Sea, emerges as a geopolitical asset for China. This geographic advantage gives China access to maritime trade routes, amplifying its influence in a region critical to global trade. With its focus on infrastructure projects, the BRI becomes a means through which China strengthens its economic foothold in Ethiopia, concurrently elevating its geopolitical influence (Ren, 2020).

Concrete examples such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, a flagship project under the BRI, showcase China's profound impact on Ethiopia's geopolitical landscape. Officially inaugurated in 2016, this transformative railway line serves as a critical artery for Ethiopia's economy, facilitating the movement of goods and people between the landlocked nation and the Red Sea port in Djibouti. The railway significantly reduces transportation costs, enhances trade competitiveness, and stimulates economic growth by providing Ethiopia with a direct and efficient link to maritime trade routes.

Furthermore, the railway extends China's strategic reach into the geopolitically sensitive Red Sea region. The Red Sea holds immense strategic importance in global trade, serving as a vital maritime corridor connecting the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal. China's involvement in constructing infrastructure projects like the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway fosters economic development in partner countries. It strategically positions China to exert influence and secure access to vital maritime routes (Xi, 2017). This underscores the broader geopolitical dimensions of China's Belt and Road Initiative, which extends beyond economic cooperation to encompass strategic interests and regional influence.

Control over this route is vital for international commerce, particularly in oil and natural gas transportation. The Bab el Mandeb Strait, a narrow passage at the southern entrance of the Red Sea, acts as a critical chokepoint for global maritime trade, further accentuating the region's strategic importance (Kaplinsky, 2018). The Red Sea's proximity to resource-rich areas and resource wealth contributes to economic and energy considerations, with

countries like Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Sudan having significant stakes (Ren, 2020). The Red Sea's geopolitical sensitivity is multifaceted, encompassing economic, military, and humanitarian dimensions that collectively make it a focal point in global geopolitics.

4.3 Economic Implications

Ethiopia's economic landscape has undergone profound transformations through China's BRI, which has marked significant infrastructural developments like the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway and the Hawassa Industrial Park. These endeavours have not only reshaped the nation's connectivity but have also fuelled industrial capacity. This analysis delves into the multifaceted economic implications of the BRI in Ethiopia, examining China's strategic investments across crucial sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology. A critical evaluation of the sustainability of Ethiopia's debt incurred through BRI participation is conducted, unravelling the intricate interplay between economic development, external financing, and geopolitical shifts. Furthermore, the exploration extends to the impact on local industries, offering a nuanced understanding of both positive and negative effects on competition, market dynamics, and the development of domestic sectors. This holistic examination aims to provide comprehensive insights into the intricate economic dynamics spurred by China's BRI in Ethiopia.

4.3.1 Infrastructure Development

One of China's most transformative BRI projects in Ethiopia has been the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, a 752.7-km standard gauge railway initiated under the BRI. It embodies a robust partnership between China and Ethiopia (People's Daily Online, 2023).

The Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, operational since January 1, 2018, is a testament to the efficacy of Chinese-Ethiopian cooperation (Global Times, 2022). In the realm of transportation, this railway plays a pivotal role as a sea-rail combined transportation route, connecting landlocked Ethiopia to Djibouti's modern port. This strategic corridor has substantially reduced transportation time from over seven days to 10 hours, redefining Ethiopia's geographical positioning and reinforcing Djibouti's status as a regional logistics hub (Global Times, 2022).

This transformative project aligns seamlessly with Ethiopia's development vision, fostering the establishment of more than ten industrial parks along its route, several of which have received Chinese investment. These industrial parks are crucial for the realisation of Ethiopia's industrialisation and urbanisation goals (Global Times, 2022). The Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation recognised the railway and associated industrial parks as "economic corridors facilitated and supported by connectivity" (Global Times, 2019).

The Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway's economic impact extends beyond its transportation role. Operational data reveals its significant contribution, with over 463,096 trips and 6.46

million tons of goods transported as of June 2022 (Global Times, 2022). In the face of global challenges, the rail cargo shipment has exhibited resilience, experiencing expansion and contributing positively to Ethiopia's economic growth (Global Times, 2022). The revenue from freight transportation has notably increased, attesting to this railway's economic viability and importance (Global Times, 2022).

Chinese Ambassador to Ethiopia, Zhao Zhiyuan, highlighted the broader impact of the BRI and the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, emphasising that Ethiopia is "the pioneer of China-Africa cooperation and the African bridgehead of building the BRI" (People's Daily Online, 2023). This underscores the strategic significance of the railway in the broader context of China-Africa cooperation.

Thus, the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway is a compelling case study of the positive outcomes of China's BRI in Ethiopia. Beyond its economic contributions and transformative role in transportation, it exemplifies the principles of long-term cooperation, technology transfer, and sustainable development inherent in the BRI. Moreover, the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway has redefined Ethiopia's geographical positioning, facilitating trade competitiveness and economic growth. This project represents a milestone in China's export of comprehensive rail industrial capabilities to Africa, fostering enduring partnerships and showcasing the potential for mutual benefit and prosperity.

4.3.2 Hawassa Industrial Park

The transformative impact of China's BRI on Ethiopia extends beyond transportation infrastructure, exemplified by the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, to include strategic industrial developments like the Hawassa Industrial Park. Positioned as Ethiopia's flagship industrial park in the quest to become Africa's manufacturing hub, the Hawassa Industrial Park was completed in a remarkable nine months by the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) in 2016 (The World Bank, 2019). This park, a model for others across Africa, has attracted global investors, with 52 factory sheds leased to 21 international companies, emphasizing job creation and technology transfer (The World Bank, 2019).

The Hawassa Industrial Park stands out for its cutting-edge technologies, including Africa's largest Zero-Liquid Discharge (ZLD) technology, which treats 11 million litres of wastewater daily. The ZLD system contributes to the park's recognition as a world-class infrastructure project, showcasing Chinese engineering expertise (Xinhuanet, 2019). This successful collaboration aligns with Ethiopia's ambitious vision of establishing around 15 industrial parks in the coming years, many of which are constructed with Chinese support, contributing to Ethiopia's transition to a middle-income economy.

Moreover, more than ten industrial parks strategically positioned along the railway are fostering light manufacturing and industrialization—a crucial component of Ethiopia's future vision (Hardy et al., 2019). Chinese-built industrial parks, including the Hawassa Industrial Park, have become magnets for global investors. The Hawassa Industrial Park

has state-of-the-art technologies, attracting 21 international companies and creating 27,000 direct job opportunities for local youth (Xinhuanet, 2019).

In addition to Hawassa, other Chinese-built industrial parks like Dire Dawa and Mekelle, constructed by CCECC and China Communications Construction Company (CCCC), further showcase China's role in Ethiopia's industrial development. The Mekelle Industrial Park, designed to attract textile and apparel-producing companies, and the Kilinto Pharmaceutical Industrial Park signify the breadth of China's contributions to Ethiopia's diverse industrial landscape (Xinhuanet, 2019).

The economic impact of these collaborations is evident in Ethiopia's export value, with Chinese-built industrial parks contributing significantly. During the fiscal year 2018/19, Ethiopia earned $142 million from these parks, reflecting a 50% increase from the previous year (Hardy et al., 2019). The successful operation of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway has also played a crucial role in boosting Ethiopia's export ambitions by facilitating the efficient transport of cargo from industrial parks to Djibouti ports (Xinhuanet, 2019).

These multifaceted initiatives, characterized by technological advancements, job creation, and economic growth, exemplify the BRI's transformative impact on Ethiopia's economic dynamics.

4.3.3 Impact of the BRI on Industries and key sectors

Positive impacts on Ethiopia's local industries are evident, driven by substantial infrastructure development facilitated by Chinese investments. The Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway exemplifies this progress, symbolising enhanced connectivity that reduces transportation costs and stimulates economic growth (Global Times, 2022). The Ethiopian Investment Commission (EIC) underscores the transformative effect on critical sectors such as manufacturing and agriculture, enabling local industries to expand their market reach significantly (Geda & Meskel, 2010).

However, these positive outcomes coexist with concerns about debt sustainability and dependency. Empirical evidence, including an International Monetary Fund (IMF) study, accentuates Ethiopia's challenges in managing the debt associated with BRI infrastructure projects (Brautigam & Zhang, 2013). The rising debt-to-GDP ratio raises questions about potential economic vulnerabilities, leading to concerns about the diversion of funds from supporting local businesses and hindering the growth of domestic industries.

The BRI has introduced new dynamics to the Ethiopian market competition. By providing alternatives, Chinese companies have led to product diversification and increased price competitiveness. Yet, the Ethiopian Economic Association (EEA) study emphasises the need for meticulous regulatory measures to ensure a level playing field. Such measures are essential to address concerns about potential dominance by Chinese firms and its adverse effects on local competitors (Brautigam et al., 2012).

China's Strategic Investments in Ethiopia: A Catalyst for Economic Transformation

China's investments in Ethiopia strategically target vital sectors, acting as a catalyst for economic transformation. Agriculture, manufacturing, and technology emerge as focal points, reflecting a multifaceted collaboration with far-reaching implications for Ethiopia's economic growth and diversification.

In agriculture, the Eastern Industrial Zone (EIZ), a project by CCCC, embodies China's role in modernising Ethiopia's agriculture. The EIZ's focus on agro-processing aligns seamlessly with Ethiopia's "Growth and Transformation Plan," emphasising Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (Chakrabarty, 2016; Brautigam & Tang, 2012). This aligns with Ethiopia's ambitious food security and export competitiveness goals.

The manufacturing sector witnessed a flagship project in the Hawassa Industrial Park, constructed by the CCECC. Its rapid completion showcases China's efficiency in contributing to Ethiopia's ambition to become Africa's manufacturing hub (Xinhuanet, 2019). The park's success attracts international companies, fostering job creation and technological transfer.

In technology, the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, a critical BRI project, integrates transportation and technology, linking Ethiopia to Djibouti's port. This transformative project revolutionises transportation and fosters economic growth by facilitating the efficient movement of goods (Global Times, 2022; Shen, 2013).

Challenges, notably concerning debt sustainability, accompany these transformative initiatives. The IMF highlighted Ethiopia's reliance on Chinese loans, raising concerns about potential economic vulnerabilities (Chakrabarty, 2016; Zafar, 2007). Others argue that excessive debt may divert funds from supporting local businesses.

Chinese investments significantly impact Ethiopia's trade dynamics, with China emerging as Ethiopia's top export and import partner (Chakrabarty, 2016). Ethiopia's exports to China have grown, reflecting a shift from traditional aid to more diverse economic engagements.

Regarding FDI, China has become Ethiopia's largest bilateral donor, surpassing traditional donors substantially (Chakrabarty, 2016; World Bank, 2012). Chinese FDI concentrates on critical infrastructure projects, particularly energy and transportation, which contribute significantly to Ethiopia's development.

4.3.4 Debt Sustainability Concerns

Ethiopia's participation in the BRI has been met with optimism and scepticism, particularly concerning its debt sustainability. While the BRI has brought substantial infrastructure development to the country, concerns have arisen about the long-term financial implications and Ethiopia's ability to manage its mounting debt.

One primary concern is the debt-to-GDP ratio, a vital indicator of a country's debt sustainability. Ethiopia's debt-to-GDP ratio has significantly increased, raising red flags among economists and policymakers. According to the World Bank, Ethiopia's debt-to-GDP ratio stood at 32.6% in 2015 (World Bank, 2015), but by 2021, it had surged to 55.8%, surpassing the IMF threshold of 50% for low-income countries (IMF, 2021).

The financing structure of BRI projects in Ethiopia also raises concerns. Chinese loans often come with relatively high interest rates compared to concessional loans from traditional lenders, putting additional strain on Ethiopia's fiscal resources (Brautigam et al., 2018). The Ethiopian government's ability to service these loans is crucial for debt sustainability, and any economic downturn could exacerbate repayment challenges.

The construction of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, a flagship BRI project in Ethiopia, exemplifies the debt dynamics. While the railway has undoubtedly improved connectivity and trade, it was financed through a Chinese loan of approximately $4 billion (Xinhua, 2017). The repayment terms of such loans demand a careful balance between economic growth and debt management.

Moreover, the former IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde emphasised the importance of sustainable and carefully managed infrastructure investment in the Belt and Road Initiative. Lagarde stated that the BRI should only go where it is needed and where the debt it generates can be sustained (Reuters, 2019). She called for a revamped "Belt

and Road 2.0" to include increased transparency, an open procurement process with competitive bidding, and better risk assessment in project selection.

Furthermore, Lagarde applauded the launch of a green investment principle for Belt and Road projects at a Beijing conference, emphasising low-carbon and climate-resilient investments. She noted that debt and green sustainability would strengthen BRI sustainability (Reuters, 2019).

Additionally, in his opinion piece, Yasheng Huang raises the question of whether the BRI could become a trap for China, leaving Beijing vulnerable to the growing bargaining power of recipient states (Huang, 2019). Huang highlights the potential risks and challenges of China's ambitious infrastructure program.

In response to these concerns, Ethiopia must implement robust fiscal policies and strengthen debt management mechanisms. Lagarde highlighted positive steps that Chinese authorities have taken, such as a new debt sustainability framework, to evaluate projects and address concerns about debt sustainability (Reuters, 2019). A more transparent approach would enable Ethiopia to make informed decisions about its borrowing and assess the long-term implications of the BRI on its economy.

4.3.5 Foreign Powers

Ethiopia's strategic location in the Horn of Africa and its substantial development needs have made it a focal point for various global powers seeking to extend their influence

through investment and cooperation. While China's BRI has been the most prominent in Ethiopia's infrastructure sector, other significant players, such as the United States and the EU, and collaborative initiatives like the AAGC led by India and Japan have maintained robust partnerships with Ethiopia through various non-infrastructure avenues. It is important to note that the U.S.-led PGII and the EU's Global Gateway are relatively new and have yet to implement significant projects in Ethiopia.

United States

As the largest bilateral donor to Ethiopia, the United States has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to humanitarian and development assistance. Since 2020, the U.S. has provided approximately $3.16 billion in humanitarian aid in response to conflicts and ongoing droughts, with $1.93 billion allocated in FY 2022 alone. This aid, primarily disbursed through USAID and the State Department, supports agriculture, food assistance, nutrition, water, sanitation, hygiene (WASH), and protection for vulnerable populations. Additionally, Ethiopia benefits from U.S. support through international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. These Bretton Woods institutions provide Ethiopia with financial resources and technical assistance to support economic reforms, fiscal management, and development projects that align with broader economic stability and growth objectives. For example, the World Bank’s Country Partnership Framework for Ethiopia includes financing various social and economic projects aimed at poverty reduction and sustainable development (World Bank, 2021).

The trade relationship between the U.S. and Ethiopia has seen significant growth over the past five years. In 2022, the U.S. exported $1.1 billion worth of goods to Ethiopia, predominantly wheat and agricultural products. Ethiopian exports to the U.S., valued at $286 million in 2022, primarily included coffee, apparel, and textiles. This substantial growth in trade illustrates the robust economic ties between the two nations (OEC, 2022). However, regarding infrastructure, the U.S. needs to catch up.

European Union

The EU plays a vital role in Ethiopia's development through various aid and cooperation programs. A notable recent development is the EU Alliance for the Horn of Africa Initiative, launched during the 19th Horn of Africa Initiative Ministerial meeting. This initiative, part of the EU's Global Gateway strategy, aims to boost trade, economic integration, and regional resilience with €83 million from the EU budget. The initiative focuses on enhancing regional economic and social integration, addressing climate change, and promoting stability (European Commission, 2023).

The EU has been a critical partner in addressing Ethiopia's broader development challenges through the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. This fund targets the root causes of irregular migration and displacement, a significant issue in the region. The Horn of Africa Initiative, supported by the EU, World Bank, African Development Bank, and Germany, aims to address shared regional challenges through policy dialogue, investments, and political ownership, generating nearly USD 9 billion in committed projects (European Commission, 2023).

India

India's engagement with Ethiopia includes substantial support for the education sector and capacity building. The Pan-African e-Network project, for example, aims to provide quality education and telemedicine services to African countries, including Ethiopia, reflecting India's strategic focus on fostering sustainable development in Ethiopia (Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2022).

Japan

Japan has been involved in Ethiopia through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). On March 30, 2020, JICA signed a loan agreement with Ethiopia to provide up to 9.655 billion yen for the Ethiopia Integrated Transport Program Phase 1: Jimma-Chida and Sodo-Sawla Road Upgrading Project (Jimma-Chida Section). This project aims to improve connectivity, reduce transport costs, and enhance agricultural logistics by upgrading the Jimma-Chida road from gravel to asphalt concrete, contributing to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 8, and 9 (JICA, 2020).

Criticism

Despite substantial engagement from the United States, European Union, India, and Japan, criticisms highlight the limited impact of these efforts on Ethiopia's infrastructure development. While the U.S. has provided significant humanitarian aid, it has been criticised for not addressing long-term infrastructural needs, which are crucial for sustainable economic growth (Sullivan, 1996). Similarly, although ambitious, the EU's

initiatives have faced delays and bureaucratic challenges, hindering timely project deployment (Finckenstein, 2021). Though valuable in education and telemedicine, India's contributions lack the scale needed for broader infrastructural impact (Bovard, 1986). Japan's focused projects, while beneficial, do not comprehensively address Ethiopia's extensive infrastructure deficit (Finckenstein, 2021). Moreover, the relatively new PGII and Global Gateway initiatives have yet to demonstrate tangible results in Ethiopia, highlighting a need for expedited implementation and broader engagement to meet Ethiopia's urgent infrastructure and development needs.

4.4 Conclusion

Exploring Ethiopia's involvement in China's BRI reveals profound economic and geopolitical implications. This chapter dissects Ethiopia's historical context, the evolution of its geopolitical landscape, and its engagement with foreign powers, providing a comprehensive foundation for understanding its participation in the BRI.

Ethiopia's geopolitical significance, deeply rooted in its strategic location in the Horn of Africa, has made it a pivotal point for global powers. Its rich history, including the Italian occupation and subsequent liberation during World War II, has set the stage for Ethiopia's complex post-war dynamics. The Cold War further shaped Ethiopia's geopolitical landscape, with superpowers vying for influence through aid and military support, culminating in a period of alignment with the Soviet Union under the Derg regime.

China's BRI has significantly impacted Ethiopia's economic trajectory. The BRI has facilitated substantial infrastructure projects, such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway and the Hawassa Industrial Park, which have enhanced connectivity, reduced transportation costs, and boosted industrial capacity. These developments align with Ethiopia's vision of becoming a manufacturing hub in Africa, fostering economic growth and job creation. However, this progress has come with challenges, particularly concerning debt sustainability. Ethiopia's debt-to-GDP ratio has increased significantly, raising concerns about its ability to manage long-term financial obligations. Compared to concessional loans from traditional lenders, the high interest rates associated with Chinese loans add to the fiscal strain.

The geopolitical implications of the BRI in Ethiopia are equally significant. China's strategic investments have positioned it as a dominant player in the region, leveraging Ethiopia's strategic location to enhance its influence. The Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, for instance, provides China with critical access to maritime trade routes, underscoring the broader geopolitical dimensions of the BRI. This has prompted other global powers, such as the United States and the European Union, to enhance their engagement in Ethiopia. The U.S. remains the largest bilateral donor, focusing on humanitarian and development aid. At the same time, the EU has introduced the Global Gateway initiative to boost trade and economic integration in the Horn of Africa. However, these initiatives have not matched the scale and impact of China's BRI projects in Ethiopia.

Despite these significant developments, the BRI has not been without criticism. Concerns about debt sustainability, transparency, and the potential for economic dependency on China have been raised. The financing structure of BRI projects, often involving high-interest loans, poses challenges to Ethiopia's long-term financial stability. Additionally, the relatively new U.S.-led Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) and the EU's Global Gateway have yet to demonstrate tangible results in Ethiopia, highlighting the urgent need for expedited implementation and broader engagement to meet Ethiopia's pressing infrastructure and development needs.

Ethiopia's distinct response to the BRI aligns strategically with China's economic ambitions, facilitating significant infrastructural transformation. This partnership has brought substantial economic benefits, including improved connectivity and industrial capacity, positioning Ethiopia as a key player in China's global economic network. This positive outlook is balanced with the need for careful debt management and sustainable economic policies, ensuring a balanced and secure future for Ethiopia.

In summary, Ethiopia's engagement with the BRI illustrates the dual-edged nature of this global initiative. While it has catalysed economic growth and infrastructural development, it has also introduced financial challenges and intensified geopolitical competition. The lessons from Ethiopia's historical and contemporary experiences underscore the importance of balancing economic aspirations with sustainable development practices and strategic geopolitical considerations. As Ethiopia navigates its future, these insights

will be crucial in shaping its strategies and partnerships within the complex landscape of global infrastructure investment.

CHAPTER 5: NIGERIA CASE STUDY

Introduction

The 20th and early 21st centuries have marked Nigeria's dynamic and multifaceted geopolitical journey, profoundly shaped by historical, political, and regional influences. This chapter endeavours to study the pivotal historical events that have intricately defined Nigeria's geopolitical trajectory, providing a foundational understanding essential for analysing its current participation in the BRI. By examining these historical contours, this study illuminates the contextual backdrop that underpins Nigeria's strategic decisions, regional engagements, and global positioning, offering nuanced insights into the diverse dimensions of its involvement in the BRI.

This chapter is structured to explore several key historical events and themes, each addressed in dedicated subsections. Beginning with the British Colonial Era, which laid the groundwork for Nigeria's modern statehood and shaped its socio-political landscape, this study navigates through significant milestones such as Nigeria's independence in 1960, marking a pivotal moment in its quest for self-determination and international prominence. Subsequent sections will examine the profound impact of the Civil War (1967-1970) and the subsequent periods of military rule, each shaping Nigeria's internal dynamics and external relations. Moving forward, the analysis looks into Nigeria's return to democracy, a transformative period characterised by efforts to strengthen governance structures and enhance socio-economic development. The exploration then pivots to the

post-2000s era, highlighting Nigeria's contemporary challenges and opportunities amidst global shifts and domestic aspirations for economic growth and regional leadership.

Beyond these historical underpinnings, this chapter also scrutinises the evolution of China-Nigeria relations, weaving a historical tapestry contextualising their current economic and geopolitical interactions. It examines Nigeria's strategic collaborations with China under the BRI, focusing on notable projects such as the Kano-Maradi railway, the Zungeru hydroelectric power initiative, and the Lagos-Ibadan expressway development. These projects reflect Nigeria's aspirations to address infrastructure deficits, foster regional connectivity, and stimulate economic growth through strategic partnerships with global powers. Furthermore, this study critically evaluates the economic implications of Nigeria's participation in the BRI, particularly regarding debt sustainability, a crucial consideration amidst the financing mechanisms and infrastructural developments facilitated by Chinese investments. The thoroughness of this evaluation provides a comprehensive understanding of Nigeria's geopolitical evolution and its implications for current and future engagements within the framework of the BRI.

In conclusion, this chapter synthesises insights gleaned from Nigeria's historical trajectory and contemporary engagements, offering a nuanced perspective on its strategic trajectory and role in the broader global geopolitical landscape. Through this exploration, readers will gain a deeper appreciation of Nigeria's evolving dynamics, the complexities of its international partnerships, and the strategic imperatives shaping its engagement with the BRI.

5.1 Shaping the Geopolitical Landscape of Nigeria

Nigeria, situated in West Africa, boasts a rich tapestry of history, culture, and economic significance. With a population exceeding 200 million, it is the most populous country on the African continent and the seventh most populous globally (World Bank, 2022). Since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1960, Nigeria has experienced significant political, social, and economic transformations, shaping its trajectory as a regional powerhouse and a key player in global affairs. Nigeria possesses vast natural resources, including petroleum, natural gas, coal, and agricultural land. As stated in the introduction chapter, its GDP is the fourth in Africa, at approximately USD 252 billion (World Economics, 2023; World Bank, 2022), driven primarily by its oil industry. However, despite its economic potential, Nigeria faces numerous challenges, including widespread poverty, infrastructure deficiencies, and political instability. Against the backdrop of China's BRI, Nigeria's engagement with this global initiative offers a compelling case study to explore the economic and geopolitical dynamics shaping contemporary international relations. First, to understand how Nigeria got here, we will begin with the history, starting with the British colonial era.

5.1.1 British Colonial Era

The section on British colonial rule in Nigeria explores the profound significance of the administrative, political, economic, and social dynamics that shaped the nation during the 20th century. It outlines the establishment of distinct geopolitical administrations, the implementation of 'indirect rule,' and the economic transformations under British control. Understanding the weight of these historical factors is essential for contextualising

Nigeria's contemporary geopolitical and economic dynamics and exploring their implications for global initiatives like the BRI.

The consolidation of British colonial rule in Nigeria during the 20th century saw significant administrative and political developments that profoundly influenced the nation's geopolitics and economics (Meredith, 2005). After assuming direct control of the Royal Niger Company's territories, the British government reorganised the Nigerian landscape into three distinct geopolitical administrations: the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos, the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria (Meredith, 2005). These administrative divisions served as mechanisms for British authorities to assert control over the region, with Lagos serving as the capital of the south and Zungeru established as the new capital of the north. In January 1914, upon the recommendations of Sir Frederick Lugard, the British colonial administration amalgamated the southern and northern protectorates to form the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, ushering in a new era of centralised governance under a single governor-general resident in Lagos (Meredith, 2005). This administrative consolidation not only laid the foundation for Nigeria as a unified state but also had implications for the country's governance, as it centralised power and decision-making in the hands of the British-appointed governor-general.

Politically, British colonial rule in Nigeria was characterised by implementing the principle of "indirect rule," whereby local government was entrusted to traditional chiefs, subject to the guidance of European officers (Oladipo, 2009). This system allowed for the preservation of native institutions and minimal interference with local customs, although

it also resulted in contradictions and challenges. Over time, however, Nigeria's local government system evolved into a sophisticated form of administration, particularly in the emirates, under the banner of "native administration," which became emblematic of British colonial rule in Africa.

Economically, British colonialism had profound implications for Nigeria, as the introduction of Western education, the English language, and Christianity accompanied the development of new forms of money, transportation, and communication (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). The Nigerian economy became increasingly reliant on the export of cash crops, leading to a two-tiered economic structure characterised by disparities between regions profiting from lucrative crops and those experiencing economic dislocation and migration (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012).

Geopolitically, British colonial rule in Nigeria was marked by efforts to maintain control through a "divide and rule policy," which sought to separate Nigerian groups and prevent united opposition to British authority (Oladipo, 2009). Traditional authorities were co-opted in the north, while in the south, the British occasionally created political hierarchies where none had existed before. However, disparities in the spread of Western education and development between the North and South contributed to growing political tensions and disparities, further exacerbating ethnic and regional divisions.

Socially and culturally, British colonialism led to the spread of Western education and Christianity, as well as the erosion of indigenous identities and customs (Imhonopi et al.,

2013). Despite efforts to co-opt traditional authorities and preserve native institutions, the imposition of Western ideals and institutions fundamentally altered Nigerian society, leading to tensions and conflicts between traditional and modern values. For instance, the introduction of Christianity often clashed with traditional religious practices, and the Western education system challenged the traditional methods of learning and knowledge transfer. Establishing colonial rule in Nigeria in 1900 marked a pivotal moment in the nation's history, bringing about significant changes in governance and power structures (Iweriebor, 1982). At its core, the colonial state in Nigeria operated through two complementary tiers of government. At the central level, a single colonial authority was imposed on the country, comprising the governor, the advisory council, and later a legislative council, along with the bureaucracy, judiciary, police, and military contingent (Iweriebor, 1982). This central authority wielded considerable power over the administration of the colony.

This system of governance at the provincial level came to be known as the "indirect rule system," where colonial authorities purportedly administered these areas indirectly through pre-existing political institutions and leaders. While the colonial authorities framed this system as a form of indirect rule, scholars have debated whether it genuinely represented indirect governance or was, in fact, a more direct form of control (Iweriebor, 1982). Nevertheless, the imposition of colonial domination brought with it the imposition of the colonial power's state system, structure, and values onto Nigeria.

As Professor Claude Ake argued, the colonial state's operation deviated significantly from the ideals of democracy (Ake, 1978). The restrictive qualifications imposed by colonial authorities, such as limited franchise and the absence of universal adult suffrage, ensured that colonial political practice resembled an authoritarian administrative state rather than a true democracy (Ake, 1978). This state structure facilitated the exploitation of Nigeria's mineral and human resources by European firms and the emerging Nigerian comprador and merchant class, a class of local elites who acted as intermediaries for European businesses. Thus, the colonial state in Nigeria was characterised by the possession and monopoly of instruments of violence, wielded primarily by the police and military (Iweriebor, 1982). Lacking a social base within the colony, colonial state power was exercised without restraint, as the colonial power was not held accountable to the subject population. This authoritarian nature of colonial governance fundamentally shaped the socio-political landscape of Nigeria during the colonial period and beyond.

5.1.2 1960: Nigeria’s Independence

When Nigeria gained political independence from Britain in 1960, there was widespread anticipation that Nigeria would emerge as a shining example of British parliamentary democracy in Africa, akin to India in Asia (Fawole, 2003). Nigeria, as the most populous African nation, recognised as the “Giant of Africa, and abundantly wealthy in geography, natural resources, and other factors, was seen as having the potential to become a significant power on the continent (Fawole, 2003; Ibeanu, 2014). This optimism extended beyond Nigeria’s borders, with many viewing the country as a symbol of hope and progress for other colonised nations striving for liberation from foreign dominance. Even

before independence, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan hoped Nigeria would achieve remarkable feats in African affairs.

Prominent figures like Nnamdi Azikiwe and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa dominated the political landscape, but regional disparities and ethnic rivalries clouded the nation's unity. The Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) predominantly represented the Yoruba ethnic group in the Western region and was led by Obafemi Awolowo. At the same time, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) emerged as the dominant party for the Igbo ethnic group in the Eastern region, led by Azikiwe following Macaulay's passing in 1946, formed a coalition with Balewa's Northern People's Congress (NPC) after neither party secured a majority in the 1959 elections. (Tyona & Abagen, 2019). Establishing a new constitution ushered in a federal system with an elected prime minister and a ceremonial head of state. Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa assumed the role of Nigeria's first Prime Minister, tasked with defining Nigeria's position in the global arena (Mbachu, 2011). Meanwhile, Nnamdi Azikiwe would assume the presidency of the ceremonial Senate.

Despite the optimism surrounding independence, Nigeria faced numerous challenges, including regional tensions fuelled by ethnic competitiveness, educational disparities, and economic inequalities. The controversial census of 1962–63 exacerbated these stresses, leading to the creation of the Mid-West region in August 1963 by dividing the Western region. However, the nation remained segmented into three geographic regions dominated by distinct ethnic groups, the Yoruba in the West, the East by the Igbo, and

the North by the Hausa-Fulani, intensifying conflicts and power struggles (Yoroms & Obasi, 2003). On October 1, 1963, Nigeria became a republic, with Azikiwe assuming the role of president while Balewa retained the position of prime minister. However, the precarious political situation reached a tipping point in January 1966 when a group of army officers, disillusioned by the political instability and corruption, attempted to overthrow the federal government, resulting in the assassination of Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. Subsequent military coups in 1967 and 1975 further destabilised the nation, revealing institutional weaknesses and hindering the establishment of consistent democratic governance (Hanson, 2005).

Economic struggles added complexity to the era, with Nigeria heavily reliant on its burgeoning oil industry yet vulnerable to external shocks due to a lack of economic diversification (Fawole, 2003). The oil industry, which became a significant part of Nigeria's economy post-independence, brought in substantial revenues but also led to a neglect of other sectors, contributing to the country's economic vulnerability. Underlying factors such as colonial legacies, socio-economic inequalities, and the failure to create a cohesive national identity further fueled instability (Zabadi, 2004). Imposing colonial boundaries exacerbated tensions between ethnic groups, while unequal resource distribution fostered resentment (Zabadi, 2004). Despite efforts to salvage the situation, including a conference to settle Nigeria's constitutional future and the Aburi Accord in January 1967, the nation plunged into a more profound crisis. The Eastern region's authorisation to establish a sovereign republic and the federal government's decree to

divide the regions further exacerbated tensions, leading to intercommunal clashes and threats of secession (Hanson, 2005).

In retrospect, colonial legacies, socio-economic inequalities, and the failure to create a cohesive national identity further fueled instability. The imposition of colonial boundaries exacerbated tensions between ethnic groups, while unequal resource distribution fostered resentment. These factors and rapid post-colonial change created a volatile environment where political manoeuvring often precedes long-term stability.

The period's struggles, conflicts, and aspirations reverberate to the present day, influencing contemporary politics and policy decisions. Efforts to promote inclusivity and unity have been made, but the historical link between political parties and specific ethnic groups continues to influence Nigerian politics. The 1960s marked a critical juncture in Nigeria's history, highlighting the challenges of transitioning to independence and the complexities of nation-building in a diverse and dynamic society (Mbachu, 2011; Ibeanu, 2014).

5.1.3 Civil War (1967-1970)

The Nigerian Civil War, from 1967 to 1970, was tumultuous in the nation's history. Numerous remote and immediate factors preceded the conflict and set the stage for its eruption (Falode, 2020; Uche, 2008). The January 15 and July 29, 1966, military coups, regional election crises, and inter-ethnic tensions fueled by structural imbalances in the Nigerian federation (Falode, 2020) laid the groundwork for the subsequent upheaval. The immediate trigger for the civil war was Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu's

declaration of the independent state of Biafra on May 30, 1967 (Falode, 2020). This declaration sought to secede the Eastern region, predominantly inhabited by the Igbo ethnic group, from the Nigerian federation. General Yakubu Gowon, leading the federal government, viewed this move as threatening national unity and sovereignty, thus setting the stage for armed conflict (Falode, 2020).

Mobilised federal forces as tensions escalated to quell the secessionist movement and preserve Nigeria's territorial integrity (Falode, 2020). The conflict unfolded amidst deep-rooted regional divisions and ethnic rivalries that had plagued Nigeria since independence. Intercommunal clashes and threats of secession further exacerbated tensions, creating a volatile environment ripe for armed conflict (Falode, 2020). The military intervention exacerbated the political situation, as ethnic divisions within the army and power struggles among its officers intensified.

Efforts to resolve the crisis through diplomatic means, such as the Aburi Accord in January 1967, proved futile as disagreements over its interpretation deepened the rift between the warring factions (Sylvester, 1970). The federal government's decree to reorganise Nigeria into 12 states, aimed at decentralising power and mitigating regional tensions, only escalated hostilities (Sylvester, 1970). However, the tide of the war began to turn in favour of the federal government, aided by superior resources and international support. Biafra's military and civilian population suffered greatly as federal forces regained territory and tightened their grip on the besieged enclave. The civilian

population, in particular, faced dire shortages of food and medical supplies, leading to a humanitarian crisis (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

The final collapse of Biafra came on December 24, 1969, when federal troops launched a decisive offensive against the weakened separatist forces (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Facing dire shortages of ammunition and food, Biafra's leaders surrendered, culminating in Ojukwu's flight into exile and the formal end of the civil war. General Gowon's efforts to reconcile the warring factions and reintegrate the former Biafran states into Nigeria marked a critical step towards national reconciliation and recovery. This process of reintegration involved political negotiations, economic restructuring, and social healing (Sylvester, 1970; Uche, 2008). Despite the devastation wrought by the conflict, Nigeria embarked on a path of post-war reconstruction and development, buoyed by the oil boom of the 1970s (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

5.1.4 Military Rule

Zaira (2013) argues that Nigeria's experience with military rule engendered a legacy of institutional weaknesses, governance deficiencies, and economic vulnerabilities, which continue to reverberate today. The Second Republic marked a pivotal transition in Nigeria's political trajectory as General Obasanjo responded to General Mohammed's push for civilian rule (Ademoyega, 1981). This era saw the adoption of a presidential system, granting expanded powers to the president, contingent upon winning specific electoral thresholds (Agagu & Ola, 2011). Despite the emergence of several political

parties, only a handful were officially recognised, with the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) dominating the landscape under Shehu Shagari's leadership (Zaira, 2013).

However, allegations of corruption and economic downturns tarnished Shagari's tenure, leading to widespread discontent and electoral irregularities (Peretei, 2004). These issues culminated in a military coup on December 31, 1983, bringing Major General Muhammad Buhari to power. Buhari justified his ascent by citing the challenges faced during the Second Republic, which included rampant corruption, economic mismanagement, and a lack of political will to address these issues (Finer, 1969).

Buhari's administration launched a "War Against Indiscipline" campaign but faced diminishing public support due to repressive measures (Peretei, 2004). Following Buhari's ousting, General Ibrahim Babangida ascended to power in 1985, initially projecting an image of responsiveness but ultimately perpetuating military dominance (Etebom et al., 2014). Babangida's regime manipulated the transition process, leading to the annulment of the 1992 presidential primaries and subsequent elections, sparking widespread unrest (Peretei, 2004). Subsequent military rulers, including General Sani Abacha, perpetuated authoritarian rule characterised by human rights abuses and disregard for democratic principles (Etebom, 2015).

5.1.5 Return To Civilian Rule

The transition to civilian democracy in Nigeria reshaped its political landscape by establishing democratic governance structures, including elected leadership and

representative institutions. This shift from military rule to civilian governance not only influenced the formulation and implementation of socio-economic policies but also fostered a more inclusive approach to development and governance. Importantly, Nigeria's relationship with China, which began to develop during its military rule, saw a significant deepening of engagement with the return to civilian rule. This transformation, however, was not just about Nigeria. It signalled a commitment to stability and democratic principles, enhancing Nigeria's standing within the global community and facilitating more robust engagement with international partners, including China. This interconnectedness of global politics is evident in Nigeria's participation in initiatives such as the BRI, which has had a significant impact on its economic and geopolitical trajectories.

The transition of Nigeria from military to civilian rule in 1999 marked a watershed moment in the nation's history, denoting the commencement of its most prolonged uninterrupted period of governance since independence (Siollun, 2016). This transition, showered by the death of military dictator Sani Abacha in 1998, signified a pivotal juncture in Nigeria's quest for political stability and democratization. A surge in political activity ensued, forming several parties, including the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the Alliance for Democracy, and the All-People's Party. In January–March 1999, a series of elections were conducted, culminating in the presidential election in February, which saw Olusegun Obasanjo of the PDP emerge as the victor. Obasanjo's inauguration in May 1999, alongside the promulgation of a new constitution, was not just a change in leadership but a significant departure from prolonged military rule, garnering widespread domestic and international approval. His subsequent re-election in 2003, despite allegations of voting

irregularities, underscored the nation's evolving democratic trajectory (Polgreen, 2005). This transition, therefore, played a crucial role in shaping Nigeria's current geopolitical position.

Despite the optimism surrounding Nigeria's transition to civilian democracy, persistent challenges, including ethnic cleavages, human rights violations, and corruption, continued to undermine the nation's democratic aspirations (Kalu, 2010; Akinboye, 2008). The absence of a dominant Nigerian culture further complicated efforts to forge a cohesive national identity, posing significant hurdles to sustainable democratic governance (Kalu, 2010). Nonetheless, the transition to civilian rule represented a critical juncture in Nigeria's pursuit of political legitimacy, social cohesion, and economic development, shaping its geopolitical trajectory and influencing its relationships with international partners, including China. This transformation has since played a defining role in Nigeria's regional and global engagements, reflecting the nation's evolving role in the international community (Lewis, 2007).

5.1.6 Post 2000s

This section explains the context against which the BRI operates, including challenges like domestic unrest, security threats, and economic vulnerabilities. One of these challenges can be illustrated by the disputes and conflicts related to the Bakassi Peninsula. The Bakassi Peninsula dispute underscores Nigeria's territorial integrity and regional dynamics, which are essential for understanding how the BRI may influence Nigeria's geopolitical position. Additionally, insights into Nigeria's economic struggles

provide a framework for analysing the potential impacts of BRI investments. Thus, this section forms a critical foundation for evaluating Nigeria's engagement with the BRI and its broader implications. In the post-2000s era, Nigeria faced significant challenges and strife that profoundly impacted its economy and geopolitics (Lewis, 2007; Kalu, 2010; Akinboye, 2008). These challenges included domestic unrest, ethnic conflicts, political controversies, and the rise of militant groups such as Boko Haram. These factors contributed to a complex landscape that shaped Nigeria's trajectory in the 21st century.

One of the significant challenges Nigeria faced was domestic unrest and insecurity. Despite some improvements under President Obasanjo's administration, the country experienced considerable strife, including ethnic conflicts and religious tensions. Friction increased between Muslims and Christians, particularly in regions where Islamic law (Sharīʿah) was adopted. Additionally, protests erupted over government oil policies, high fuel prices, and the exploitation of natural resources by petroleum companies, particularly in the Niger Delta region. Militant groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) targeted oil infrastructure, disrupting production and causing economic losses (Lewis, 2007).

Another significant challenge was the Bakassi Peninsula dispute with Cameroon, which raised questions about territorial sovereignty and resource control. The International Court of Justice ruling in 2002 awarded the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon, leading to tensions and domestic criticism in Nigeria. The dispute resolution affected Nigeria's territorial integrity and resource access, affecting its geopolitics and regional

relationships (Kalu, 2010). The ceding of the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon challenged Nigeria's territorial integrity and sovereignty while raising concerns about resource access and maritime rights in the Gulf of Guinea. Moreover, resolving the dispute altered the balance of power between Nigeria and Cameroon, potentially reshaping dynamics within regional organisations such as the ECOWAS and the AU. Despite initial strains on diplomatic relations, the eventual implementation of the International Court of Justice ruling showcased a commitment to international law and diplomacy, positively impacting Nigeria's reputation as a responsible regional actor.

Furthermore, controversies surrounding the 2007 presidential election, including attempts to amend the constitution for a third term and allegations of electoral irregularities, undermined political stability and legitimacy. These issues strained Nigeria's democratic institutions and governance, impacting investor confidence and economic development (Akinboye, 2008). The rise of Boko Haram posed a significant security threat and humanitarian crisis. Founded in 2002, Boko Haram's campaign of violence escalated in the late 2000s, targeting government institutions, security forces, and civilian populations, particularly in northeastern Nigeria. The group's activities, including mass kidnappings and attacks on schools and villages, led to widespread fear and displacement. Nigeria's efforts to combat Boko Haram were complicated by human rights abuses by security forces and challenges in implementing effective counterterrorism strategies.

Economically, Nigeria faced both opportunities and challenges. Despite being Africa's largest economy, it struggled with corruption, infrastructure deficiencies, and over-

reliance on oil revenues (Lewis, 2007). As seen in the 2014 oil price crash, fluctuations in global oil prices exposed vulnerabilities in Nigeria's economy, leading to recession and exacerbating poverty levels. Efforts to diversify the economy and promote sustainable development faced hurdles due to institutional weaknesses and political instability (Kalu, 2010).

5.2 The evolution of China-Nigeria Relations: A Historical Tapestry

The diplomatic relationship between China and Nigeria, which was forged in 1971, marks a significant chapter in the geopolitical landscape of both nations. This analysis explores their bilateral history, from the initial stages of diplomatic engagement to the current era of extensive economic cooperation. Beginning with Nigeria's emergence as an independent nation in the 1960s, we trace the gradual development of unofficial communications between the two countries, culminating in the formal establishment of diplomatic ties. Against China's quest for global prominence, these interactions laid the foundation for a multifaceted relationship characterized by mutual interests and evolving dynamics.

Furthermore, this section investigates beyond diplomatic formalities, encompassing the intricate tapestry of economic interdependence between China and Nigeria. The study scrutinizes trade patterns and the consequential impact of initiatives such as the BRI on their bilateral relations. Furthermore, it explores the ramifications of Chinese loans in Nigeria, particularly in addressing critical infrastructure gaps and fostering economic development. Amidst the opportunities presented by this burgeoning partnership, this

research also confronts the challenges of trade imbalances and the broader implications of China's involvement, including corruption and fiscal management issues. Through this analysis, this paper endeavours to unravel the complexities of the China-Nigeria relationship, shedding light on its significance in shaping the socio-economic landscapes of both nations.

Historical Context: From Diplomatic Ties to Economic Cooperation

As Nigeria emerged as an independent nation during the 1950s and 1960s, unofficial communications between the two nations began to take shape. China, seeking to assert its role on the global stage, engaged in informal interactions with various countries, including Nigeria, laying the groundwork for future diplomatic relations. This engagement intensified in the 1960s, although formal diplomatic ties were not established until 1971. The diplomatic relations between China and Nigeria were officially established in 1971 under the leadership of Nigerian President Yakubu Gowon and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, and this pivotal moment marked a significant shift in Nigeria's foreign policy, reflecting its commitment to non-alignment and diversification of international partnerships beyond Western allies.

Shortly after the Nigerian Civil War, General Gowon's official visit to China in 1972 marked one of the early engagements between the two nations (Richard, 2013). During General Abacha's tenure, Nigeria sought support from China amid international criticism and isolation, particularly following the crackdown in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, which led to China's international isolation (Richard, 2013). Both nations engaged in tangible

goodwill gestures following the formalisation of diplomatic ties. Both nations engaged in tangible goodwill gestures following the formalisation of diplomatic ties. China provided financial support to Nigeria through grants and aid packages, demonstrating its commitment to fostering bilateral relations. For instance, during a meeting between leaders of both countries in 1971, Nigeria was presented with a 30 million RMB Yuan grant equivalent to approximately N380 million or USD 3.5 million (Nwokolobia & Ikenga, 2023). These funds were allocated to various development projects to bolster Nigeria's infrastructure and socio-economic development. The strategic decisions made by President Gowon and Premier Zhou laid the groundwork for a multifaceted relationship that continues to evolve, shaping the socio-economic landscape of both nations.

The significance of these early engagements and financial support lies in the foundation they set for future cooperation. They were symbolic gestures and practical steps that established trust and mutual interests, laying the groundwork for more extensive economic partnerships in later years.

Economic Relations

Nigeria’s economic relationship with China has witnessed substantial growth, with China emerging as one of Nigeria’s largest trade partners. However, this expansion has been accompanied by significant challenges, including trade imbalances and concerns about Nigeria’s economic resilience. China’s ascent as Nigeria’s second-largest trade partner is evident in trade figures. For instance, Nigerian imports from China surged from US$5.3 billion in 2000 to US$17.7 billion in 2005, reflecting the increasing volume of goods flowing

into the Nigerian market. In contrast, Nigeria's exports to China experienced more moderate growth, rising from US$307.3 million in 2000 to US$526.9 million in 2005 (Zenith Quarterly, 2010).

Despite this growth, concerns persist regarding the imbalance in trade composition. Bukarambe (2005) states, "The pattern has been such that China exported manufactured and industrial items to Nigeria and imported unprocessed agricultural and mineral items." This imbalance underscores Nigeria's technological dependence on China and the need for diversification efforts. Nigeria's heavy reliance on oil exports has hindered efforts to address the trade disparity. Nigeria's export base remains concentrated in petroleum products and minerals, limiting its ability to offset the influx of Chinese imports. Nwokolobia and Ikenga (2023) noted that "Nigeria's heavy reliance on oil exports has contributed to the trade imbalance."

Moreover, Nigeria's domestic manufacturing sector has struggled to compete with cheap imported goods from China, exacerbating the trade imbalance. The decline of Nigeria's manufacturing base has raised concerns about the country's long-term economic prospects. Kwanashie (2007) states, "The failure of initiatives like the cassava project highlights Nigeria's challenges in promoting domestic production." Addressing these challenges requires strategic policy interventions to diversify Nigeria's economy and enhance its industrial capacity.

In this context, President Umaru Yar'Adua's visit to China in 2008 resulted in agreements to pursue a strategic partnership in power, energy, and transport infrastructure (Adeniyi, 2011). This visit underscored the strategic significance of Sino-Nigerian cooperation and marked a pivotal moment in their bilateral relationship. The agreements reached during this visit laid the groundwork for a deeper, more structured partnership, reflecting mutual interests and long-term goals. The collaboration aimed to address Nigeria's inadequate power supply in the power and energy sectors, which has long hampered industrial growth and economic development. Projects initiated as part of this partnership sought to increase electricity generation capacity, modernise the grid, and develop renewable energy sources, all essential for Nigeria's sustainable development.

In the realm of transport infrastructure, the agreements included plans to develop and modernise Nigeria's road, rail, and port infrastructure, facilitating smoother and more efficient movement of goods and people, thus boosting economic activities and regional integration. Furthermore, Nigeria has sought to attract foreign investment to bolster its economic resilience. For instance, Olugboyega (2010) notes that China has set up over 30 solely owned companies or joint ventures in Nigeria, actively involved in various sectors of the economy. These investments spanned manufacturing, construction, mining, and telecommunications, contributing to job creation, technology transfer, and capacity building in Nigeria.

The strategic partnership with China also emphasised the importance of attracting foreign investment to support Nigeria's economic resilience. This collaboration was part of

Nigeria’s broader strategy to diversify its economy away from an over-reliance on oil. By focusing on sectors like power, energy, and transport infrastructure, Nigeria aimed to create a more balanced and resilient economy. Enhancing industrial capacity through these strategic partnerships was vital to achieving long-term economic stability and growth.

While Nigeria’s economic relationship with China has expanded, addressing trade imbalances and promoting sustainable economic growth will require concerted efforts to diversify the economy, enhance industrial capacity, and attract foreign investment. As Nwokolobia and Ikenga (2023) argue, “efforts to rebalance the trade equation remain pivotal in fostering sustainable economic growth.” This trajectory from diplomatic engagement to robust economic collaboration underscores the resilience and pragmatism characterising China-Nigeria relations. President Yar’Adua’s 2008 visit to China and the resulting agreements represented a strategic alignment of Nigeria’s developmental goals with China’s capabilities and interests, aiming to address critical infrastructure deficits, attract significant foreign investment, and support Nigeria’s broader economic diversification and industrialisation efforts.

Chinese Developments and Loans in Nigeria

Chinese loans have supported Nigeria's development endeavours, particularly in completing essential infrastructure projects. These loans, totalling $3.121 billion, have been earmarked for specific initiatives to enhance the country's transportation and road networks, among others (Agah & Ikenga, 2023). Projects such as expanding airport

terminals in Abuja, Kano, Lagos, and Port Harcourt and railway modernisation projects highlight the breadth of Chinese investment in Nigeria's infrastructure (Agah & Ikenga, 2023).

Despite the tangible benefits of Chinese loans in addressing Nigeria's infrastructure deficits, the broader implications of foreign borrowing warrant careful consideration. While African nations, including Nigeria, have found Chinese lending to be more practical and responsive to their developmental needs compared to traditional Western donors (Ojeme, 2020), concerns persist regarding the effectiveness of such loans in promoting sustainable economic growth and poverty alleviation.

Indeed, Nigeria's reliance on external borrowing reflects broader challenges in domestic savings and investment dynamics (Omoruyi, 2019). Despite significant inflows of foreign aid and loans, Nigeria's poverty rate continues to rise, with over 40% of the population living below the national poverty line (World Bank, 2019). This underscores the limited impact of foreign borrowings, including Chinese loans, in driving meaningful economic transformation and improving livelihoods for the most vulnerable segments of society.
Furthermore, Nigeria's mounting public debt and ongoing budget deficits highlight the complexities of managing external borrowings in the context of corruption and fiscal mismanagement (Ejumudo & Ikenga, 2015). The country's struggle to control debt levels and stimulate economic growth is compounded by various macroeconomic challenges, including declining commodity prices and ineffective policy frameworks (Fosu, 2017).

Evolution of the Relationship and Its Significance

The historical context of China-Nigeria relations, marked by early diplomatic engagements and evolving economic ties, underscores the strategic importance of their partnership. Nigerian leaders' visits to China and subsequent agreements reflect a mutual recognition of the benefits of cooperation (Richard, 2013; Nwokolobia & Ikenga, 2023). These interactions were not merely ceremonial but strategic moves to secure economic development, enhance infrastructure, and diversify economic partnerships.

Nigeria's efforts to attract Chinese investment and develop critical infrastructure projects through strategic partnerships have been pivotal in addressing its developmental challenges (Adeniyi, 2011). However, the reliance on external borrowing and the resulting debt sustainability issues highlight the need for a balanced approach. This involves leveraging foreign investments to spur economic growth while ensuring fiscal responsibility and mitigating the risks of excessive debt accumulation (Agah & Ikenga, 2023).

The trajectory from diplomatic engagement to robust economic collaboration exemplifies the resilience and pragmatism characterising China-Nigeria relations. The strategic alignment of Nigeria's developmental goals with China's capabilities and interests aims to address critical infrastructure deficits, attract significant foreign investment, and support Nigeria's broader economic diversification and industrialisation efforts (Olugboyega, 2010; Ojeme, 2020).

5.3 Economic Implications

This section explores the economic implications of China's BRI in Nigeria. Through an in-depth examination of three pivotal infrastructure undertakings - the Kano-Maradi railway project, the Zungeru hydroelectric power project, and the Lagos-Ibadan expressway project - this research investigates the multifaceted effects of Chinese investment on Nigeria's economic landscape. By scrutinising the intricate dynamics of these projects, ranging from financing mechanisms to stakeholder endorsements, this study endeavours to provide a nuanced understanding of their profound implications for Nigeria's socio-economic development and its broader engagement with international partners. Through a comprehensive exploration of the economic dimensions of the BRI projects in Nigeria, this research offers valuable insights into the country's evolving socio-economic landscape and strategic positioning within the global economic arena.

5.3.1 Kano-Maradi railway project

The Kano-Maradi Railway Project covers 285 kilometres from Kano, Nigeria, to Maradi, Niger, as part of the Trans-Saharan railway network facilitated by the BRI and Chinese investment (Ezra Ukanwa, 2023). This project aims to bolster trade, economic development, and connectivity between the two countries. By linking major commercial centres like Kano and Maradi, the railway streamlines the movement of goods, stimulating trade activities, economic growth, and regional integration (Ihenacho et al., 2020).

Moreover, the project attracts industrialization and investment along the rail corridor, as efficient transportation infrastructure makes the area appealing to industries and logistics

companies (Adejuwon & Ojo, 2021). This potential for industrial development extends to just-in-time supply chain management and establishing industrial parks, fostering economic activities, job opportunities, and revenue growth. Large-scale infrastructure projects like the Kano-Maradi Railway generate employment during construction and stimulate economic activity, contributing to sustained job creation and economic growth (Adejuwon & Ojo, 2021). Additionally, improved rail connectivity supports various economic sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, and services, enhancing production, employment, and economic expansion (Ihenacho et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the project enhances regional development and accessibility, providing previously underserved communities with better market access and economic opportunities (Akinlabi et al., 2020). This accessibility is particularly significant for agriculture, as farmers along the rail corridor can transport produce more efficiently, reducing post-harvest losses and increasing income. Efficient logistics and intermodal transportation provided by the railway improve businesses' competitiveness by reducing transit times and transportation costs, enabling them to operate more cost-effectively and compete more effectively in domestic and international markets (Adegbite & Salawu, 2020).

The financing milestone of $1.3 billion secured by the Nigerian Ministry of Transportation signifies significant progress towards completing the Kano-Maradi Railway Project, aligning with President Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda and the administration's commitment to national development and regional cooperation (Ezra Ukanwa, 2023).

Various stakeholders, including the African Development Bank and Chinese partners, endorse the project as a catalyst for positive change (Akinlabi et al., 2020), fostering economic growth and prosperity between Nigeria and Niger.

5.3.2 Zungeru hydroelectric power project

The Zungeru Hydroelectric Power Project, recently completed by the Federal Government under President Buhari's administration, is a hydroelectric power generation initiative situated on the Niger River in Niger State, Nigeria. The BRI supports and facilitates the project to generate 700 megawatts of electricity, meeting nearly 10% of Nigeria's domestic energy needs (Okonkwo, 2023). This project represents a significant infrastructure investment under the BRI in Nigeria and is poised to have far-reaching economic implications.

The Zungeru Hydroelectric Power Project is a significant step towards addressing Nigeria's chronic power deficit, but more is needed for the country's extensive energy challenges. Nigeria has long faced issues with inadequate power supply, which have hindered industrial growth and economic development (Adenikinju & Ajakaiye, 2020). While completing the Zungeru project promises to add substantial capacity to the national grid, it is part of a broader strategy to improve energy access and reliability. The enhanced power supply from Zungeru is expected to stimulate economic activities by reducing business operational costs, enhancing productivity, and fostering industrial growth (Ebele et al., 2019; Okonkwo, 2023). Additionally, the project opens up export opportunities, potentially generating national revenue (Awosika & Ajani, 2017; Okonkwo, 2023).

Furthermore, the Zungeru Hydroelectric Power Project can catalyse industrialisation and economic diversification in the state (Abubakar & Ohunakin, 2017). A stable power supply is crucial for various economic sectors, including manufacturing, agriculture, and services. With reliable electricity, manufacturing companies can increase production capacities, reduce operating costs, and remain competitive in domestic and international markets (Abubakar & Ohunakin, 2017; Okonkwo, 2023). Completing the project also presents job creation opportunities during the construction phase and beyond (Adenikinju & Ajakaiye, 2020; Okonkwo, 2023). Increased economic activity stimulates business growth and job opportunities, contributing to sustained job creation and economic growth (Adenikinju & Ajakaiye, 2020; Okonkwo, 2023).

Additionally, the Zungeru Hydroelectric Power Project has the potential to attract infrastructure development and investment along its corridor (Awosika & Ajani, 2017; Okonkwo, 2023). As power supply improves, regions surrounding the project site become attractive destinations for businesses and industries, fostering economic growth and development (Abubakar & Ohunakin, 2017; Okonkwo, 2023). With Mainstream Energy Solutions Limited named as the official operator and manager of the project, the Zungeru hydropower project is expected to play a significant role in improving Nigeria's power supply and driving economic growth (Okonkwo, 2023).

However, to effectively address Nigeria's power problems moving forward, a multifaceted approach that includes expanding renewable energy sources, upgrading existing

infrastructure, and improving governance in the power sector is required. Investments in solar, wind, and other renewable energy projects and reforms to ensure efficient and transparent management of power generation and distribution are crucial. While the Zungeru Hydroelectric Power Project contributes significantly, it must be complemented by other initiatives to create a sustainable and reliable power supply system for Nigeria.

5.3.3 Lagos-Ibadan expressway project

The Lagos-Ibadan Expressway Project, a 127.6-kilometer stretch connecting Nigeria's economic hub, Lagos, with Ibadan in the southwest, is a pivotal infrastructure initiative to enhance trade, connectivity, and economic development (Ene, 2019). Financed and executed with Chinese firms, the project addresses challenges like congestion and accidents, aiming to modernise the road network (Ajakaiye & Adejumo, 2018). This project significantly enhances connectivity and trade facilitation, stimulating economic growth by providing a direct route to Apapa Port and promoting regional integration (Adeyemi et al., 2020). Reducing transit times and costs benefits industries with complex supply chains and facilitates international trade, contributing to Nigeria's position as an economic gateway in West Africa (Adenikinju et al., 2020).

Moreover, the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway Project attracts investment and industrialisation along its corridor, offering opportunities for businesses to set up operations and foster economic diversification (Adejuwon & Ojo, 2021). Its impact extends beyond construction, generating employment opportunities and supporting various economic sectors, thereby contributing to broader economic growth and development (Adenikinju et al., 2020;

Adejuwon & Ojo, 2021). The project also plays a crucial role in regional development and accessibility by improving transportation links and expanding access to services in underserved areas (Akinlabi et al., 2020; Ene, 2019).

Enhancing logistics and supply chain efficiency reduces business operational costs and facilitates domestic and international trade, ultimately fostering a more competitive and dynamic Nigerian economy (Ajakaiye & Adejumo, 2018; Adenikinju et al., 2020). The total investment in the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway Project amounts to approximately USD 1.5 billion, primarily sourced from the Nigerian government and supplemented by loans and financing from international partners, including Chinese firms involved in the project's execution. As of the latest available information (Adejuwon & Ojo, 2021), the project is undergoing various phases of construction and rehabilitation, with ongoing work to expand further, rehabilitate, and integrate additional infrastructure components to enhance overall road quality and capacity.

Debt sustainability

The debt sustainability of BRI projects in Nigeria, which refers to the country’s ability to meet its debt obligations without compromising its economic growth and development, is a critical issue that warrants careful analysis. This is especially important given the country’s substantial investments and potential long-term financial implications. While the Kano-Maradi Railway, Zungeru Hydroelectric Power Project, and Lagos-Ibadan Expressway represent significant strides in infrastructure development, they also pose considerable challenges related to debt management and fiscal stability.

Nigeria's engagement with China's Belt and Road Initiative has been characterised by large-scale financing arrangements, primarily through loans from Chinese banks and financial institutions. The Kano-Maradi Railway Project, for instance, has secured $1.3 billion in financing, while the Zungeru Hydroelectric Power Project and Lagos-Ibadan Expressway Project have attracted substantial investments as well (Ezra Ukanwa, 2023; Okonkwo, 2023; Adejuwon & Ojo, 2021). These projects are pivotal for Nigeria's socio-economic development, enhancing trade, energy supply, and connectivity. However, they also contribute significantly to the country's debt burden.

Recent estimates show Nigeria's total public debt is approximately $86 billion, with Chinese loans comprising a significant portion (World Bank, 2021). The structure of these loans often includes relatively high interest rates and short repayment periods compared to concessional loans from traditional multilateral lenders. This financing model places additional strain on Nigeria's fiscal resources and raises concerns about its ability to service its debt, particularly during economic downturns or fluctuating oil prices, significantly impacting Nigeria's revenue base (Brautigam et al., 2018).

The Zungeru Hydroelectric Power Project, despite its potential to improve energy access and stimulate economic growth, exemplifies the complexities of debt sustainability. The $1.3 billion loan for the project must be repaid, and any delays or inefficiencies in the project's operation could exacerbate Nigeria's debt situation (Okonkwo, 2023). Furthermore, the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, another critical BRI project, involves an

investment of approximately $1.5 billion, adding to the debt load (Adejuwon & Ojo, 2021). While these projects promise long-term economic benefits, the immediate fiscal pressures must be noticed.

Nigeria's debt-to-GDP ratio has been rising, surpassing 30% in recent years and raising alarms among economists and policymakers about the country's debt sustainability (IMF, 2021). The IMF and the World Bank have highlighted the need for Nigeria to adopt robust fiscal policies and improve debt management frameworks to mitigate risks associated with external borrowing. These institutions have also emphasised the critical importance of transparent project selection, competitive procurement processes, and rigorous risk assessments to ensure that investments are sustainable and do not jeopardise the country's financial stability. This transparency is vital to maintaining accountability in Nigeria's fiscal management (Reuters, 2019).

Moreover, the dependency on Chinese loans has implications beyond financial sustainability. The geopolitical dynamics of Nigeria's increasing reliance on China could influence its foreign policy and economic strategies, potentially limiting its engagement with other international partners. The strategic nature of Chinese investments in critical infrastructure sectors like energy and transportation further underscores the need for Nigeria to balance its relationships. Excessive dependence on a single partner could lead to a lack of economic diversification, potential loss of sovereignty, and limited access to alternative financing sources (Huang, 2019).

5.4 Nigeria’s Geopolitics with the BRI

Nigeria's engagement with the BRI, a strategic aspect of its foreign policy and economic strategy, carries profound implications for its position in West Africa and geopolitical relationships (Ubi, 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). Nigeria's aim to harness Chinese investment and expertise through the BRI, to address its infrastructure deficit, enhance regional connectivity, and bolster economic development, demonstrates a strategic foresight (Coste, 2014). The joint Kano-Maradi Railway project, a testament to Nigeria's strategic collaboration with China under the BRI, significantly impacts regional geopolitics (Chen, 2018; Sayagie, 2016). By connecting Kano in northern Nigeria to Maradi in southern Niger, the project symbolises Nigeria's efforts to strengthen economic ties with neighbouring nations and extend its influence in West Africa, positioning itself as a regional trade and investment hub. Through partnerships facilitated by the BRI, such as with Niger, Nigeria not only promotes economic integration but also strengthens diplomatic relations and cooperation. These joint endeavours advance Nigeria's geopolitical goals of asserting leadership in West Africa and projecting influence across borders.

Furthermore, Nigeria's engagement with the BRI underscores its strategic approach to diversifying its economic partnerships and reducing dependence on traditional Western allies (Ubi, 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). By embracing Chinese investment and infrastructure development initiatives, Nigeria aims to balance its foreign policy objectives and explore new avenues for economic growth (Coste, 2014). This shift in

strategy reflects Nigeria's evolving geopolitical outlook, emphasising pragmatic cooperation with multiple global players to advance its national interests.

However, Nigeria's engagement with the BRI also presents geopolitical challenges and considerations. Sovereignty concerns emerge as a significant issue due to the substantial influx of Chinese investment and influence in Nigeria's critical infrastructure projects, exemplified by Chinese firms like CCECC involved in projects like the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway (Ubi, 2023; Adebayo, 2017). While these investments promise to address infrastructure deficiencies and drive economic growth, they come with the potential trade-off of relinquishing some control over vital assets to Chinese interests. Notably, Chinese involvement in key sectors like transportation and energy infrastructure, as seen in projects like the Kano-Maradi Railway with China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC), may lead to Nigeria ceding autonomy in decision-making and operational management, raising valid questions about sovereignty and national security (Sayagie, 2016; Adebayo, 2017). This entanglement could introduce complexities in governance structures and oversight mechanisms, potentially undermining Nigeria's ability to safeguard its strategic assets and effectively manage its infrastructure in the long term. However, it is essential to note that these investments also hold the potential to boost Nigeria's economic growth and development significantly.

Secondly, Nigeria's active participation in projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) often necessitates substantial debt financing from Chinese lenders, as evidenced by the funding from the Export-Import Bank of China (Exim Bank) for the Kano-Maradi Railway

project and support from the China Development Bank (CDB) and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) for the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway project (Amusan, 2022; Adebayo, 2017). While these loans are critical in funding essential infrastructure development initiatives, they also pose significant risks related to debt distress and repayment obligations (Coste, 2014). To mitigate these risks, Nigeria must implement prudent debt management strategies to prevent the accumulation of unsustainable financial burdens that could compromise its fiscal sovereignty. Furthermore, the terms and conditions accompanying Chinese loans, including interest rates and repayment schedules, may influence Nigeria's economic policies and financial stability. This underscores the importance of balancing leveraging Chinese financing for development projects and safeguarding Nigeria's long-term economic independence and sovereignty.

Competition with foreign powers

Nigeria's involvement in the BRI has led to a nuanced approach to its foreign partnerships, aiming for diversification while proactively mitigating potential risks. The BRI's allure of infrastructure development and economic cooperation has significantly deepened Nigeria's ties with China (Leslie, 2020). However, concerns have arisen regarding the sustainability of China's loans and Nigeria's potential vulnerability to a "debt trap" (Odutola, 2020). In response, Nigeria has sought to balance its economic engagement with China by maintaining relationships with other foreign powers, such as the United States and European countries, ensuring a diversified portfolio of partnerships (Shaw et al., 2009).

The competition among foreign powers for influence in Nigeria has become multifaceted due to its participation in the BRI. China's growing presence through infrastructure investments has spurred other countries to bolster their engagement to protect their interests and prevent China from dominating strategic sectors (Leslie, 2020; Hu, 2019). This competition extends beyond economic interests to encompass soft power and influence, as evidenced by various foreign powers' efforts to shape public perceptions and foster goodwill (Solana, 2015).

For instance, the U.S. promotes its culture through Hollywood movies and specific educational exchange programs like the Fulbright Program and scholarships offered by U.S. universities. At the same time, France maintains cultural centres such as the Institut Français du Nigeria and engages in humanitarian aid projects (Solana, 2015). Similarly, India leverages Bollywood films, cultural festivals like the India Festival Nigeria, and educational ties, including scholarships and academic partnerships, to enhance its influence (Solana, 2015). Consequently, Nigeria, as a regional economic powerhouse, must navigate this complex geopolitical landscape, balancing economic opportunities with strategic considerations (Calabrese, 2019).

5.5 Conclusion

Nigeria’s involvement in China’s BRI reveals multifaceted economic and geopolitical implications. This chapter has explored Nigeria’s historical context, the evolution of its relationship with China, and the significant impacts of BRI projects, providing a

comprehensive foundation for understanding Nigeria's strategic engagement with the BRI.

Nigeria's historical journey, from the British colonial era through its independence in 1960, the tumultuous Civil War from 1967 to 1970, periods of military rule, and eventual return to democracy in 1999, has shaped its current socio-political and economic landscape. The colonial legacy left an indelible mark on Nigeria's infrastructure and administrative systems, which the country has been working to reform and develop post-independence. The Civil War and subsequent military regimes introduced challenges that hindered economic growth and stability. However, Nigeria's resilience and determination, since returning to democracy, have seen the country embark on various reforms to promote development, democratisation, and economic diversification, setting the stage for its current engagement with international partners, including China.

Nigeria's early diplomatic engagements with China, dating back to the 1970s, laid the groundwork for a robust partnership characterised by mutual economic interests. This partnership, built on shared economic goals and mutual respect, has seen the two countries collaborate on various fronts, from infrastructure development to cultural exchanges. Over the decades, visits by Nigerian leaders to China and subsequent agreements have underscored the strategic importance of this bilateral relationship. These interactions were not merely ceremonial but aimed at securing economic development, enhancing infrastructure, and diversifying economic partnerships.

The BRI has facilitated significant infrastructure projects in Nigeria, such as the Kano-Maradi Railway, the Zungeru Hydroelectric Power Project, and the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway. These projects have enhanced connectivity, stimulated economic activities, and created job opportunities. The Kano-Maradi Railway, for instance, aims to bolster trade and regional integration. At the same time, the Zungeru Hydroelectric Power Project promises to alleviate Nigeria's chronic power shortages, boost productivity, and foster industrial growth. Similarly, the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway enhances trade facilitation and regional development, contributing to broader economic growth.

Despite these tangible benefits, Nigeria's engagement with the BRI raises concerns about debt sustainability. While crucial for infrastructure projects, substantial loans from Chinese financial institutions pose significant risks related to debt distress and repayment obligations. As Nigeria's public debt rises, prudent debt management and fiscal responsibility become increasingly critical. Ensuring these investments do not compromise Nigeria's financial stability requires careful planning and strategic oversight.

Nigeria's active participation in the BRI also has profound geopolitical implications. By diversifying its economic partnerships and reducing dependence on traditional Western allies, Nigeria is not just positioning itself, but strategically asserting its significance within the global economic arena. However, the substantial influx of Chinese investment and influence in critical infrastructure projects raises sovereignty concerns. Balancing the benefits of Chinese cooperation with the need to maintain control over strategic assets is a delicate task that Nigeria must navigate carefully.

The BRI has intensified competition among foreign powers for influence in Nigeria. While China's presence has significantly deepened, other countries, such as the United States and European nations, continue to vie for strategic partnerships. This competition extends beyond economic interests to include cultural and educational exchanges, highlighting Nigeria's pivotal role as a regional powerhouse in West Africa.

Nigeria should adopt a multifaceted approach to maximise the benefits of the BRI while mitigating associated risks. Enhanced debt management is crucial, with robust frameworks needed to ensure that infrastructure projects are financially sustainable in the long term. Diversifying partnerships is also essential to avoid over-reliance on any single country. Strengthening governance structures and oversight mechanisms will safeguard national interests and maintain control over critical infrastructure. Moreover, ensuring that the benefits of infrastructure projects are equitably distributed will promote socio-economic development across all regions.

In conclusion, Nigeria's experience with the BRI underscores the complexity of international development partnerships. While Chinese investments have spurred significant infrastructure growth and economic development, they also present challenges related to debt sustainability and geopolitical dynamics. However, by adopting a balanced and strategic approach, Nigeria can harness the full potential of the BRI to drive sustainable development and assert its influence in the regional and global arenas. This case study provides valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges associated

with large-scale infrastructure development and international cooperation, offering a nuanced understanding of Nigeria's evolving socio-economic landscape and the promising future it can achieve through the BRI.

CHAPTER 6: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter serves as a comparative exploration of the economic and geopolitical implications of China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia. The goal is to uncover the nuanced dynamics shaping BRI implementation in these diverse African contexts through meticulous comparison and contrast. This chapter will first refamiliarise the reader with research questions, providing a clear lens through which to conduct the comparative examination. Following this, the chapter will unpack the comparative framework, explaining the criteria for comparison and the theoretical underpinnings guiding the analysis. Subsequently, the chapter presents the data within each compared theme group, analyses the findings, discusses cross-case themes, compares with existing literature, and concludes with final reflections. This structured approach thoroughly explores the economic and geopolitical implications of China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia through comparative analysis.

6.1 Restating the Research Questions and Objectives

Problem Statement: China's BRI has emerged as a transformative force in the global economic and geopolitical landscape, particularly in Africa, where Nigeria and Ethiopia have become pivotal partners. However, a critical need remains to comprehensively grasp the economic and geopolitical ramifications of China's BRI implementation in these African nations. This study seeks to delve into the nuances of these implications, specifically examining how the BRI influences Nigeria and Ethiopia's agency and sovereignty in international affairs and development pathways. To this end, this research asks, "What are the economic and geopolitical implications of China's Belt and Road Initiative implementation in Nigeria and Ethiopia?" The current research seeks to unpack this information further by determining "How has the BRI impacted Africa's geopolitical dynamics, considering the involvement of other foreign powers? Moreover, "What are the distinct responses of Nigeria and Ethiopia to China's BRI, and how do they compare"?

This study hypothesises that China's BRI implementation in Nigeria and Ethiopia will yield positive and negative economic and geopolitical outcomes. While BRI investments could stimulate economic growth and infrastructure development, concerns persist regarding potential debt traps and asymmetrical power relations. Dependency theory offers a pertinent framework for analysing these dynamics, suggesting that the BRI could engender dependencies that undermine African agency. By scrutinising Nigeria and Ethiopia's responses to the BRI, this research aims to evaluate the economic and geopolitical implications for these African nations' agency and sovereignty.

6.2 Description of Comparative Framework

The comparative framework for analysing China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia encompasses a multifaceted approach integrating document analysis, case studies, and semi-structured interviews. Document analysis involves systematic review and triangulation of various sources, including policy documents, reports, and academic literature. The foundation for the analysis is laid in Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework, Chapter 3: Literature Review, Chapter 4: Ethiopian Case Study, and Chapter 5: Nigerian Case Study, which draws significantly on established academic sources and publications. Further, the case studies offer detailed insights into the real-world impact of BRI projects within the unique contexts of Nigeria and Ethiopia. Semi-structured interviews with subject matter experts provide an in-depth exploration of stakeholders' experiences and decision-making processes related to the BRI.

6.3 Case Studies Presentation and Analysis

Before analysing the cases, the section will summarise the individual case studies found in chapters 4 and 5. The information presented here offers insights into BRI implementation's economic and geopolitical implications in these African nations. By scrutinising project details, outcomes, and associated concerns, this analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how the BRI has influenced Africa's geopolitical dynamics and the distinct responses of Nigeria and Ethiopia.

6.3.1 Ethiopia's Engagement with the BRI:

With a population exceeding 110 million and a strategic location near the Red Sea, Ethiopia offers a substantial consumer base and crucial access to maritime trade routes (Ren, 2020). The BRI has significantly transformed Ethiopia's economic landscape, with China investing heavily in infrastructure and industrial development.

The Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, spanning 752.7 kilometres, was completed in January 2018 by Chinese construction companies (People's Daily Online, 2023). This railway connects Ethiopia's capital to Djibouti's port, reducing transportation time from over seven days to just 10 hours, thereby enhancing Ethiopia's trade competitiveness (Global Times, 2022). China's strategic investments in Ethiopia extend beyond infrastructure to critical sectors like agriculture and manufacturing, with projects such as the Eastern Industrial Zone and the Hawassa Industrial Park demonstrating China's role in modernizing Ethiopia's economy (Chakrabarty, 2016; Brautigam & Tang, 2012). The Hawassa Industrial Park, completed in nine months by China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) in 2016, attracted 21 international companies and created 27,000 direct job opportunities for local youth (The World Bank, 2019; Xinhuanet, 2019). These projects have significantly boosted Ethiopia's infrastructure and industrial capacity, contributing to an export value of $142 million from industrial parks during the fiscal year 2018/19 (Hardy et al., 2019).

Despite these positive developments, concerns have been raised regarding Ethiopia's rising debt-to-GDP ratio, which reached 55.8% in 2021, surpassing the International

Monetary Fund's threshold for low-income countries (IMF, 2021). The financing structure of BRI projects, including high-interest Chinese loans, has strained Ethiopia's fiscal resources, raising questions about debt sustainability and potential economic vulnerabilities (Brautigam et al., 2018). The growing debt associated with these projects has led to concerns about dependency and the long-term implications for Ethiopia's economic stability (Chakrabarty, 2016; Zafar, 2007).

6.3.2 Nigeria's Engagement with the BRI:

Nigeria's engagement with the BRI has been shaped by its transition from military rule to civilian democracy and its post-2000s challenges, including domestic unrest, security threats, and economic vulnerabilities (Zaira, 2013; Lewis, 2007). Nigeria, Africa's most populous country with over 200 million people, faces significant infrastructure deficiencies and economic challenges despite its vast natural resources and economic potential (Meredith, 2005; Oladipo, 2009). The Kano-Maradi Railway Project, spanning 285 kilometres from Kano, Nigeria, to Maradi, Niger, aims to enhance trade, economic development, and connectivity between the two countries. This project has attracted industrialisation and investment along the rail corridor, generated employment opportunities, and enhanced regional development and accessibility (Adejuwon & Ojo, 2021; Ihenacho et al., 2020).

Similarly, the Zungeru Hydroelectric Power Project in Niger State aims to address critical infrastructure deficits by generating 700 megawatts of electricity, which is expected to enhance energy access and reliability, stimulate economic activities, and support

industrial growth (Okonkwo, 2023; Abubakar & Ohunakin, 2017). This project represents a significant infrastructure investment under the BRI and has the potential to catalyse industrialisation and economic diversification in the region (Adenikinju & Ajakaiye, 2020).

The Lagos-Ibadan Expressway Project, a 127.6-kilometer stretch connecting Nigeria's economic hub, Lagos, with Ibadan in the southwest, is a testament to Nigeria's commitment to progress. This project, which aims to improve transportation links, facilitate trade, and attract investment and industrialisation along its corridor (Ene, 2019; Ajakaiye & Adejumo, 2018), is set to transform the region. By addressing congestion and accidents, modernising the road network, and enhancing regional connectivity and economic development (Adeyemi et al., 2020; Adenikinju et al., 2020), it is paving the way for a brighter future.

The outcomes of these projects have been significant. However, challenges remain, including managing foreign debt, balancing sovereignty concerns, ensuring sustainable development, and navigating geopolitical complexities. Nigeria's engagement with the BRI underscores its strategic approach to leveraging Chinese investment to address infrastructure deficits and enhance regional connectivity while maintaining a balance with other foreign partnerships to ensure a diversified and resilient economic strategy (Ubi, 2023; Coste, 2014).

6.3.3 Comparative analysis of the case studies

Background Information:

Ethiopia and Nigeria, two of Africa's most significant nations, provide compelling case studies for examining China's BRI's economic and geopolitical impacts.

Ethiopia, strategically located in the Horn of Africa, has experienced substantial economic growth, averaging 11.53% annually between 2004 and 2017 and over 9% from 2012 to 2022, mainly due to its strategic positioning, a sizable consumer base, and its proximity to the Red Sea, which facilitates global trade (African Development Bank, 2019). Historically, Ethiopia's geopolitical landscape has been shaped by its resistance to colonialism, the Cold War dynamics, and the Eritrean War of Independence (1961-1991), all of which have influenced its contemporary political and economic strategies (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Ethiopia's engagement with the BRI has been marked by significant infrastructure projects, such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway and the Hawassa Industrial Park, which have enhanced connectivity and industrial capacity (Global Times, 2022). However, these developments have also raised concerns about debt sustainability, with the country's debt-to-GDP ratio increasing significantly, prompting scrutiny over its long-term financial obligations (World Bank, 2021).

In contrast, in West Africa, Nigeria boasts a population exceeding 200 million, making it the most populous country on the continent. Nigeria has experienced a more turbulent economic trajectory, with an average growth rate of approximately 2.2% from 2012 to 2022, often hampered by fluctuating oil prices and socio-political instability (World Bank,

2022). The country's history includes a British colonial era, post-independence struggles, a brutal civil war from 1967 to 1970, and extended periods of military rule before transitioning to civilian democracy in 1999 (Meredith, 2005; Falode, 2020). Nigeria's involvement with the BRI includes pivotal infrastructure projects like the Kano-Maradi railway and the Lagos-Ibadan expressway to address infrastructure deficiencies and boost economic development (Ezra Ukanwa, 2023). However, the country faces challenges related to debt management and fiscal sustainability, with concerns over the terms of Chinese loans and the potential for a debt trap (Agah & Ikenga, 2023).

Both countries illustrate the diverse impacts of the BRI on African nations, highlighting the interplay between historical contexts, economic strategies, and the geopolitical landscape.

Outcomes:

Ethiopia and Nigeria have experienced notable economic growth and engagement with the BRI. Key similarities include the focus on infrastructure development, job creation, and economic stimulation. However, differences arise in the specific projects undertaken, their outcomes, and the challenges faced, reflecting the distinct trajectories shaped by their respective historical, economic, and geopolitical contexts.

In Ethiopia, the BRI has catalysed significant infrastructural and economic advancements. Key projects such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway and the Hawassa Industrial Park have enhanced Ethiopia's connectivity, reduced transportation costs, and bolstered

industrial capacity (Global Times, 2022). These developments align with Ethiopia's ambitions to become a manufacturing hub in Africa, fostering job creation and economic growth. However, Ethiopia's engagement with the BRI has also introduced challenges, particularly regarding debt sustainability. The country's debt-to-GDP ratio has surged, raising concerns over long-term financial stability (World Bank, 2021; Reuters, 2019). Despite these challenges, Ethiopia's strategic location and improved infrastructure have positioned it as a critical player in China's global economic network, enhancing its geopolitical influence in the Horn of Africa (African Development Bank, 2019).

Conversely, Nigeria's engagement with the BRI has yielded mixed outcomes, reflecting its complex socio-political landscape and economic vulnerabilities. The Kano-Maradi Railway and Lagos-Ibadan Expressway projects are pivotal BRI undertakings to improve regional connectivity and trade facilitation (Ezra Ukanwa, 2023; Adejuwon & Ojo, 2021). These projects are expected to stimulate economic activities, attract investments, and support Nigeria's broader economic diversification goals. However, Nigeria's reliance on external borrowing to finance these projects has exacerbated concerns over debt sustainability. The country's total public debt, including substantial Chinese loans, poses significant fiscal challenges, especially given Nigeria's economic dependency on volatile oil revenues (World Bank, 2022; Agah & Ikenga, 2023).

Ethiopia and Nigeria face the challenge of managing the terms of Chinese loans, which are often characterised by higher interest rates and shorter repayment periods. This

raises concerns about the potential debt trap, necessitating prudent debt management strategies (Brautigam et al., 2018).

Moreover, the geopolitical implications of Nigeria's BRI engagement underscore its strategic shift towards diversifying economic partnerships beyond traditional Western allies (Ubi, 2023). While this diversification aims to reduce dependency on Western powers, it also introduces sovereignty concerns, particularly regarding Chinese influence in critical infrastructure sectors like transportation and energy (Adebayo, 2017). Nigeria's efforts to balance its engagement with China against maintaining robust relationships with other global powers, such as the United States and European countries, reflect its nuanced approach to navigating the complex geopolitical landscape (Shaw et al., 2009).

Both countries illustrate the BRI's multifaceted impacts, underscoring the importance of balancing economic benefits with sustainable development practices and strategic geopolitical considerations. Christine Lagarde and Yasheng Huang raised concerns about debt sustainability and the potential risks of the BRI, highlighting the need for prudent debt management and sustainable development strategies (Reuters, 2019; Huang, 2019).

6.3.3.1 Integrating the theoretical framework of this research

This section analyses the economic and geopolitical implications of China's BRI in Ethiopia and Nigeria using dependency theory and the concepts of neocolonialism and soft power. It examines how these projects bolster infrastructure and industrial capacities

while potentially reinforcing economic dependencies and power imbalances. The analysis explores how China's strategic investments enhance its geopolitical influence and employ soft power to cultivate positive relations, highlighting the complexities and nuances of these international engagements.

Economic Implication

The BRI projects in Ethiopia and Nigeria have significantly boosted the countries' infrastructure and industrial capabilities, ushering in a new era of development. These projects, while not without their challenges, also bring to light the potential for economic growth and prosperity in these underdeveloped nations. However, these projects also exemplify dependency theory's assertion that underdeveloped countries can become economically reliant on developed nations (Prebisch, 1950). Ethiopia's growing debt to China and the significant influence of Chinese firms in its vital infrastructure sectors highlight this dependency (IMF, 2021). In Nigeria, BRI projects have targeted critical infrastructure deficits. However, similar to Ethiopia, Nigeria faces challenges related to debt sustainability and the strategic control exerted by China over its infrastructure (Brautigam et al., 2018). This aligns with dependency theory's view that such economic engagements often reinforce structural dependencies and inequalities (Frank, 1967).

Geopolitical Implications

Dependency theory also provides insights into the geopolitical ramifications of the BRI in Ethiopia and Nigeria. In Ethiopia, the strategic investments, such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway and the Hawassa Industrial Park, have strengthened China's influence,

positioning it as a critical ally in the region (Xi, 2017). The Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, for instance, not only facilitates trade but also grants China access to a critical maritime route via Djibouti (Ren, 2020). This geopolitical leverage is a classic example of the core-periphery dynamics described by dependency theorists, where the core (China) maintains control over the periphery (Ethiopia) through strategic economic investments (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979).

In Nigeria, the BRI projects are instrumental in bolstering China's geopolitical influence in West Africa, aligning with Nigeria's strategic goals of regional integration and economic diversification (Ubi, 2023). However, the substantial influx of Chinese investment raises sovereignty concerns, reflecting the neocolonialism's emphasis on economic and political dominance through indirect means (Nkrumah, 1965). The construction of critical infrastructure by Chinese firms could potentially lead to a dependency that severely limits Nigeria's autonomy in managing these assets (Adebayo, 2017).

Nigeria and Ethiopia as Semi-peripheries of their regions

According to world systems theory, Nigeria and Ethiopia are often considered semi-peripheral nations within their respective regions. This classification describes countries that exhibit characteristics of both core and peripheral nations, including partial industrialisation, significant export of raw materials, and moderate levels of economic development. Nigeria, with a GDP of approximately $480 billion as of 2023 (Michael, 2023), was the largest economy in Africa; now ranked fourth place with a GDP of approximately USD 252 billion (Agbetiloye, 2024; World Bank, 2023). Its economy is

diversified with significant sectors such as oil and gas, telecommunications, and agriculture. However, the oil sector remains dominant, contributing about 90% to export revenues, underscoring its semi-peripheral nature due to heavy reliance on a single commodity (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2023).

Despite its reliance on the oil sector, Nigeria exerts considerable regional influence, particularly within the ECOWAS, where it plays a crucial role in economic policies and security matters (ECOWAS, 2023). This underscores Nigeria's geopolitical significance. Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) is 0.539, ranking 161 out of 189 countries, reflecting ongoing challenges in health, education, and living standards (UNDP, 2023). The country's urbanisation rate is 52.7%, indicating a significant transition from rural to urban living, a characteristic of semi-peripheral nations. Additionally, Nigeria is investing in significant infrastructure projects like the Lagos-Ibadan railway and the Mambilla hydroelectric power project to bolster its industrial capacity (Federal Ministry of Transportation, 2023).

With a GDP of approximately $205 billion, Ethiopia has an economy primarily based on agriculture, contributing about 34% to the GDP (World Bank, 2023). The country has experienced rapid industrial growth, particularly in manufacturing and construction, driven by government policies that focus on developing industrial parks and attracting FDI (Ethiopian Investment Commission, 2023). Ethiopia's HDI is 0.485, ranking 173 out of 189 countries, highlighting significant developmental challenges (UNDP, 2023). Unlike

Nigeria, Ethiopia's urbanisation rate is lower, at about 21.2%, indicating a more rural demographic distribution.

Ethiopia's export profile includes coffee, qat, and gold, with recent diversification into light manufacturing, such as textiles and garments, which helps reduce dependence on agricultural exports (National Bank of Ethiopia, 2023). The country is pivotal in regional organisations like the AU and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), influencing regional political and economic initiatives (African Union, 2023). Major infrastructure projects like the GERD and the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway enhance Ethiopia's energy production and trade connectivity, further supporting its semi-peripheral status (Ethiopian Electric Power, 2023).

Exploitation

Nigeria and Ethiopia, as semi-peripheral nations, occupy a strategic position that allows them to exploit their neighbouring countries, mainly through the BRI projects facilitated by China. These countries can leverage their relatively advanced infrastructure and economic diversification to exert influence and derive benefits at the expense of their less-developed neighbours.

With its diversified economy and significant regional influence, Nigeria has established itself as a pivotal player within the ECOWAS. China's BRI projects, such as the Lagos-Ibadan railway, enhance Nigeria's transport and trade capabilities (Federal Ministry of Transportation, Nigeria, 2023). This enhanced connectivity can lead to Nigeria becoming

a significant transit hub for goods and services in West Africa, allowing it to dominate regional trade routes. Consequently, Nigeria could exploit neighbouring countries by controlling the flow of goods, setting higher transit fees, and leveraging its logistical advantages to attract more foreign investment, which could otherwise go to its neighbours.

Moreover, Nigeria's oil and gas sector, bolstered by Chinese investments, positions it to dictate energy supplies to neighbouring countries. For instance, the West African Gas Pipeline, partly financed by China, enables Nigeria to export natural gas to neighbouring Benin, Togo, and Ghana (Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, 2023). This gives Nigeria significant economic leverage, as these countries depend on Nigerian energy supplies, potentially allowing Nigeria to influence their energy policies and economic conditions.

Ethiopia, similarly, has strategically positioned itself as a key player in East Africa through significant infrastructure projects, many of which are part of China's BRI. The Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway, for instance, is a critical link that facilitates trade between landlocked Ethiopia and Djibouti, a significant port nation (Ethiopian Railways Corporation, 2023). This railway enhances Ethiopia's ability to serve as a conduit for international trade for several landlocked neighbours, such as South Sudan and Uganda. By controlling this vital trade artery, Ethiopia can exploit its neighbours by imposing higher tariffs and transit fees, thereby strengthening its economic position at its expense.

Additionally, the GERD, another significant project with indirect Chinese support, is set to make Ethiopia a major energy exporter in the region (Ethiopian Electric Power, 2023). The dam's capacity to generate surplus electricity means Ethiopia could supply power to neighbouring countries such as Sudan and Kenya. By setting favourable export terms, Ethiopia could exploit these dependencies to gain economic and political advantages, thereby enhancing its semi-peripheral status.

In both cases, the BRI projects help these semi-peripheral nations reinforce their dominance over less developed neighbouring countries. By controlling critical infrastructure and trade routes, Nigeria and Ethiopia can leverage their semi-peripheral status to exploit their neighbours economically, ensuring they remain central to regional economic dynamics while their neighbours remain reliant on them.

Neocolonialism and Soft Power

Neocolonialism explains how China's BRI investments might perpetuate economic and political dominance in Ethiopia and Nigeria. In Ethiopia, the significant control over major infrastructure projects could be seen as a modern extension of colonialism, where economic leverage translates into political influence (Rodney, 1972). Similarly, in Nigeria, the extensive Chinese involvement in infrastructure projects can lead to economic dependencies that undermine national sovereignty and self-determination (Emmanuel, 1972).

Soft power offers a different perspective by highlighting how China cultivates positive relations and goodwill through its BRI projects. China employs cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, and public relations efforts in Ethiopia and Nigeria to enhance its image and influence (Nye, 2004). These soft power strategies complement the economic investments, helping China to build stronger diplomatic ties and foster cooperative relationships. However, the efficacy of these strategies depends on how the local populations perceive them and whether they lead to sustainable and equitable development (Mawdsley, 2019).

6.4 Discussion of Cross-Case Themes

The research compares Ethiopia and Nigeria's engagement with the BRI across several themes, including infrastructure development, China's geopolitical strategy in Africa, competition with other foreign powers, the role of African agencies in China-Africa relations, challenges and criticisms, dependency theory and economic interdependencies, and future developments and trends in China-Africa relations. Together, these themes provide valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of BRI projects and their impact on Africa's development landscape and geopolitical dynamics. This thematic comparison uncovers findings that underscore China's investments in these African nations' economic, geopolitical, and developmental implications.

6.4.1 Infrastructure Development

This section explores the impact of Chinese investments in electricity, water and sanitation, and transportation infrastructure. Drawing from literature and expert

interviews, it outlines how these projects address significant deficits, promote economic growth, and improve living conditions.

6.4.1.1 Electricity, Water, Sanitation and Transport Infrastructure

The literature underscores the critical infrastructure shortages in Africa, particularly in electricity, water and sanitation, and transportation sectors, significantly affecting economic growth and quality of life (Lakmeeharan et al., 2020; Adesina, 2016; Brautigam, 2019; Rodriguez, 2019; Holtz & Golubski, 2021; Ashurst, 2016; Holtz & Heitzig, 2021). With 600 million people needing grid electricity, the electricity deficit forces reliance on expensive alternatives like generators, increasing business costs and reducing competitiveness. Matambo (17 November 2023) highlights that Chinese projects have enabled countries like Kenya, Nigeria, and Ethiopia to enhance their electricity infrastructure, addressing critical barriers to development. Yahaya (5 December 2023) notes that the "no strings attached" approach of Chinese-funded projects has facilitated more accessible development assistance, particularly for Nigeria. These initiatives reduce reliance on costly alternatives, lower business costs, and improve educational facilities by enhancing electricity access. This directly answers the research question by showing that implementing BRI has substantial economic benefits.

Water scarcity and inadequate sanitation also pose severe health risks, affecting millions across Africa. The literature calls for substantial investment to mitigate these problems and improve living conditions. While not directly addressing water and sanitation, expert interviews imply that infrastructure improvements facilitated by Chinese investments

indirectly benefit these areas. Enhanced infrastructure, such as roads and electricity, supports better construction and maintenance of water and sanitation systems, contributing to broader public health and living standards improvements (Rodriguez, 2019; Holtz & Golubski, 2021).

Transportation infrastructure deficiencies significantly hinder economic growth due to logistical challenges and high business costs. The literature stresses the need for improved road networks to facilitate efficient movement and trade. Interviews with experts provide specific examples of the positive impacts of Chinese investments. Shelton cites China's development of Angola's road system, which has improved personal mobility and local economic activities. Monyae (6 December 2023) emphasises the long-term benefits of such infrastructure projects, drawing parallels with historical initiatives like the Marshall Plan. The alignment between the literature and interviews on the importance of transportation infrastructure illustrates the substantial economic benefits of improved road networks. These projects facilitate better trade and connectivity, reducing business costs and boosting local economies. This answers the research question by showing that the BRI's implementation has practical and immediate economic impacts in countries like Nigeria and Ethiopia.

6.4.1.2 Long-Term Implications and Strategic Considerations

Sustained investment and strategic negotiation are crucial for maximising infrastructure development benefits (Export-Import Bank of India, 2018). The literature emphasises coordinated efforts among governments, international organisations, and the private

sector. Experts like Monyae (6 December 2023) and Shelton (29 November 2023) stress the importance of strategic negotiation by African countries to benefit from Chinese investments. They caution against overly optimistic expectations of immediate economic growth, emphasising the long-term nature of infrastructure benefits. Monyae (6 December 2023) notes explicitly that visible benefits may take decades to materialise, but the initial investments are crucial for future growth. The emphasis on long-term benefits and strategic negotiation, a key finding of this research, highlights the economic and geopolitical implications of the BRI. For Nigeria and Ethiopia, this means that while immediate economic impacts are significant, the full potential of these investments will unfold over time. Strategic negotiation ensures these countries maximise benefits and mitigate potential negative impacts, such as China's debt dependency or geopolitical leverage. This comprehensive approach answers the research question by illustrating the immediate and long-term implications of the BRI's implementation.

6.4.2 China’s Geopolitical Strategy in Africa

The literature highlights the BRI as a strategic vision for regional integration and cooperation, aiming to revive ancient trade routes and enhance connectivity. The initiative is motivated by China’s pursuit of secure energy resources, alleviating industrial overcapacity, and fostering technological advancement (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Belgium, 2013; Jonsson, 2018; Kan, 2017). These objectives underscore China’s broader geopolitical ambitions to strengthen its global influence and economic ties with partner countries.

Expert interviews provide detailed insights into China's geopolitical strategy in Africa. Aidoo (9 December 2023) characterises the BRI as a "multifaceted diplomatic approach" that captures geopolitical and geoeconomic objectives, positioning China as a dominant partner among global powers. Matambo (17 November 2023) emphasises the strategic importance of stable relationships with critical African nations like Nigeria and Ethiopia. He notes, "If you have a stable relationship with Nigeria, you do not only have a stable relationship with the massive oil producer, you have a stable relationship with Africa's biggest economy, and you have a stable relationship with Africa's biggest population as well." Due to its economic and demographic significance, this highlights Nigeria's pivotal role in West Africa.

Similarly, Ethiopia's geopolitical importance is underscored by its status as the seat of the African Union and its large population. Matambo (17 November 2023) remarks, "Ethiopia's demographics are very big, with a population of over 100 million, and not only that, you have African diplomatic makers when you have stable relationships." This strategic positioning in East Africa further enhances China's influence.

This alignment between literature and interviews illustrates how China's strategic relationships with influential African countries enhance its geopolitical leverage. The BRI's implementation in Nigeria and Ethiopia supports China's economic interests and secures strategic partnerships to bolster its influence. This strategic positioning answers the research question by highlighting the geopolitical benefits China gains through the BRI, reinforcing its presence and influence in Africa.

6.4.2.1 Responses of Nigeria and Ethiopia to the BRI

The literature underscores the BRI's historical significance and strategic motivations, portraying it as a modern revival of the Silk Road, focusing on mutual benefit and cooperation (ASEAN-China Center, 2013; Chang, 2019). The core pillars of the BRI include infrastructure development, financial cooperation, trade facilitation, and cultural exchanges, all aimed at improving regional connectivity and economic integration (Ahmed, 2017; Wang, 2018; Song, 2020; Zhao, 2018).

Expert interviews reveal distinct responses from Nigeria and Ethiopia to the BRI. Yahaya highlights Nigeria's enthusiastic engagement with China, which is driven by shared strategic interests and the mutual benefits of economic and geopolitical collaboration. He states, "China, like any superpower with ties with Africa, and once you want to say ties with Africa, you have to look at the geopolitical implications of countries with the power, too. Moreover, once you mention Africa, you remember one quote from Obama: 'For Africa to get it right, Nigeria must get it right.' One is because it is the most populous nation, has a high gross domestic product, and has many characteristics that make Nigeria a power not to reckon with in international politics. So, with the rise of China, it will form ties with countries that share some similarities or hard resources or geopolitical interests."

In Ethiopia, Shelton (29 November 2023) notes that the country's geopolitical stance, including its neutral position in global conflicts, aligns well with China's strategic objectives. He observes, "African nations often vote with China in international forums

due to perceived economic benefits and partnerships like the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC).” Ethiopia’s participation in the BRI enhances its infrastructure and economic prospects, fostering closer ties with China.

This convergence of literature and interviews shows that Nigeria and Ethiopia have embraced the BRI, recognising its potential to enhance their economic and geopolitical standing. The BRI’s implementation in these countries supports infrastructure development, economic growth, and strategic partnerships, answering the research question by demonstrating how the BRI has been positively received and strategically utilised by vital African nations.

6.4.2.2 Geopolitical Dynamics and Competition

The BRI’s geopolitical implications extend beyond Africa, influencing global power dynamics and prompting responses from other major powers. The literature suggests that the BRI is a geopolitical strategy to counterbalance US influence and foster closer economic ties with neighbouring countries (Chatzky & McBride, 2020; Jia & Wallace, 2021). This perspective highlights the competitive nature of global geopolitics, where major powers vie for influence through economic and strategic initiatives.

Expert interviews echo this competitive dynamic. Shelton (29 November 2023) notes that Western powers are increasingly attentive to Africa’s evolving geopolitical landscape, especially given African countries’ tendency to align with China in international forums. This alignment is driven by perceived economic benefits and partnerships like the

FOCAC. Western powers, recognising the strategic significance of the BRI, are reassessing their approach to Africa and establishing their initiatives to compete with China. Shelton (29 November 2023) states, “The West views China’s BRI as a strategic tool for winning support in Africa and acknowledges the need to compete by establishing their initiatives.”

The intersection of literature and interviews clearly shows the geopolitical competition between China and other major powers in Africa. The BRI’s success in establishing strong economic and strategic ties with African nations compels Western powers to respond strategically, highlighting the broader geopolitical implications of the BRI. This analysis answers the research question by demonstrating how the BRI influences geopolitical dynamics, prompting strategic adjustments from other global players.

6.4.3 Competition with Other Foreign Powers

The competition among foreign powers in Africa has intensified due to China’s BRI. The literature has extensively explored this theme, highlighting the strategies, motivations, and consequences of various foreign powers’ engagements in these African nations. Insights from the interviews provide a nuanced understanding of how African leaders and scholars perceive and manage this competition.

6.4.3.1 Counterbalancing China’s BRI

In response to the BRI, Western countries have launched initiatives such as the PGII, formerly the B3W initiative. Proposed by the G7, the PGII aims to provide an alternative

to the BRI by focusing on infrastructure development in low and middle-income countries, particularly in Africa (G7, 2021). The PGII emphasises values such as democracy, good governance, and sustainability, contrasting with China's non-interference stance. However, challenges such as coordination among multiple stakeholders and the reliance on private sector funding may hinder its effectiveness compared to the centralised approach of the BRI (Sun, 2014; Greiger, 2021).

Yahaya highlights the U.S.'s strategic counteractions, noting that "the U.S. is looking for all avenues to counter whatever China tries to achieve. The international system has two dominant powers, and China is not relenting. So whatever initiative the Chinese will come up with, rest assured that the U.S. will devise a counter initiative." This reflects the dynamic and competitive nature of geopolitical engagements in Africa, with the U.S. actively seeking to provide alternatives to Chinese investments.

Aidoo (9 December 2023) also comments on the strategic responses from Western countries, stating, "With the enunciation of BRI in 2013, Western countries have positioned themselves to respond in various ways to this monumental geopolitical step by China. The IMEC and the Lobito Corridor are both reminders of Europe and the U.S.' attempt to design infrastructural and institutional frameworks to serve as geopolitical and geoeconomic responses to Beijing's BRI." These responses aim to offer African countries alternatives that align with Western governance and human rights values. However, the effectiveness and appeal of these alternatives remain to be thoroughly evaluated.

Shelton (29 November 2023) provides a broader perspective on the geopolitical implications, stating, “I think the IMEC and the Lobito Corridor is a response to the BRI. The BRI has encouraged other countries to think about transportation and railway networks, which they have neglected for many years. So, I think this is a response to what is perceived as a success for the BRI in many parts of the world.” This underscores the catalytic effect of the BRI in prompting other nations to reconsider their infrastructure investments and strategic engagements in Africa.

6.4.3.2 The U.S. Response

The U.S. has launched several initiatives to counter China’s BRI, such as the IMEC and the PGII. These initiatives aim to provide alternative infrastructure investments and foster regional connectivity, particularly in strategic regions like the Middle East and Africa. The Trans-African Corridor, including projects like the Lobito Corridor, illustrates the U.S.’s efforts to enhance African trade and development. However, questions about financing and project timelines challenge these initiatives’ success. Aidoo (9 December 2023) reflects on the geopolitical implications, noting that the Western response to the BRI emphasises democratic values and good governance, which may affect their relationships with African countries.

Yahaya comments on the subtlety of the U.S. approach, highlighting how it navigates the political landscape to avoid alienating potential allies: “Even with the military, even with the military regime, with so many elections that have flowed, have you seen the American government criticising? You see, the language there now is neither supportive nor

against. They are neutral. After all, they do not want to offend Africans because most of these countries are looking for opportunities to say bye-bye. Go so that we now have a new newcomer." This strategic neutrality reflects the U.S.'s attempt to maintain influence without overtly antagonising African governments that might turn to China.

6.4.3.3 India and Japan's AAGC

India and Japan have proposed the AAGC as an alternative to China's BRI. This initiative focuses on infrastructure development, trade facilitation, and people-to-people connectivity between Asia and Africa, aiming to provide a quality alternative to the BRI (AfDB et al., 2017). The AAGC underscores India's proactive approach to regional geopolitics and its desire to enhance its influence in Africa through sustainable and inclusive development projects. Aidoo (9 December 2023) notes that the AAGC and similar initiatives reflect a strategic shift in India's foreign policy, emphasising engagement and partnership-building in regions critical to its strategic interests.

6.4.3.4 Multifaceted Competition: BRI, PGII, EU's Global Gateway and AAGC

The BRI, PGII, EU's Global Gateway and AAGC competition places Africa at the centre of a multifaceted geopolitical struggle. This rivalry involves infrastructure development and extends to technology, with significant implications for Africa's digital economy and governance standards. The competition presents both opportunities and challenges for African countries. As Monyae (6 December 2023) notes, the outcome of this competition largely depends on how African nations navigate and manage the interests of these

foreign powers. He states, “It depends on how Africans respond to this competition and the situation in balancing the activities of China and the United States.” This emphasises the importance of African agencies and strategic planning in leveraging the benefits of foreign investments while mitigating potential drawbacks.

Shelton (29 November 2023) emphasises that the competition could be beneficial, giving African countries more choices and opportunities for development: “If the BRI and others are competing, we are the consumers of these products, we benefit from that. So, I do not think it is a negative. It is a positive, and I hope the European Union will build more corridors.” This optimistic view highlights the potential for African countries to capitalise on the competitive dynamics among foreign powers to drive their development agendas. In conclusion, the intensifying competition among foreign powers in Africa, driven by initiatives like the BRI, PGII, and AAGC, presents a complex geopolitical landscape. African countries must strategically navigate this competition to leverage opportunities for infrastructure development and economic growth while safeguarding their sovereignty and governance standards. This multifaceted competition underscores the African agency’s need to manage international partnerships and negotiate favourable terms to maximise developmental benefits.

6.4.4 African Agency and Its Role in China-African Relations

The concept of African agency in China-Africa relations is significant, particularly concerning dependency theory and sovereignty. Dependency theory suggests that developing countries often rely on more developed "core" powers, which can limit their

sovereignty and decision-making autonomy. In China-Africa relations, the critical question is whether African states can make independent decisions or if China influences them as a core power.

6.4.4.1 Historical Context and Sovereignty

African agency challenges the narrative of Africa as a passive recipient of foreign aid and influence. Despite being historically depicted as a continent needing assistance, Africa's diverse cultures, histories, and aspirations are increasingly recognised, showcasing the resilience of nations to take ownership of their development trajectories (Adepoju, 2019; Abiye & Kekong, 2020).

Yahaya's discussion on the historical context is crucial, underscoring how colonial legacies continue to influence African countries' agency. He states, "Countries that obtained independence through constitutional means, like Nigeria, still maintain strong ties with former colonial powers, affecting their autonomy in international engagements. In contrast, nations that achieved independence through violent means, such as Ethiopia, may possess more agency due to fewer colonial ties." This highlights the profound impact of historical pathways to independence on contemporary international negotiations and relationships.

6.4.4.2 Structural and Institutional Factors

Monyae's (6 December 2023) critique of implementing high-level frameworks like the African Union's Agenda 2063 is significant. He notes that it lacks practical application at

the state level. He explains, “The question of agency is well defined. Nevertheless, the disadvantage or weakness of Agenda 2063 is that it is too high-level, with no implementation taking place at the AU level. These are heads of state. They discuss, sign papers, and establish relationships, but agreements are signed and implemented at the state-to-state level, bilaterally.” This underscores the gap between visionary plans and on-the-ground execution, which can dilute the effectiveness of collective African agency.

The literature supports this view, emphasising that while frameworks like Agenda 2063 provide a vision, their success depends on effective implementation at national and regional levels (Nyabuga, 2020; Mlambo, 2019). Regional economic communities such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), ECOWAS and the EAC play crucial roles in this implementation process.

6.4.4.3 Economic Dependency and Negotiation Dynamics

The economic dependency created by Chinese investments in Africa challenges African agencies. Chen and Shuai (2019) argue that this dependency limits decision-making autonomy, while Cui and Zhang (2019) suggest that strategic negotiations can help reduce economic dependence and expand agency.

Yahaya highlights the hunger for investment in African countries, driven by years of underdevelopment and resource mismanagement. He notes, “African countries are hungry for investment because they lag after years of colonialism. However, we are rich in resources, and these resources have not translated into meaningful development. Any

partner we see coming is welcomed, thinking they could be the solution." This eagerness for development partners can sometimes lead to unfavourable agreements, highlighting the need for strategic and informed negotiation to safeguard national interests.

Aidoo (9 December 2023) comments on the practical challenges smaller economies face when negotiating with dominant economic actors like China. He states, "Smaller economies may struggle to navigate equal partnerships, impacting their resource management and decision-making processes." This highlights the uneven power dynamics that can affect the outcomes of such negotiations. These dynamics underscore the relevance of dependency theory, as smaller economies may find their sovereignty compromised when engaging with more powerful nations, thus affecting their ability to make independent decisions.

6.4.4.4 Learning from Successful and Unsuccessful Projects

Shelton (29 November 2023) underscores the potential for African agency to grow through learning from successful and unsuccessful projects. He contrasts Ethiopia's successful railway project, which transports high-value raw materials, with Kenya's less successful railway project, which relies on small merchants and commuters. He explains, "Kenya's railway relies on small merchants and commuters and struggles to repay loans, while Ethiopia's success lies in transporting high-value raw materials. This comparison will show how African agency can effectively shape engagement with China by learning from successful examples and avoiding the pitfalls of unsuccessful ones." This

comparative analysis inspires hope for the future by highlighting the role of strategic planning and execution in enhancing agency.

6.4.4.5 Socio-Cultural and Political Considerations

Socio-cultural factors significantly shape African agency. Adepoju (2019) argues for preserving cultural identities amid increasing Chinese influence, while Nyabuga (2020) suggests embracing cultural diversity can enhance agency. African nations can leverage their rich cultural heritages to foster mutual understanding with China, strengthening their negotiation positions.

Yahaya emphasizes the socio-cultural dimensions, noting that "Chinese people can speak African languages like Hausa and Yoruba, yet we are not learning theirs. We have been reduced to thinking only about immediate survival." This underscores the importance of African nations investing in cultural exchange and education to better engage with China on equal terms, fostering mutual understanding and respect for cultural diversity.

6.4.4.6 Security and Geopolitical Implications

Security concerns intersect with African agency in the context of the BRI. Amadi and Tadesse (2018) argue that Chinese involvement in African security matters can limit African agencies' ability to address regional conflicts. In contrast, Kamau (2018) posits that African countries can shape the terms of security collaborations to safeguard their interests. Monyae (6 December 2023) and Aidoo (9 December 2023) emphasize the

importance of strategic engagement to enhance African agency in security and geopolitical matters. African nations must navigate these complex dynamics to ensure their sovereignty and long-term development goals are not compromised.

6.4.5 Challenges and Criticisms

The challenges and criticisms surrounding China's BRI in Africa are crucial to understanding the broader implications of China-Africa relations. This section explores significant issues such as "debt trap diplomacy," project quality, transparency, economic and social impacts, and environmental concerns. It looks into how these challenges affect African countries, particularly in terms of debt sustainability and the quality of infrastructure projects. By examining these critical themes, readers will gain a nuanced understanding of the complexities and the need for greater collaboration, transparency, and accountability in BRI projects across the continent.

Debt Trap Diplomacy

The concept of 'debt trap diplomacy' is a pivotal and highly debated aspect of China's BRI in Africa. This notion posits that Chinese loans can potentially burden African countries with unsustainable debt, leading to economic instability and a loss of sovereignty. Matambo (17 November 2023) provides an insightful perspective on this issue, noting that while many African countries are indebted to China, it needs to be clarified whether this is a deliberate strategy by China to trap these nations. He states, "China has nothing to gain from trapping African nations. Another criticism is that some of the initiatives are

shrouded in mystery. The partners should know that even Africa's relationship with China, although generous, is far away from perfect, and China itself must admit that."

In contrast, Aidoo (9 December 2023) highlights the issue of rising debt, with notable examples like Angola, Zambia, and Kenya. He explains that these countries have sought renegotiation of their debt terms or cancellation of their debts, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. He expresses concern about the long-term implications of such debts, particularly the maintenance and improvement of infrastructure projects funded by these loans. These perspectives are supported by scholars such as Kitissou (2020) and Alemu (2019), who emphasize the risks of unsustainable debt levels and the potential jeopardy of economic stability. They also point out the opacity of loan agreements between China and African nations, suggesting that the lack of transparency can expose these countries to unfavourable debt arrangements.

Project Quality

Concerns about the quality of Chinese-funded infrastructure projects are prevalent. These concerns include rushed projects, lack of proper environmental impact assessments, and failure to involve local stakeholders adequately. Yahaya (5 December 2023) criticizes the quality of Chinese products and projects: "In Nigeria, Chinese is synonymous with substandard; you buy one thing, and it easily breaks or is faulty. So, the Chinese have permeated the Nigerian economy, which is also part of the Nigerian factor." This sentiment underscores the perception that Chinese investments sometimes fail to meet quality expectations, impacting their long-term sustainability and effectiveness.

Shelton (29 November 2023) underscores the importance of local supervision in ensuring project quality, citing an example from Angola where local leaders' involvement in overseeing Chinese-built hospitals and schools resulted in better quality outcomes. He states, 'Quality control has been a question some people raise... Your result is not as good when you are not supervising the project as with anything. So, you can overcome the question of quality by having a joint venture with the local government.' The literature supports these observations, with Elu (2019) and Ke (2020) raising concerns about environmental degradation and inadequate community engagement. Conversely, some scholars, including Yu (2019) and Han (2018), emphasize the importance of involving local communities and maintaining high standards in project execution to mitigate these issues.

Transparency and Accountability

Another critical concern is transparency in loan agreements and project execution. The opacity of these agreements often leaves African nations in precarious positions, preventing them from thoroughly assessing the long-term implications of their financial commitments. Matambo (17 November 2023) notes that some initiatives are "shrouded in mystery," calling for greater transparency and accountability from China. He criticizes China's reluctance to admit shortcomings or accept criticism, which hampers the ability to address and rectify issues collaboratively. He also questions China's policy of non-interference, suggesting that it only protects African politicians rather than ordinary citizens who suffer from state violence, abuse, and corruption.

Economic and Social Impacts

The economic and social impacts of Chinese investments in Africa are multifaceted. While these investments have contributed to infrastructure development, they have also led to significant challenges. Yahaya (5 December 2023) warns that China's involvement in sectors such as retail and wholesale can stifle local businesses and industries. He argues that while foreign direct investment is essential, it should not come at the expense of local economic development. He states, "The Chinese are here. Their initiatives are also affecting our industrial development and infant industries. Our artisans and businessmen are also affected." Aidoo (9 December 2023) underscores the need for comprehensive environmental and social impact assessments in BRI projects to mitigate adverse effects. He discusses the social ramifications of large-scale projects, such as displacement and inadequate compensation for affected communities.

Environmental Concerns

Environmental degradation is a significant concern associated with BRI projects. Risks such as deforestation, habitat destruction, and increased emissions are frequently highlighted. Shelton (29 November 2023) points out that some projects do not fully consider environmental impacts, leading to potential long-term damage. He stresses the importance of integrating environmental safeguards and involving local communities in the planning and execution stages to ensure sustainable development.

The literature corroborates these concerns, with scholars such as Elu (2019) and Ke (2020) warning of the environmental risks associated with large-scale infrastructure projects. However, Xi and Sun (2018) and Li (2020) argue that China has implemented environmental safeguards in its projects to minimize negative impacts, suggesting that investments in renewable energy and sustainable transport could mitigate environmental concerns.

6.4.6 Dependency Theory and Economic Interdependencies

Dependency theory provides a critical framework for understanding the economic dynamics between China and African nations within the BRI. This theme explores the implications of dependency, focusing on skills transfer, economic interdependencies, the gradual process of dependency, asymmetric economic relationships, and the impact of unique global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Integrating insights from literature and expert interviews, this analysis offers a nuanced understanding of these dynamics.

Skills Transfer and Reducing Dependency

The transfer of skills is essential in mitigating dependency on Chinese investments. Scholars such as Huang (2018) and Li (2019) emphasize that fostering local expertise is crucial for African countries to manage and sustain their infrastructure projects independently. Matambo (17 November 2023) echoes this sentiment, advocating for a model where China temporarily operates infrastructure before transferring skills to the local workforce. He states, "Skills transfer is essential to avoid dependency on China. Africa has the youngest population in the world, so training young people is crucial. China

must insist on good governance from its African partners, focusing on sustainability and empowering young minds and women."

This alignment between literature and Matambo (17 November 2023) perspective underscores the critical role of skills transfer in mitigating dependency. Matambo's (17 November 2023) practical examples offer concrete steps to operationalise theoretical frameworks, emphasizing the importance of sustainability and capacity building when it comes to reducing dependency on China and Africa having skills to continue the work long after China has completed and left the projects.

Economic Interdependencies

The literature, including works by Kitissou (2020) and Turay (2018), discusses the broader economic interdependencies resulting from extensive Chinese financing. These scholars warn that such financing can lead to unsustainable debt levels and reduced economic autonomy. Monyae (6 December 2023) expands this discussion by noting that dependency is not unique to China but involves multiple external partners, including the U.S. and Europe. He stresses the importance of enhancing African negotiation skills to navigate these complex relationships and achieve long-term independence. He asserts, "In the short term, we might rely on foreign assistance, but long-term independence is crucial. The notion of debt traps often lacks concrete evidence and is frequently used as propaganda. While China might not be innocent, Africa's debt issues are complex and involve European and American lenders."

Monyae's (6 December 2023) insights provide a broader context, highlighting the multifaceted nature of economic dependencies. This holistic view complements the literature by emphasizing that dependency is a global issue, not confined to China-Africa relations alone.

The Gradual Process of Dependency

Dependency theory, as described by Frank (1967) and subsequent scholars like Devarajan (2018) and Shinn (2019), highlights how external investments can gradually lead to economic dependency, impacting sovereignty and leading to geopolitical alignments. Yahaya (5 December 2023) reflects on this viewpoint, cautioning that the opacity of Chinese loan conditions could result in economic dependency and geopolitical subservience. He states, "Dependency theory, as described by scholars like Andre Gunder Frank, suggests that dependency is a gradual process. China's loans and investments could lead to economic dependency and alignment with Chinese geopolitical interests. The conditionalities attached to Chinese loans are often not transparent, which is problematic."

The literature and Yahaya (5 December 2023) underscore the risks associated with opaque financial agreements, reinforcing the need for transparency to safeguard economic independence. Yahaya's (5 December 2023) specific examples illustrate these theoretical concerns in practice, highlighting the real-world implications of dependency.

Asymmetric Economic Relationships

Mawdsley (2019) and Wang (2020) argue that the BRI creates asymmetric economic relationships where African countries may become dependent on China, leading to issues such as resource exploitation and weakened governance. Aidoo (9 December 2023) aligns with this perspective, noting that the BRI reinforces African dependence on China, especially post-COVID-19, as economies struggle under heavy debt burdens. He explains, "The BRI reinforces African dependence on China, highlighting asymmetric economic relationships. These relationships can lead to natural resource exploitation and a lack of democratic reforms. Debt unsustainability is a significant concern, especially post-COVID-19, as African economies struggle under heavy debt burdens."

Contrasting this view, Shelton (29 November 2023) attributes the current debt difficulties primarily to the unprecedented global economic slowdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. He argues, "I think African countries cannot repay their loans because of the three years of COVID lockdowns we had. So, all African economies are experiencing much lower growth because of that. Had they not been those COVID lockdowns, I do not think we would be talking that much about the debt trap. The global slowdown caused the debt trap; nobody could have predicted it. So if you go back 5-10 years ago when these loans were, when people were talking about lending money, nobody predicted you would have a three-year zero growth in the global economy."

This divergence in perspectives highlights a fundamental debate in the analysis of African debt: while some view the debt issues as a symptom of structural dependencies exacerbated by the BRI, others, like Shelton (29 November 2023), see them as the result

of exceptional, unforeseeable global events. This distinction is crucial for understanding the nature of the debt challenges faced by African countries and the role of external actors like China.

Balancing Sovereignty and Development

Scholars like Afolayan (2021) and Liu (2019) argue that African countries must balance the benefits of BRI-led development with preserving sovereignty, emphasizing effective governance and strategic leadership. Shelton (29 November 2023) provides a nuanced view, acknowledging that while some African countries are heavily indebted to China, the continent retains significant independence. He states, "There are five or six countries at the moment that are quite dependent on China, and those are the ones who owe China much money. Angola is at the top of the list. So, there are some countries I think are quite dependent on China because they owe money. However, I do not think Africa as a whole feels kind of dependent on China. We are independent actors. We can meet with India, Japan, the USA, and the European Union and listen to all sides. I do not think we must take instructions from any superpower or great power."

Shelton's (29 November 2023) historical analogy further illustrates this point, comparing Africa's potential future dependencies with past dependencies seen in Europe and Asia post-World War II. He explains how Europe became dependent on the United States through the Marshall Plan and how Japan and South Korea developed security dependencies on the U.S. after being rebuilt post-World War II. "The same is true for Japan and South Korea. Both of those economies are very dependent on the United

States because the United States also did a kind of Marshall Plan for Japan and South Korea and rebuilt them after the Second World War."

Both the literature and interviewees underscore the importance of balancing development with sovereignty. Shelton's (29 November 2023) optimism about the African agency counterbalances the more cautionary tones in the literature, suggesting that African countries can navigate these challenges effectively with strategic foresight.

6.4.7 Future Developments and Trends in China-Africa Relations

The future of China-Africa relations under the BRI reveals various perspectives on potential developments and trends. This section delves into expert insights on the strategic approaches African nations might adopt, the evolving nature of China's economic engagement, and the opportunities for maximizing benefits while mitigating dependency.

6.4.7.1 Strategic Adaptation and Multilateral Engagement

Monyae (6 December 2023) emphasizes the importance of strategic adaptation by African nations in their engagements with China. He believes that the ongoing evolution of the BRI presents opportunities for African countries to secure profitable contracts, such as infrastructure development projects, agricultural investments, and technology transfers. These contracts can enhance their self-reliance and promote sustainable development. "The future is bright, and it depends on the ability of African countries to be smart, pick profitable contracts, and learn to do things themselves," Monyae (6 December

2023) asserts. This proactive approach is essential for fostering long-term independence and sustainable development.

Yahaya (5 December 2023) echoes this sentiment, highlighting the strategic advantage African nations currently possess due to the interest of multiple global powers. He suggests Africa should leverage this position to negotiate the best terms for its development goals. "Now is the opportunity to trade between these powers... to strike a balance strategically so that we can maximize the little time we have," Yahaya (5 December 2023) explains. He underscores African countries' need to align external assistance with their national development trajectories to ensure fruitful outcomes.

6.4.7.2 Economic Diversification and Soft Power Initiatives

Aidoo (9 December 2023) offers a nuanced perspective on the future of the BRI, considering China's economic challenges. He notes that while China's financial capacity to invest in large-scale projects might wane, it will likely continue pursuing diplomatic and soft power initiatives. These initiatives could include cultural exchanges, educational scholarships, and humanitarian aid, which can bolster China's influence in Africa through non-financial means. "There is a likelihood that when Beijing is cash-strapped, it will continue its pursuit of other diplomatic and soft power elements of the BRI," Aidoo (9 December 2023) suggests.

Aidoo (9 December 2023) also stresses the importance of policy coordination and unimpeded trade among BRI partner countries. He advocates for a multilateral approach

through the AfCFTA and regional economic blocs to enhance collective bargaining power. "African countries would be best served if they can negotiate from a position of multilateral strength," he asserts, emphasizing that such a posture could maximize collective outcomes beyond bilateral arrangements with China.

6.4.7.3 Financial Constraints and Strategic Planning

Shelton (29 November 2023) provides a cautiously optimistic view of the BRI's future, acknowledging the potential benefits and the financial constraints China faces. He highlights the importance of the upcoming FOCAC Summit, noting that the budget allocation for Africa will be a crucial indicator of future projects. "The trend is not that good because we've gone from 60 billion six years ago to 40 billion," Shelton (29 November 2023) notes, expressing concern over China's declining financial commitment.

Shelton (29 November 2023) stresses the crucial role of African governments' strategic planning and project selection. He advocates for more minor, high-impact projects that can quickly show profit and development benefits. "Governments need to go there with detailed plans and programmes," Shelton (29 November 2023) advises, emphasizing the need for well-thought-out proposals that align with African development needs and Chinese investment criteria. This strategic approach is not just a recommendation but a call to action for African governments to take the lead in shaping their economic future.

Shelton (29 November 2023) further addresses the issue of debt forgiveness, explaining the constraints faced by the Chinese government due to domestic public pressure. "They

cannot forgive or cancel loans easily because there will be an outcry in China," he explains, highlighting China's challenges in balancing domestic and international interests. This underscores the importance of African countries strategically managing their debt obligations and seeking projects promising quick returns.

6.5 Conclusion

The comparative analysis of China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia provides crucial insights into the economic and geopolitical implications of Chinese engagement in these African nations. This research addresses a critical gap by focusing on the specific impacts of the BRI on agency and sovereignty in Nigeria and Ethiopia. Key findings reveal that BRI investments have the potential to stimulate economic growth and infrastructure development, addressing significant infrastructure deficits and enhancing connectivity. For instance, Ethiopia's Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway and Hawassa Industrial Park have boosted trade competitiveness and industrial growth. At the same time, Nigeria's Kano-Maradi Railway, Zungeru Hydroelectric Power Project, and Lagos-Ibadan Expressway have improved connectivity, energy access, and economic activity.

However, concerns about debt sustainability and economic dependency on China persist. The opacity of loan agreements and the risk of "debt trap diplomacy" raise questions about autonomy in decision-making and long-term implications for national sovereignty. This aligns with dependency theory's assertion that such economic engagements can reinforce structural dependencies and inequalities.

China’s strategic investments have also enhanced its influence in both countries, positioning it as a dominant geopolitical player in Africa. In Ethiopia, China’s involvement in strategic sectors increases its leverage, while in Nigeria, significant Chinese control over infrastructure projects raises sovereignty concerns. These dynamics reflect the core-periphery model of dependency theory, where China, as the core, exerts substantial control over African nations at the periphery.

Nigeria and Ethiopia have demonstrated agency in negotiating and shaping their engagements with China despite these structural dependencies. For instance, Ethiopia successfully negotiated favourable terms in constructing the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, securing Chinese financing with interest rates lower than market averages and favourable repayment terms. Additionally, Nigeria has leveraged its position to negotiate technology transfer and local employment stipulations in its BRI agreements, ensuring that the projects contribute to local capacity building and employment. These actions challenge the traditional narrative of passive African recipients and underscore the importance of strategic negotiation, effective governance, and cultural exchange in fostering mutually beneficial relationships.

Nevertheless, the asymmetrical power dynamics between China and African nations remain a central theme, necessitating strategic diplomacy to navigate these dynamics effectively. Environmental and social impacts are significant considerations in the context of BRI projects in Nigeria and Ethiopia. While infrastructure development brings economic benefits, it also poses risks such as deforestation, habitat destruction, and increased

emissions. Social issues, including displacement, inadequate compensation, and cultural heritage preservation, further complicate BRI implementation. Addressing these concerns requires robust mechanisms for community engagement, adherence to international labour standards, and comprehensive impact assessments.

This study validates the hypothesis that China's BRI implementation in Nigeria and Ethiopia yields positive and negative economic and geopolitical outcomes. While the BRI has stimulated economic growth and infrastructure development, concerns about debt traps and asymmetric power relations persist. Dependency theory provides a relevant framework for analysing these dynamics, highlighting the potential for economic dependencies and the importance of African agency in mitigating these risks.

In answering the main research question—what are the economic and geopolitical implications of China's implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative in Nigeria and Ethiopia—the study finds that while the BRI provides significant infrastructure and economic benefits, it also imposes risks related to debt dependency and loss of autonomy. The BRI has catalysed significant economic growth and infrastructure development in Nigeria and Ethiopia. For example, Nigeria's major BRI projects, like the Kano-Maradi Railway and Zungeru Hydroelectric Power Project, have enhanced connectivity and energy access, respectively, driving economic activity. Similarly, Ethiopia's Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway has improved trade logistics, and the Hawassa Industrial Park has spurred industrial growth. These developments underscore the

economic benefits of the BRI, fulfilling the hypothesis that the initiative leads to increased economic growth and development.

However, the economic benefits come with geopolitical ramifications. China's strategic investments have amplified its influence in Nigeria and Ethiopia, raising concerns about sovereignty and decision-making autonomy. In Nigeria, the significant control exerted by China over key infrastructure projects poses sovereignty issues, while in Ethiopia, China's involvement in strategic sectors like telecommunications and energy highlights Beijing's growing leverage. These dynamics illustrate the complex interplay between economic benefits and geopolitical influence, confirming the hypothesis that increased economic interdependency also heightens geopolitical interdependency.

Addressing the first sub-question—how has China's BRI affected the geopolitical landscape of Africa, particularly concerning the involvement of other foreign powers—the analysis reveals that the BRI has intensified geopolitical competition in Africa. China's assertive infrastructure investments have prompted responses from other global players, such as the United States and the European Union, seeking to counterbalance China's influence through their infrastructure and development initiatives. This competitive environment underscores the strategic importance of the BRI in reshaping Africa's geopolitical landscape, making African nations pivotal in the global power play.

Regarding the second sub-question, what are Nigeria's and Ethiopia's distinct responses to China's BRI, and how do they compare? The study finds that both countries have

strategically engaged with the BRI but in different ways that reflect their unique contexts. Ethiopia has proactively negotiated favourable terms, such as securing lower interest rates and favourable repayment conditions for the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway. On the other hand, Nigeria has focused on leveraging BRI projects for technology transfer and local capacity building, ensuring that Chinese investments also contribute to domestic employment and skills development. These distinct responses highlight the agency of both nations in shaping their engagements with China to align with their national interests. However, they also face common challenges, such as the risk of debt dependency and the need to manage large-scale infrastructure projects' environmental and social impacts.

This analysis provides a nuanced understanding of the BRI's multifaceted impacts on Nigeria and Ethiopia, offering insights essential for policymakers, stakeholders, and scholars. It highlights the potential for significant economic growth and development through strategic infrastructure investments while cautioning about the risks of dependency and loss of sovereignty. By integrating dependency theory, the analysis emphasises the need for strategic planning and negotiation to ensure that African countries can leverage foreign investments for sustainable development without compromising their autonomy. Enhancing transparency and accountability in BRI-related projects, adopting multilateral approaches, preserving cultural heritage, and ensuring fair labour practices are essential for sustainable and mutually beneficial cooperation. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of context-specific approaches to China-Africa relations, emphasising the need for responsible and inclusive development strategies to pursue shared goals.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter concludes the study by summarising the key research findings regarding the economic and geopolitical implications of China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia. It will address the research aims and questions, evaluating the significance and contributions of the study's outcomes. Additionally, this section will discuss the study's limitations and propose avenues for future research to explore further the complexities and impacts of BRI engagements in African contexts.

This dissertation has explored the economic and geopolitical implications of China's BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia. Initiated in 2013, the BRI seeks to enhance global connectivity through extensive infrastructure projects, fostering economic growth and integration across continents. Given the strategic importance of Africa within the BRI framework, with Nigeria and Ethiopia emerging as central partners, this study aimed to examine how the initiative influences their national sovereignty, economic dependencies, and regional power dynamics.

The findings reveal that BRI investments have significantly impacted infrastructure development in both Nigeria and Ethiopia, addressing critical infrastructure deficits and enhancing connectivity. In Ethiopia, projects such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway and the Hawassa Industrial Park have boosted trade competitiveness and industrial growth. Similarly, the Kano-Maradi Railway, Zungeru Hydroelectric Power Project, and Lagos-Ibadan Expressway have improved connectivity, energy access, and economic

activity in Nigeria. These projects align with the broader goals of the BRI to facilitate economic development and regional integration.

However, the economic benefits of the BRI are accompanied by considerable challenges. Concerns about debt sustainability and economic dependency on China persist, with the opacity of loan agreements raising questions about autonomy in decision-making and the long-term implications for national sovereignty. The risk of "debt trap diplomacy" underscores the potential for these countries to fall into more profound economic dependence on China, reinforcing structural dependencies and inequalities as posited by dependency theory. This aligns with dependency theory's assertion that such economic engagements can reinforce structural dependencies and inequalities. Additionally, neocolonialism and soft power are relevant in this context. Neocolonialism highlights the potential for economic exploitation and control reminiscent of colonial-era dynamics. At the same time, soft power emphasises China's use of attraction and persuasion through cultural and diplomatic means to shape international relations favourably.

China's strategic investments have also enhanced its geopolitical influence in both countries, positioning it as a dominant player in Africa. In Ethiopia, China's involvement in strategic sectors increases its leverage, while in Nigeria, significant Chinese control over infrastructure projects raises sovereignty concerns. These dynamics reflect the core-periphery model of dependency theory, where China, as the core, exerts substantial control over African nations, the periphery. Nigeria and Ethiopia have demonstrated agency in negotiating and shaping their engagements with China despite these structural

dependencies. Ethiopia, for example, secured favourable terms for the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, and Nigeria has leveraged BRI projects for technology transfer and local capacity building. These actions challenge the traditional narrative of passive African recipients and highlight the importance of strategic negotiation and effective governance in fostering mutually beneficial relationships.

The comparative analysis of Nigeria and Ethiopia's engagement with the BRI provides crucial insights into Chinese investment's economic and geopolitical implications. While the BRI has catalysed significant economic growth and infrastructure development, it has also intensified geopolitical competition and raised concerns about sovereignty and dependency. Addressing these issues requires a balanced approach, leveraging the benefits of Chinese investment while safeguarding national interests and promoting sustainable development.

This study fills a critical gap in the literature by focusing on the specific impacts of the BRI on agency and sovereignty in Nigeria and Ethiopia. The research questions guiding this study were: "What are the economic and geopolitical implications of China's implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative in Nigeria and Ethiopia?" and the sub-questions: "How has China's BRI affected the geopolitical landscape of Africa, particularly concerning the involvement of other foreign powers?" and "What are the distinct responses of Nigeria and Ethiopia to China's BRI, and how do they compare?" The results indicate that while the BRI provides significant infrastructure and economic benefits, it also imposes risks related to debt dependency and loss of autonomy. China's strategic

investments have amplified its influence in Nigeria and Ethiopia, raising concerns about sovereignty and decision-making autonomy. In Nigeria, the significant control exerted by China over key infrastructure projects poses sovereignty issues, while in Ethiopia, China's involvement in strategic sectors like telecommunications and energy highlights Beijing's growing leverage.

The findings contribute to the field by providing new insights into the application of dependency theory in the context of the BRI. This study reinforces the core-periphery dynamics at both global and regional levels by illustrating how economic dependencies created by large-scale infrastructure investments can shape political and economic outcomes. Furthermore, the study highlights the agency of Nigeria and Ethiopia in negotiating and shaping their engagements with China, challenging the traditional narrative of passive African recipients. This research validates the hypothesis that China's implementation of the BRI in Nigeria and Ethiopia leads to increased economic growth and development but also results in heightened economic interdependency on China, which can influence national sovereignty and policy autonomy.

Despite the contributions, the study has limitations. While providing in-depth insights into Nigeria and Ethiopia, the case study approach may not be easily extrapolated to other African countries or regions involved in the BRI due to unique socio-political and economic contexts. Additionally, qualitative research can introduce subjective biases despite measures like triangulation and peer debriefing. The time-intensive nature of qualitative case studies can also limit the scope of the research. Moreover, the dynamic

and evolving nature of the BRI means that findings may quickly become outdated as new developments occur.

Future research should explore the economic and geopolitical implications of the BRI across a broader range of African countries. Employing quantitative methods alongside qualitative approaches could provide additional insights and a more robust analysis of the BRI's economic and geopolitical impacts. Longitudinal studies would help understand the BRI's long-term effects on economic growth, debt sustainability, and geopolitical dynamics. Furthermore, future research should consider BRI projects' social and environmental implications in greater detail, assessing the impacts on local communities and ecosystems. Investigating the effectiveness of governance structures and policy frameworks in managing BRI projects and ensuring transparency and accountability would provide valuable insights for policymakers. Comparing the BRI with other international infrastructure initiatives, such as the U.S.-led PGII and the EU's Global Gateway, could offer a more nuanced understanding of global infrastructure development and its implications for African nations.

In conclusion, this dissertation has comprehensively analysed the BRI's economic and geopolitical implications in Nigeria and Ethiopia. While the BRI has stimulated significant infrastructure development and economic growth, it also poses challenges related to debt sustainability, economic dependency, and geopolitical influence. By adopting a balanced and strategic approach, African countries can harness the full potential of the BRI to drive sustainable development and assert their influence in the regional and global arenas.

Future research should continue to explore these themes, ensuring that the benefits of the BRI are realised while mitigating potential risks, ultimately fostering sustainable and equitable development for African nations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Top 10 economies in Africa as of 2024

Below are the 10 largest economies in Africa in 2024 according to IMF:

Rank	Country	GDP (billions)
1	South Africa	$373bn
2	Egypt	$347bn
3	Algeria	$266bn
4	Nigeria	$252bn
5	Ethiopia	$205bn
6	Morocco	$152bn
7	Kenya	$104bn
8	Angola	$92bn
9	Cote D' Ivoire	$86bn
10	Tanzania	$79bn

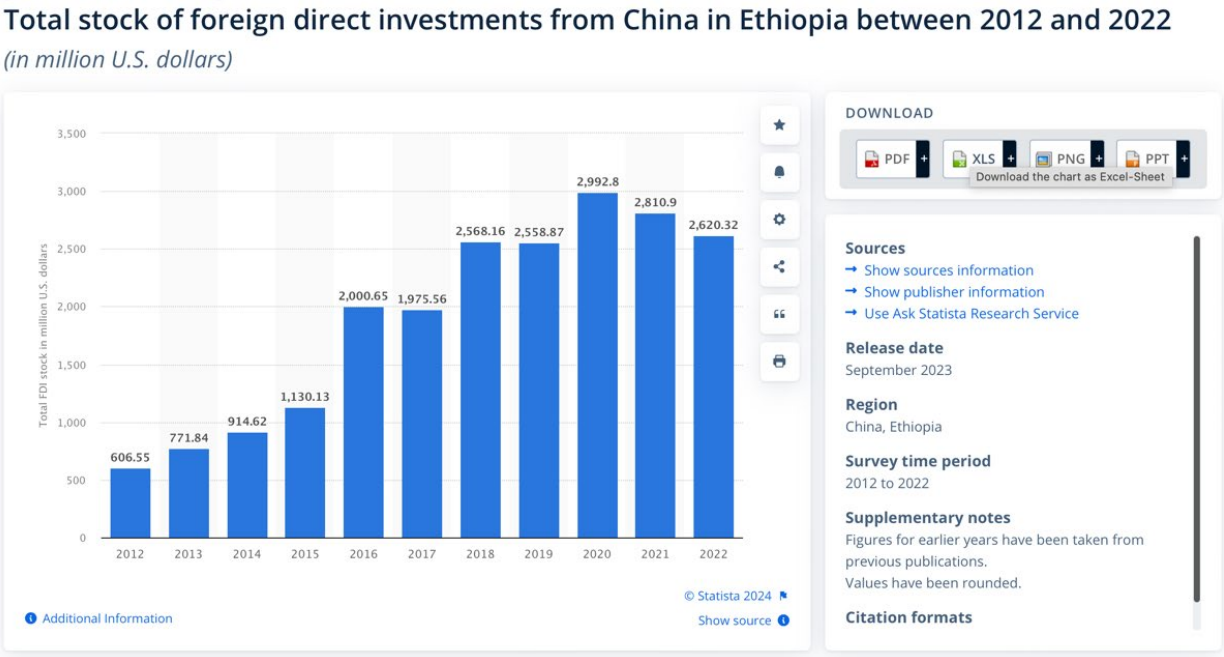
(Retrieved from Business Insider Africa, 2024)

Appendix 2: FDI from China to Nigeria between 2012 and 2022



(Retrieved from Statista, 2024)

Appendix 3: FDI from China to Ethiopia between 2012 and 2022



(Retrieved from Statista, 2024)

Appendix 4: Interview Questions

Research Instrument: Interview questions

1. How would you characterize China's engagement with Africa through the Belt and Road Initiative? What are the main objectives and motivations behind China's involvement?
2. In your opinion, what are the key economic implications of the Belt and Road Initiative in African countries like Nigeria and Ethiopia? How has it influenced their economic development and infrastructure growth?
3. What are the geopolitical implications of China's Belt and Road Initiative in Africa? How has it shaped the regional power dynamics and relationships between African countries and other foreign powers?
4. From your perspective, how has the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative affected the agency and decision-making processes of African nations? Has it influenced their sovereignty and resource management?
5. Are there any specific challenges or criticisms associated with China's engagement in Africa through the Belt and Road Initiative? How have African countries responded to these challenges and what implications do they have for future cooperation?
6. Can you comment on the role of African agency in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative? How have African countries actively shaped their engagement with China and negotiated their interests?
7. In terms of dependency theory, how does the Belt and Road Initiative impact the economic interdependencies between China and African countries? Are there any concerns about potential asymmetrical power relations or debt traps?
8. What potential future developments or trends do you foresee in China's engagement with Africa through the Belt and Road Initiative? How can African countries navigate these dynamics and maximize the benefits while minimizing the risks?
9. I would also like to get your thoughts on the IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor) that the U.S proposed in September and the “Lobito Corridor”? What are your thoughts? This has to do with the U.S countering China’s BRI and its course of action.