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RESEARCH ARTICLE

IMPLICATIONS OF BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI) ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the implications of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on economic development in Africa. In 2013, the Chinese Government declared its commitment to invest USD 1 trillion over ten years from 2013 to 2023. Thus, 53 African countries have signed the cooperation agreement with China to work under the BRI framework. The initiative has been hailed as a right step in the right direction in addressing the huge infrastructure deficit in Africa. However, beyond infrastructure development, BRI has more nuanced implications on the economic development of Africa bothering on the development of underdevelopment which has not been critically interrogated. Referencing the cases of Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya, Egypt, Angola and Djibouti which are among the major beneficiaries of BRI projects in Africa, this paper argues that while BRI is playing a vital role in addressing infrastructure deficit in Africa through the construction of modern highways, airports, high-speed railways, bridges, power generation (hydropower), and industrial parks which are important forces of production and by extension economic development in Africa, a critical examination reveals that the initiative constitutes a new form of imperialism. The economic policy is imperialistic because it is market seeking, asset seeking and resource seeking in the interest of China. BRI is not oriented towards production or industrialization which is much needed in Africa. Because it is not oriented to production, borrowing to finance the construction of large-scale infrastructure has been unable to spur economic growth in Africa. Borrowing has rather exacerbated the debt crisis in Africa and furthered the periphery and the core development divide in which the periphery exports primary commodities while the centre exports manufactured goods, resulting in dependent relations and underdevelopment in the periphery. Africa's infrastructure development must be accompanied by industrialization to achieve economic development.

Keywords: China, Belt, road initiative, economic development, Africa, new imperialism

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

Following sustained economic growth since the late 1970s occasioned by the opening up of the economy, the Peoples' Republic of China, formerly an underdeveloped Asian nation has achieved remarkable economic transformation and emerged as an economic powerhouse in the global economy, effectively contending with the United States, the European Union and Japan in the contemporary international political economy. China's current economic achievement is not self-contained.

China's economic experience is like that of European imperialism which occurred following the first industrial revolution which was pioneered by Britain. The first industrial revolution created the contradictions of over-production and under-consumption amidst growing raw material needs in the context of acute shortages of domestic energy supplies to sustain industrialization. This necessitated the outward scramble for markets, raw materials, and territories for the profitable investment of surplus capital among contending major European powers.

The resultant effect of the outward movement of capitalism was the colonization of Africa which began in the late 19th century. In fact, capitalist production and the scramble for spheres of influence culminated into imperialism and colonization in Africa. Similarly, massive and sustained capitalist production and economic growth over four decades has spurred China's "Going Global Policy" in search of markets for manufactured goods, the acquisition of raw materials for industrial production and new centres for the profitable investment of surplus capital. The Chinese government has established key institutions such as the Chinese Export-Import Bank (China Exim Bank) to drive it globalization strategy. Like its predecessor, the European imperialism, Chinese imperialism is attracted to Africa due to its large market size, deficit of infrastructure, availability of diverse energy typologies, and abundance of other natural resources which are needed by China to drive her industrial production.

But unlike European imperialism which was violent and atavistic, China has entered Africa through economic diplomacy with a baggage of economic policy initiatives which are said to be targeted at transforming the economic fortunes of Africa by driving economic development through the provision of infrastructure. In 2000, China introduced the Forum on China-Africa Conference (FOCAC). In 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative was introduced. China's infrastructure investments in Africa are being carried out under the rubric of the Belt and Road Initiative.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is China's globalization strategy that seeks to integrate China's economy with other countries and specifically contribute to addressing diverse development needs of countries in Asia, Europe and Africa. BRI seeks to achieve policy coordination; facilitate connectivity; enhance trade; encourage financial integration; and promote people to-people bonds. This paper has examined the implications of China's infrastructural projects on the development process of Africa. It notes that while the infrastructure projects are a major boost to economic and social development in Africa, the economic presence of China risks being a new imperialism characterized by the perpetuation of global structures of domination and dependency between African countries and China.

2.0. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

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2.1. Conceptual Clarification

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

The Belt and Road initiative is part of China's "going global" policy. It is the globalization strategy initiated by the Peoples Republic of China following its massive economic breakthrough and stupendous accumulation of capital. The strategy is aimed at connecting Asia with Africa and Europe through land and maritime transportation networks. The economic policy aims to improve transcontinental integration, boost trade and stimulate economic growth. It focuses on improving connectivity and infrastructure development through Asia, Europe and Africa. At the 2017 Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation held in Beijing, China, Chinese President, Xi Jinping described BRI as "*a project of the century*" and "*a new form of globalization*" (Komakech & Ombati, 2023).

BRI refers to an ambitious economic vision of the opening-up of and cooperation between the Asian, European, and African continents in order to promote economic prosperity and regional economic cooperation through strengthening exchanges and mutual learning between or among different civilizations, and promoting world peace and development (Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, 2015). The five pillars of BRI are infrastructure development, trade and investment, economic growth, people-to-people exchanges, environmental sustainability ((World Bank, 2018; Maliszewska & Mensbrugghe, 2019). Through these pillars, BRI is expected to promote trade and strengthen economic growth across the region leading to a 25% reduction in road transport margins, 5% in sea transport margins, and to coordinate economic policy and improve regional collaboration, contribute to lifting 7.6 million people from extreme poverty and 32 million from moderate poverty by 2030. It is interesting to note that the UN has acknowledged the intrinsic link between each of the five pillars of the BRI and the 17 SDGs 2030 Agenda (The United Nations, 2020).

In Africa, BRI focuses on connecting African countries through transportation infrastructure projects, including modern highways, airports, and high-speed railways. Furthermore, the Belt and Road Initiative aims to promote the connectivity of the Asian, European, and African continents and their adjacent seas, establish and strengthen partnerships among the countries along the Belt and Road, set up all-dimensional, multi-tiered, and composite connectivity networks, and realize diversified, independent, balanced, and sustainable development in these countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, 2014).

It is expected that such partnerships can help promote sustainable development and prosperity for all involved (IMF, 2018; World Bank, 2018; Yu, Li Yang & Wei, 2020; Brautigam, 2020; Moore, 2020). At the tenth anniversary of BRI held from 17 to 18 October, 2023 in Beijing, China, the Chinese President, Xi Jinping remarked that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is designed to spur the global economy, create new opportunities for global development, and build a new platform for international economic cooperation. Furthermore, President Xi Jinping propounded eight major steps that China would take to support the joint pursuit of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation as follows: (a) building a multidimensional Belt and Road connectivity network; (b) supporting an open world economy; (c) carrying out practical cooperation; (d) promoting green development; (e) advancing scientific and technological innovation; (f) supporting people-to-people exchanges; (g) promoting integrity-based Belt and Road cooperation; (h) strengthening institutional building for international Belt and Road cooperation (Premuim Times, 25th October 2023).

Economic Development

Fritz (1995) asserts that the main purpose of economic development is to improve the social and material well-being of all individuals and social institutions with the goal of achieving the highest possible level of human development. Dragoi (2020) defines economic development as a process that focuses on growth expressed in qualitative and quantitative terms. Economic development is the process of raising the level of prosperity through increased production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Economic development refers to increase in productivity plus improvement in the quality of life or wellbeing of the people (Fritz, 1995; Dragoi, 2020; Panth, 2020). Economic growth is a key element of economic development Economic growth refers to increase in productivity in an economy that is measured over a given period of time. "Economic growth is represented by the increase of goods and services obtained within a timeframe within the economy of a nation" (Dragoi, 2020, p.3). Economic growth is enhanced production. Therefore, industrialization is key component of economic development.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The analysis of the implications of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on the economic development of Africa has been interrogated from the theoretical perspective of dependency or underdevelopment theory. Dependency theory originated in Latin America in the late to 1950s through the writings of Hans Singer and Raul Prebisch which later gave rise to "the Prebisch-Singer thesis" according to which the terms of trade for periphery countries tend to decline over time relative to the core. Dependency theory seeks to explain the development differentials between the advanced capitalist economies of the global north and the underdeveloped economies of the global south. The major proponents of dependency theory are Raul Prebisch, Hans Singer, Samir Amin, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Theotonio Dos Santos, Aghiri Emmanuel, and Andre Gunder Frank (Prebisch, 1959; Cardoso, 1979; Frank, 1967; Frank, 1979; Frank, 1966; Cardoso; 1979; Singer & Raffer, 2002). The main contention of dependency theory is that the explanations offered by modernization theory for the development crisis in the global South are faulty.

Modernization theory argues that underdevelopment is attributable to the persistence of primitive institutions and values, lack of innovation, lack of capital, lack of achievement motivation and harsh climatic conditions. Development in the global north is, therefore, attributed to the prevalence of modern institutions and values that are supportive of development. Therefore, western societies are paraded as perfect examples of development, and developing countries are expected to imbibe western values and institutions to develop. To achieve development, therefore, modernization theory has prescribed the transition from traditional to modern societies, the diffusion of western values, institutions and capital into the South and the embrace of democracy.

Contrary to modernization theory, dependency theory argues that development and underdevelopment are products of the same historical process rooted in the spread of capitalism. In other words, the historical integration of the underdeveloped societies into the sphere of the exploitative and acquisitive capitalist economy created conditions of dependency. Dos Santos defined dependency as a situation whereby the economy of a country is conditioned by the development and expansion of another to which the former is subjected. Imperialism therefore, results in the development of the core and arrested development in the countries that are subjected to it. While the spread of capitalism resulted in the economic growth and development of European countries, it simultaneously produced under-development in the colonies. Integration of the economies of developing countries into the sphere of global capitalism causes disarticulation and incoherence in the economies of the periphery.

These relations of exploitation and dependency persisted after developing countries achieved formal political independence, leading to neo-imperialism. This paper argues that Chinese globalization, and in particular the Belt and Road Initiative is a manifestation of dependency and development of underdevelopment between Africa and China. African economies are tied to the development and expansion of the Chinese economy and this relationship is benefiting China at the expense of African countries. Infrastructure provision is not accompanied by industrialization in Africa. Borrowing from China has exacerbated the debt crisis in Africa. China is acquiring energy resources and raw materials from Africa so much needed to drive China's industrialization. Africa has become a huge market for Chinese manufactured goods.

3.0. METHODLGY

This study is qualitative in nature. It draws from secondary data and assessed the perspectives of diverse researchers using content and discourses on the implications of BRI in Africa.

4.0. DISCOURSES

Positive Implications of BRI on Economic Development in Africa

It has been well noted that infrastructural development is a critical factor in economic development (Olateju & Adebisi, 2025; Ajah & Onuoha, 2025). Therefore, given the focus of the Belt and Road Initiative on transforming the infrastructural landscape of African countries to boost economic growth, it can be argued that BRI has some positive implications on the economic development of African countries. The positive implication is viewed against the backdrop of the capacity of BRI to deliver on its stated objectives which are to finance the construction of large-scale infrastructure projects such as highways, railways, ports, and airports in Africa, and thereby integrate the continent into global trade networks. Vines, Butler and Jie (2022) have justified that over the past two decades, Chinese finance has contributed to an infrastructure boom in many African countries. In this regard, BRI can be said to have largely achieved its stated objectives when reference is made to countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, Egypt, Uganda, and Djibouti where large-scale infrastructure projects such as roads, railways, ports, airports, and power generation plants have either been completed or are ongoing to address infrastructural deficits and catalyze economic development.

Nigeria signed the Belt and Road cooperation agreement with China in 2018. Since subscribing to BRI, Nigeria has become China's biggest contractor market, second largest trading partner in Africa, and major investment destination in Africa. Financed by the China Exim Bank, China has invested in the construction of roads, railways, seaports and power generation in Nigeria. Seaports include the Lekki Deep Sea Port and the Badagry seaport. The Federal Ministry of Works also signed an MoU with China Harbour Engineering Company Ltd for the construction of the Lekki Blue Seaport at the Lekki Free Trade Zone in Lagos (Premium Times, 25th October, 2023). Major railway projects include the Lagos-Ibadan train route, Abuja-Kaduna rail line, Port Harcourt-Maiduguri rail line, Warri-Irape rail line, and Abuja-Warri rail line (Olateju & Adebiyi, 2025; Ajah & Onuoha, 2025).

There are several road projects but the notable ones include the ongoing dualization of the Abuja-Keffi-Lafia-Makurdi-Enugu road. BRI has played a pivotal role in the expansion of four of Nigerian international airport terminals in Abuja, Port Harcourt, Lagos and Kano (Ajah & Onuoha, 2025). During the tenth anniversary of BRI in Beijing from 17 to 18 October, 2023, Nigeria's Vice President, Kashim Shettima witnessed the signing of Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) between the National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure and three Chinese partners, for new projects valued at $2 billion, as well as the signing of letters of intent between the Chinese and Nigerian partners, for new projects and investments worth $4 billion (Premium Times, 25th October, 2023).

Like Nigeria, Uganda is also a major beneficiary of infrastructural development projects financed by Chinese loans under the BRI framework. Some of the key projects include the Kampala-Entebbe Expressway, the Karuma and Isimba Hydropower Dams and the Entebbe International Airport. The 49.56 km Expressway worth USD 479.2 million (with 74% of the cost from loans) was started in 2012 and completed in 2019 and is the first toll fee road in Uganda. The work was carried out by the China Communications Construction Company Ltd. and supervised by Beijing Expressway Supervision Company Ltd. These projects have improved connectivity within Uganda in terms of improved traffic conditions on both bypass and distributor roads in urban areas, as well as enhancing urban development and improving connectivity between Uganda and other countries in the region.

Currently, China is one of Uganda's largest trading partners along with India, Kenya, and the European Union (World Bank, 2021). Uganda and the People's Republic of China have signed multiple agreements to boost trade and investment between them. In addition, Chinese entrepreneurs have set up six industrial parks in Uganda with the support of the Ugandan Government. The industrial parks include the Shandong Industrial Park in Luzira, Tiantang Industrial Park in Mukono, Liaoshen Industrial Park in Kapeeka, Uganda-China (Guangdong) Free Zone of International Co-operation in Sukulu, Mbale Industrial Park, and Kehong Agricultural Industrial Park in Luweero.

BRI has played a key role in transforming the infrastructural landscape of Kenya. Financed by loans from the China Export-Import Bank, the Chinese Government has through the BRI, constructed the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) which is the first railway in Kenya since its independence in 1963. The 472 km long railway cost about USD 3.8 billion (and 90% of it was funded by Chinese loans) (Komakech & Ombati, 2023). The project started in 2014 and was completed in 2017 and is now operational. It was constructed by China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) under the supervision of Bridge Corporation and China Communications Construction Company (CCCCC). Other notable projects under the BRI are the Lamu Port-South Sudan Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor, Nairobi Expressway, Likoni Floating Bridge, and the Makupa Bridge (Komakech & Ombati, 2023).

Under BRI, China has been involved in Djibouti's economic development with the construction of a new port and a railway connecting Djibouti to Ethiopia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, 2014; Komakech & Ombati, 2023), expansion of Djibouti's international airport, construction of Doraleh Multipurpose Port (China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC) and the construction of Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway. All these infrastructure projects were either supervised or constructed by Chinese companies such as the CCCC Fourth Harbor Engineering Company Limited, China Railway Engineering Corporation (CREC), China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC), China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC), China Airport Construction Group Corporation (CACG), the China Railway Seventh Group Co., Ltd., (Xhinhua, 2018).

BRI infrastructure projects have significantly impacted the country's infrastructure and economy. They have provided Djibouti with improved transportation systems and trade links and stimulated economic growth and job creation opportunities, thereby enhancing the country's position as a regional hub for trade and transportation. It has been argued that these infrastructure projects align with Africa's 2063 vision of establishing an integrated railway network, connecting the continent from Egypt in the north to South Africa in the South (Komakech & Ombati, 2023).

However, there are concerns about the high levels of debt incurred by Djibouti to finance these projects, the environmental impact of these developments, and lack of transparency, disregard of community concerns, and threats of environmental degradation (Wang & Tang, 2020; Financial Times, 2022; The Diplomat, 2022). Currently, the country is grappling with renegotiating loan terms, seeking debt relief, and diversifying its sources of funding as well as seeking investments from other countries (like the United States, France, and Japan) and multilateral institutions (such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank) in order to pay its debts (African Logistics, 2020). It is renegotiating the terms of its loan for the Doraleh Multipurpose Port, from 8.5% to 3% interest rate, and extending the loan repayment period from 10 to 25 years (Komakech & Ombati, 2023).

Egypt was the first African country to sign the BRI Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2013. Under the BRI, China is developing the Suez Canal Economic Zone (SC-Zone) as a major economic development project aimed at creating a world-class industrial and logistics hub around the Suez Canal. The SC-Zone covers an area of over 461 square kilometers and includes six ports, as well as various industrial, commercial, and residential zones (Komakech & Ombati, 2023). China has also invested heavily in the building of a New Administrative Capital City in Egypt which began in 2015 and is on course. The project involves the construction of government buildings, residential areas, and infrastructure such as roads, water and sewage systems, and public transportation.

The goal of the new administrative capital is to relieve congestion in Cairo, Egypt's current capital, and to provide a modern, sustainable city with state-of-the-art infrastructure and amenities. The project is expected to be inaugurated in 2030 (Komakech & Ombati, 2023). Although the construction will take time, when completed, the it will be the Tallest Tower in Africa (a 385 m high skyscraper with 80 floors) that showcases smart and sustainable city principles (Komakech & Ombati, 2023).

Negative implications of BRI on Africa's Economic Development

Despite BRI's focus on infrastructural transformation which has been touted as a critical factor in economic development, a critical examination indicates that it is a neo-colonial project designed to perpetuate dependent-development which has been historically characteristic of, and entrenched by capitalist expansionism following the first industrial revolution in Europe. In the 21st century, Chinese globalization under the rubric of BRI is an economic policy designed to exacerbate the development gap between the core and the periphery countries of Africa. Genyi (2017, p.14) has pointed out that China has emerged as a new imperial power in Africa.

Genyi explains that the character of Chinese imperialism is different from previous forms of European imperialism in that that while European imperialism leveraged underdeveloped state formation and governance structures to exploit and expropriate surplus value from the periphery to the core, China is exploiting weak governance structures and rent-seeking behaviour to under develop Africa. In seeking energy security to sustain the boom in her economic growth, China is involved in the total exploitation, expropriation and accumulation of surplus from Africa through investments in trade (Genyi, 2017).

Olateju and Adebisi (2025) have argued that the neo-colonial character of China economic relations with Africa implicit in the BRI is that while Chinese investments have brought about significant infrastructure growth on the continent, the relationship highlights the risks of neo-colonial dependency and exploitation. It underscores the persistence of centre-periphery relations in which African countries are the producers or exporters of primary commodities whose prices are low compared to China which is the supplier of manufactured goods whose prices are high.

China therefore enjoys favourable terms and balance of trade at the detriment of African economies. Similarly, Ajah and Onuoha (2025) maintain that BRI is a replication of colonial patterns of economic domination and unequal exchange. Andaman Partners (2025) has argued that while African economies are gradually shifting from predominantly raw material exports to light manufacturing and high-value manufactured products, essential minerals and raw materials still dominate Africa's export. In contrast, China's exports to Africa mostly consist of manufactured goods such as machinery and mechanical appliances and electrical equipment. In 2025, Africa imported $13 Billion of machinery and mechanical appliances and $11. 6 Billion of electrical equipment (Andaman Partners, 2025).

Nigeria, Angola, Egypt and Kenya were among the top ten importers of Chinese goods in 2025, with Nigeria having the largest share of $2.4 Billion at growth rate of 19 percent (Andaman Partners, 2025). It explains that given the worsening strained relationship between the United States and China occasioned by tightening tariffs, China has redirected exports to Africa and other regions, with export growth to Arica witnessing a 21. 6 percent increase in 2025. A further break down shows that China's export to Africa increased rapidly from USD 5 Billion in 2000 to USD 171 Billion in 2024, representing a 16 percent increase. In 2025, China's exports to Africa exceeded USD 100 Billion, representing a growth rate of 21.6 percent. From 2001 to 2024, China's imports from Africa increased more than fourfold. Despite this, Africa retained a low share of China's total trade, representing only 4.5 percent of total imports in 2024. This has been the case despite the elimination of tariffs on 98 percent of imports from 21 African countries and extending zero tariffs on imports from 33 least-developed African countries (Andaman Partners, 2025).

Ajah and Onuoha (2025) further note that BRI is being used by China as a tool to project or showcase its rising superpower status in the face of fierce superpower competition with the entrenched transatlantic hegemony of the United States. It is aimed at realizing China's national interest in a highly competitive and fragmented global economy, and not the development of African countries. Thus, the primary motive of BRI is to break the United States' global hegemony, promote China's economic interest and military influence across Africa and other parts of the world (Ajah & Onuoha, 2025).

The nature of BRI infrastructure projects and the manner in which they are executed also bears significant economic repercussions for African economies. Transportation is an aid to trade and must be tied to productive activity to contribute to economic development. BRI infrastructure projects in Africa are not tied to industrialization. The construction of roads, ports and railways is to link Africa with other regions of the world and enhance the movement and distribution of Chinese goods across Africa and also facilitate the evacuation of natural resources such as oil and gas (Ajah & Onuoha, 2025). By focusing on transport infrastructure, there is an overwhelming neglect of other crucial economic sectors such as manufacturing, education, agriculture, and security. BRI's infrastructure projects are tied to resource exploitation and the penetration of Chinese manufactured goods into Africa markets rather than the establishment of industries.

BRI projects are not tied to industrialization in Africa. China is simply seeking for markets, assets acquisition and natural resources. As Ezechi and Mbaeze (2024) have noted, Chinese globalization is fueled by overcapacity and over-production, domestic accumulation of capital and the search for new territories for investments and markets to sale their excess goods. The policy is being pursued as China is experiencing internal contradictions, chief among which are acute shortages of energy and raw materials required to sustain massive economic growth and industrial production. The infrastructure contracts are elitist, prioritizing the interests and rent-seeking behavior of government officials and Chinese foreign capital over local communities (Ajah & Onuoha, 2025). All contracts are executed and supervised by Chinese construction companies. There is the fringe use of local labour force. In fact, the projects are executed without regard for the development of local content in Africa.

Furthermore, the dependency syndrome in the China-Africa economic relations is that BRI has entrenched the dependence of African countries on Chinese financing for economic development. Major Chinese creditors to African countries include China Development Bank, Bank of China, China Export-Import Bank, and China Construction Bank (Vines, Butler & Jie (2022). In 2017, China became the world's largest official creditor to Africa, surpassing the lending from the Bretton Woods institutions (Horn, Reinhart & Trebesch, 2021).

From 2000 to 2019, China committed USD 153 Billion to African public sector borrowing, and at least 80 percent went to finance infrastructure projects (Acker & Brautigam, 2021). Mo Choi, Li and Razafimahefa (2024) informed that in 2020, Chinese lending to Africa was concentrated in resource endowed countries. The figures showed that 46 percent ($32.8 Billion) debt was owed by oil exporters, non-oil intensive countries accounted for 35 percent ($24.9 Billion), and non-resource intensive countries accounted for 20 percent ($13.8 Billion). More than 40 percent of public debt to China is owed by countries with high debt risks, vulnerabilities or distress (Mo Choi, Li & Razafimahefa, 2024).

Increased borrowing from China has pushed African borrower nations into the debt trap, debt overhang and debt crisis which has negatively impacted the continent's economic development (Mo Choi, Li and Razafimahefa, 2024; Mutai et al, 2024; Ajah & Onuoha, 2025). For instance, Ajah and Onuoha (2025) has maintained that BRI is a "debt trap diplomacy" in which China is trading short-term infrastructure gains for long-term indebtedness. Borrowing from the Chinese financial and development institutions such as the China Development Bank and the China Export and Import Bank is worsening the debt crisis among African countries.

For example, in 2024, Angola owed China $20.98 Billion, Ethiopia $6.82 Billion, Zambia $6.69 Billion and Nigeria $4.29 Billion (Business Day, 2024). Djibouti's debt to China stood at $2.6 Billion in 2025. Egypt's total reached $161.2 Billion in June 2025. Out of this figure, debt owed China stood at $9.6 billion. Egypt redenominated its loan to Yuan to reduce cost of repayment (Daily News Egypt, 2025). In the same vein, while Uganda's total debt stood at UGX 116 Trillion in 2025, debt owed China's Export Import Bank was approximately UGX 9.2 Trillion ($2.3 Billion) (Parliament Watch, 2025).

As of December, 2024, Uganda paid China \$178.7 Million (approximately UGX 679.2 Billion of which UGX 212.2 Billion was interest and UGX 13.2 Billion covered commissions and other fees (Parliament Watch, 2025). Kenya is experiencing the worst case of the debt crisis. In 2025, Kenya owed China \$12.7 Billion of which \$3.5 Billion was borrowed for the construction of the standard gauge railway. Kenya has incurred high cost of debt servicing (Miriri, 2025; African Sovereign Debt Justice Network, 2025). Thus, just like Egypt, Kenya has redenominated its Standard Gauge Railway loan of \$3.5 Billion into Yuan to cut interest (Miriri, 2025; African Sovereign Debt Justice Network, 2025). It is therefore, clear that African countries are experiencing rising debt burden and the inability to repay their debts. While presently affecting economic development, borrowing to finance infrastructure construction is piling up debt burden for future generations which has negative implications on intergenerational equity and sustainable development.

5.0. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the nature and implications of BRI on the economic development in Africa. It establishes that while China's Belt and Road Initiative as a globalization strategy is facilitating the financing and construction of large-scale infrastructure projects in Africa to bridge the infrastructure gap in developing countries particularly through the construction of modern highways, airports, high-speed railways, bridges, power generation plants (hydropower) and the development of industrial parks, the policy and its implementation is a replication of Africa's economic dependency. Since its introduction in 2013, African countries have subscribed to the initiative, acquired infrastructure loans from China Export-Import Bank and executed various infrastructure projects.

Infrastructure projects are important forces of production that have the potential to lay the foundation for and spur the industrial development of Africa. However, infrastructure provision through external financing by China that has not been accompanied by industrialization confines Africa to primary production. This implies that African leaders must not rely on China for their development. African countries have the duty to develop their industrial sectors to become producers, exporters and competitors in the global economy as against their current dependency on the imports of foreign goods and reliance on foreign loans for development.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that no conflict of interest exist in this manuscript.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Statement

The authors declare that this article is original with minimal use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which was deployed only in the area of plagiarism and grammar checks.

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