

Who is Against Sino-African Relations? Evolving Perceptions on Chinese Engagement in Kenya

Sammy Mwangi Waweru

*Karatina University
Department of Social Sciences, Karatina, Kenya
swaweru@karu.ac.ke*

Published 25 January 2021

Abstract

Rise of China and increased Chinese engagement across the globe, have attracted mixed and varied reactions of approval and disapproval in a number of host countries. Against this background, this study brings into perspective rise of anti-Chinese sentiments in Africa, with a Kenyan case study, examining who, why and where anti-Chinese sentiments are most prevalent. The study finds anti-Chinese sentiments being most prevalent among Kenya's small scale traders who have been displaced by Chinese capital flow and trade in the country. The finding is contextualized within broader framework of globalization and its resultant effects on free movement of capital, trade and investment. More precisely, Chinese capital flow and trade have had distributional consequences of winners and losers with potential to displace Kenya's small scale traders hence the rise of anti-Chinese sentiments. The anti-Chinese sentiments are equally evident among section of Kenya's politicians and intelligentsia, who have questioned the viability of Chinese built infrastructure. Further, anti-Chinese sentiments have been found among ordinary citizens who have experienced, albeit isolated, incidences of Chinese misconducts in the country. Notwithstanding these negative reactions, Chinese engagement in Kenya is still pronounced and has popular support from government, general citizenry and among classes of Kenyan who have benefited from Chinese

This is an Open Access article, copyright owned by World Scientific Publishing Company (WSPC) and School of International Relations and Public Affairs of Shanghai International Studies University (SIRPA of SISU). The article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 (CC BY-NC) License which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original work is properly cited and is used for non-commercial purposes.

involvement in the country. The segmented nature of anti-Chinese sentiments has not been strong enough to undo general goodwill, attitude and perceptions, that ordinary citizen hold towards Chinese engagement in Kenya.

Keywords

Kenya; anti-Chinese; trade; politics; Chinese engagement.

1. Introduction

Studies on Sino-African relations have kept on evolving as they seek to make meaning on rise of China and its implications to the continent and rest of the world. These studies have taken different perspectives ranging from Chinese vis-à-vis African agency and their relations, trade and investment, diplomacy and politics, macro and micro levels of analysis among many other approaches. Initial research on China's reentry into Africa in the 21st century have mostly centered on Chinese agency in its relations with African countries and resulted impact of these interactions. However, overtime focus has shifted for the need to examine African voices in these interactions, such that, as opposed to Sino-African relations, spotlight has shifted to Africa China relations. It is on this basis that a number of researches have examined African agency and African reactions in these engagements. Building on African agency in Sino-African relations, this study extends the discussion by examining evolving perceptions on Chinese engagement in the continent through a Kenyan case study.

Chinese engagement in Africa in various sectors in the continent has attracted divided opinions in different countries and across sections of African societies. Like many African countries, Kenya has equally experienced increased Chinese presence in various sectors of the economy. Consequently, a number of researches on Sino-African relations have previously shown Kenya being among African countries with high approval rate on role of China in the country. However, in the recent past, there have been evidences of discord and disapproval on Chinese engagement in the country. This paper examines who, why and where anti-Chinese sentiments are most prevalent in Kenya. The paper finds anti-Chinese sentiments being most prevalent among Kenya's small scale traders who have been displaced by Chinese capital flow and trade in the country. The finding is contextualized within broader framework of globalization and its resultant effects on free movement of capital, trade and investment. More precisely, Chinese

capital flow and trade have had distributional consequences of winners and losers with potential to displace Kenya's small scale traders hence the rise of anti-Chinese sentiments. The anti-Chinese sentiments are further evident among section of Kenya's politicians and intelligentsia, who have questioned the viability of Chinese built infrastructure, as well as ordinary citizens who have experienced isolated incidences of Chinese misconducts in the country. Notwithstanding these negative reactions, Chinese engagement in Kenya is still pronounced and has popular support from government, general citizenry and among classes of Kenyan entrepreneurs who have benefited from interactions with Chinese business counterparts. The segmented nature of anti-Chinese sentiments has not been strong enough to undo general goodwill, attitude and perceptions that ordinary citizens hold towards Chinese engagement in Kenya.

The paper proceeds as follows: the next section briefly examines theoretical discussion on globalization, capital, trade flow and its resultant consequences of winners and losers in global capitalist economy. This discussion lays the foundation for understanding nature and character of Chinese engagement in Africa as a consequence of globalization. Consistent with outcome of globalization, the third section examines Chinese engagement in Africa and how Africans have had diverse reactions on Chinese engagement in different parts of the continent. The fourth section narrows down to bilateral relations between China and Kenya, and analyzes the evolving perception on Chinese engagement in the country. The fifth section examines mixed and varied reactions to Chinese engagement in Kenya. This is followed by sixth section that analyses who is against Chinese engagement in the country and why. Finally is a concluding section.

This is a qualitative study which relied mainly on secondary data in examining sources and motivation on anti-Chinese sentiments in Kenya. Towards this end, the study made use official government documents like speeches, policy papers, academic journal articles, books and periodicals. Local news outlets like newspapers provide invaluable timely primary data and news surrounding Kenyan reactions towards Chinese engagement in the country.

2. Globalization, Factor Flow its Implications

Rise of China in 21st century is attributed to globalization processes as well as a number of internal reforms undertaken in China. While there is no

general agreement on precise definition on what globalization processes is, there seems to be unanimity that globalization process entails intense connectivity and interactions in social-economic and political spheres of life (Held *et al.*, 1999, p. 484). From an economic perspective, globalization process has meant 'the integration of the world economy' (Temin, 1999, p. 76). This involves free movement of factors of production i.e. capital and labor, in a bid to maximize profitable returns. As these factors of production move across borders, they have potential of creating winners and losers as a consequence. It is on this account that standard Heckscher–Ohlin theoretical model hypothesize that in international trade, 'a country's relatively abundant factors gain while a country's relatively scarce factors stand to lose from globalization process' (Kauder and Potrafke, 2015, p. 355). That is, in a liberal world order, free movement of capital and labor has intended and unintended consequences of winners and losers as an outcome of these interactions.

Developed countries with abundant supply of capital and skilled labor would favor globalization that allows free movement of these factors, since they can compete and gain globally from areas that promise high returns. The same can be said of less developed/developing countries favoring globalization that allow free movement of capital which stands to gain from supply of unskilled labor. Free flow of capital to less developed countries offers investment opportunities where abundant supply of unskilled labor can be put to use in production of goods and services. However, globalization also has potential to displace or offer competition to scarce factors of production in a given country. For example, abundant supply of unskilled labor in less developed countries poses a threat when it moves to developed world's scarce unskilled labor. Equally, developed countries' capital poses a threat and competition to developing countries' limited capitalists. Theoretically, unskilled labor in developed countries and few capital owners in developing countries will not favor globalization and free movement of factors of production for they stand to lose.

The above hypotheses explain how different segments of the society in different parts of the world have had varying opinion and attitudes towards globalization and free movement of factors of production. Milner and Tingley (2011) explores domestic sources of preference to US foreign economic policy on foreign aid and trade. They show case how citizens, legislators and presidency policy choices are informed by perceived

economic and political gains or losses when confronted with different policy options of foreign aid and trade. Politicians reading the cue from constituents either support or oppose a global engagement policy based on perceived benefits (Milner and Tingley, 2011). Factor endowment model has also been used to predict a society's skills composition and individual attitudes and reactions towards immigrants and immigration policies. There is evidence that predicts that unskilled individuals are more likely to harbor negative attitudes towards globalization policy that support immigrated unskilled labor in a given country (Mayda, 2006). This premised on likely consequences of inflow unskilled labor competing with the local unskilled labor. The opposite is true where individual with skilled labor would support immigration policy of unskilled labor which would not offer competition. However, Gordon *et al.* (2007) have demonstrated that in a condition where immigration policy has the potential of impacting negatively on skilled individuals in the form of high taxes aimed at supporting immigrants, the skilled individuals will not favor immigration policy.

Beyond attitude towards globalization and factor model predictions, globalization has further been extended to examine its relations with other variables. It has been established that globalization through trade and financial liberalization can foster democratization (Rudra, 2005). This is made possible if vulnerable citizens are mitigated through social protection mechanisms from negative consequences of globalization. On other front, while there has been an unending debate on globalization and increasing levels of inequalities, there is also an argument that posits that globalization promotes social justice (Kauder and Potrafke, 2015). The underlying feature of globalization is that it has potential to produce both positive and negative consequences. This explains contending opinions among scholars and practitioners in support and critical to globalization processes (Stiglitz, 2002; Wolf, 2005; World Bank, 2002). The discussion on globalization and free movement of factor is wide and deep topic that cannot be fully discussed in this paper. Never the less, the above discussion has attempted to demonstrate how globalization policies have distributional consequences by creating both winners and losers thus explaining varied reactions on its outcome. From the foregoing theoretical discussion of globalization and its resultant consequences, the paper puts into perspective how globalization processes, which has made possible Chinese capital flow and trade in Kenya, has contributed to the rise of anti-Chinese sentiments in the country.

3. Chinese Engagement in Africa: Consequences and Reactions

The earliest form of Sino-African relations can be traced back to Chinese expedition for trade and search for allies in North and East Africa regions during BC era (Alden and Cristina, 2008, p. 46). Later on in 20th century, China would play part supporting decolonization efforts in Africa and later offering infrastructure aid, with notable case being TanZam rail project that linked Tanzania and Zambia. In contemporary settings, Sino-African relations should be understood within a number of initiatives and policy frameworks that have guided Chinese engagement with the African continent. Among these is the adoption of China Policy Paper of 2006 which would guide Sino-African relations in different areas of cooperation that included: political, economic, human resources development and peace and security (Inyambo, 2008). Another widely celebrated policy initiative on Sino-African relations is the tri-annual event known as Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) platform. FOCAC brings together both Chinese and African top policy makers including head of states and governments to explore areas of mutual interests that include: trade and investment, diplomacy, security and cultural exchange among others (Abuya, 2012, p. 15). FOCAC tri-annually held in China or in Africa, has proved to be a major platform where China has made key declarations and pledges on aid, trade, investment and policy direction toward Africa. Sino-African relations should also be understood within broader framework of Chinese "One Belt One Road", and "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" also referred as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI initiative entails Chinese engagement in construction of interconnecting infrastructural projects in different parts of the world following ancient Chinese international trade route (Shatz, 2016, p. 93). A number of African countries along BRI route have benefited from Chinese financed infrastructural projects of roads, pipelines, railways and seaports.

Chinese engagement with Africa should also be understood within the broad framework of 'go out' (zouchu qu) policy of 2001 which was meant to transform Chinese enterprises into competitive global players (Kragelund, 2009, p. 85). The policy has played a role in eliminating bureaucratic bottlenecks for Chinese enterprises with global ambition to venture out (Kragelund, 2009, p. 85). The idea behind going global happened as a result of previous policy shift that had an impact on both internal and external factors on Chinese enterprises. Most important is a

number of internal economic reforms and opening up under Deng Xioping leadership which saw China welcoming abundant foreign capital flow in the country. These reforms led to unprecedented economic growth since 1990s to early 21st century. Positive economic and microeconomic performances, current account surplus and excessive foreign reserves have all played a role in Chinese ascendancy in global economy (Biggeri and Sanfilippo, 2009, pp. 31–33). Equally, due to abundant supply of labor and enabling policies, China became a global manufacturing hub. Further, Chinese admission into World Trade Organization (WTO) only acted to augment the already existing gains made since the era of internal reforms and opening up. In short, rise of China is a typical case study on positive consequences of globalization and liberal world economy which has allowed free movement of capital that transformed Chinese economy.

Although Sino-African relations are informed by general frameworks, relations with individual African countries are based on bilateral relations. In respective African countries, Chinese engagement has taken different forms and shapes from state to non-state actors. Chinese engagement in African countries has majorly been through state owned enterprises (S.O.E) that are involved in multiple infrastructural projects across the continent. Through these S.O.Es, China is playing a major role in addressing infrastructural deficit that the continent has experienced for long period of time. Chinese S.O.Es have also proved to be major players in extractive industries in Africa's vast mineral resources. China's involvement in Africa's natural resource is also in response to meet ever-growing appetite for raw material by domestic industries. It is argued that Chinese S.O.Es in Africa enjoys support from Chinese central and provincial governments towards the realization of China's go out strategy (Biggeri and Sanfilippo, 2011, p. 46). Equally, private and independent Chinese businesses and entrepreneurs form part of wider part of realizing Chinese dream globally (Mohan and Lampert, 2013, p. 96). Different shades of Chinese involvement in Africa have relatively been successful in their diverse areas of engagement in an unprecedented manner. It is argued that state support, low bidding, minimum entry barriers and bureaucratic procedures in execution of projects explains Chinese successes in their venture in Africa (Dittgen, 2013, p. 61). This explains ubiquitous Chinese presence in virtually all sectors of economy in Africa.

Sino-African relation has also been heavily informed by increased trade relations. Overtime, China has become Africa's largest trading partner with

some resource rich countries registering surplus trade flow with China (Bbaala, 2015, p. 98). China in Africa is also motivated by search for market from its enormous manufacturing industries. This is more so on cheap products that average African citizens can afford. Trade has also been augmented by increased flow of Chinese investment in the continent. China has proved to be a major source of foreign direct investment (FDI) for number of African countries (Ike, 2017). This is irrespective of the exact amount that flows to continent due to lack of official data indicating Chinese overseas FDI flow. Increased Chinese FDI is diverse in area of interest, has even come to compete with the West which is continent's traditional sources of FDI.

Notwithstanding successful Chinese engagement in a number of African countries, there is a divided opinion among Africans on the role of China in the continent. Chinese engagement in Africa has attracted three kinds of opinions and in three different perspectives i.e. of optimists, pessimists and accommodative (Asongu, 2016, p. 351). It is on this account that African public has had a varying attitudes and sentiments depending on how they have been impacted or perceived impact on Chinese engagement in the continent. Among the optimists are African policy makers who have been at forefront driving Chinese inroad in Africa. Chinese engagement in Africa being largely state centric, African elite being the first line of beneficiaries of Chinese involvement, have been quick to give popular support to Sino-African relations. However, there has been contention for the need to go beyond state elites in understanding these relations (Mohan and Lampert, 2013). At political elite level, there are those who have disapproved role of China in various sectors of the economy in the continent. This is best exemplified by Zambia case where a leading presidential candidate in 2006 general elections used anti-Chinese rhetoric to mobilize and galvanize support (Waweru, 2018). In other instances, governing elites have also used Chinese infrastructure projects as a means to rally political support (Waweru, 2018). This is as demonstrated with the Kenya's Chinese built standard gauge railway (SGR), which became a political topic amongst both the incumbent and opposition with each trying to associate themselves with the project as means to gain popular support. There are those who have been cautious on Sino-African relations. Former South African president Thabo Mbeki once warned of skewed nature of Sino-African relations, arguing that current relation where Africa exports raw

material and imports finished products from China has potential making China a new colonial master (Taylor, 2008, p. 74). Opposition political elites have also questioned economic viability of China's relations with African countries. Chinese engagement in selected African countries has only become political whenever opposition political elites have chosen to frame a narrative of 'Chinese problem' (Sautman and Hairong, 2009, p. 728). Reactions and perceptions among political elites towards engagement in Africa are therefore varied across board depending on economic and political interests and consequences.

Popular opinion among African citizens towards Chinese is varied, although generally, majority of ordinary African citizens have high approval rate on role of China in the continent. Based on number of national public opinion surveys and research, African citizens have had positive perception on Sino-African relations. In a number of countries, studies have shown Kenyans, Ethiopians and Sudanese to have had positive attitudes towards Chinese engagement in their respective countries (Sautman and Hairong, 2009, p. 728). Positive rating towards Chinese in Africa is informed by the perception that China is involved in key development infrastructural projects that have had meaning to ordinary citizens' lives. In this sense, China is seen as a development partner for their participation in economic and business sectors that have had direct bearing to people's livelihood.

In the same vein of positive perception on Chinese engagement in Africa, there are sections of African populace that harbor negative opinions on role of China in respective African countries. This is confirmed by national opinion research as well macro and micro level examinations which have revealed existence of anti-Chinese sentiments and perceptions in a number of African countries. Zambia, Botswana and South Africa have been cited to have high level of anti-Chinese sentiments (Gadzala and Hanusch, 2010; Mogopodi *et al.*, 2016, p. 21). As aforementioned, African populace attitudes towards China in Africa is largely determined by how Chinese engagement has impacted their lives. In cases of negative perceptions, Chinese engagement has mostly had a negative consequence on peoples' lives. In Zambia, a typical case of anti-Chinese engagement in Africa, citizens' discontents was rooted on the role of China in cooper industry. With era liberalization and free capital mobility, China had become major player in Zambia's political economy which saw a number of copper plants privatized to Chinese entrepreneurs and S.O.Es. It is argued in some quarters

that, anti-Chinese sentiments in Zambia were rooted by new Chinese Copper mine owners' failures to adhere to requisite best labor practices and safety measures. On a number of occasions, violent conflicts erupted in copper mines as workers protested on poor pay and working conditions (Hanglund, 2009, p. 635; Joon, 2012, p. 551). Zambia case got worsened when opposition leaders politicized the role of China thus exacerbating negative perceptions ordinary citizens had towards Chinese investors in Zambia. Alternative view has been that anti-Chinese sentiments in Zambia need to be contextualized that protests have not been restricted to Chinese owned mines alone rather other foreign owned mines have also experienced similar challenges.

Other case studies that have had anti-Chinese sentiments are those where there have been an influx of independent and private Chinese entrepreneurs and businesses in host countries. This has been more so with Chinese involvement in small and medium size import businesses. Acknowledging China's state support to entrepreneurs and enabling liberalized world order, a number of Chinese businesses have been setting bases in a number of African countries (Wang and Elliot, 2014, pp. 1021–1026). It is these Chinese entrepreneurs involvement in small and medium sized businesses that has also attracted high level of anti-Chinese sentiments across the continent. These Chinese entrepreneurs have faced resentment for competing with local businesses in the same line of business. In Nigeria, local associations of small scale trade were at forefront challenging the role of Chinese businesses at a China Town mall in Lagos as well as in Kano state (Mohan and Lampert, 2013, pp. 107–108). The traders voiced their concerns on infiltration of Chinese traders as threat to their own businesses.

The same case was replicated in Ghana, where local business association led protests against an increased presence of Chinese traders in wholesale and retail sectors (Lampert and Mohan, 2014, pp. 15–16). In other instances, anti-Chinese protests have sometimes turned violent. Lesotho, Malawi and Malagasy and Tanzania have all seen local traders protest and threaten physical violence against Chinese on claim that they were being forced out of business by Chinese owned businesses (Besada, 2013, p. 97; Hanauer and Morris, 2014, pp. 67–71). The above cases demonstrate a mixture of reactions on Chinese engagement in Africa. While there appear to be a general popular support for Chinese engagement in the continent, there is a

category of ordinary African that disapprove role of China in Africa. This is more pronounced among small scale traders who have faced competition from the same line of businesses. Small scale traders and those working in Chinese owned and run entities seem to have the highest incidences of expressing anti-Chinese sentiments. However, there are contending arguments that opine that some of anti-Chinese sentiments are overly exaggerated by western media and few opposition politicians to discredit rise and role of China in Africa (Besada, 2013, p. 97; Hanauer and Morris, 2014, pp. 67–71; Sautman and Hairong, 2009, p. 728; Power and Mohan, 2008, p. 5). Broad generalization on few cases cannot offer true picture of incidences of support or opposition to Chinese engagement in the continent. This calls for broader and insightful and in-depth analysis of African reactions to Chinese role in African countries on case by case basis.

4. Bilateral Relations Between China and Kenya

China and Kenya have had a long history of bilateral relations since the country gained independence although the relation was later severed during the reign of first president Jomo Kenyatta. It is during President Moi tenure, Kenya's second president, that the relations between the two countries were reestablished and later cemented with Jiang Zemin visiting Kenya in 1996 (Abuya, 2012). As rise of China become more evident in the early 21st century, there was a change of government in Kenya that saw transition of power from Moi to Kibaki regime in December 2002. It is during president Kibaki's reign that China Kenya relation heightened. President Kibaki was quick to make several bilateral cooperation agreements as China made reentry into Africa. These agreements covered a number of areas on trade and investment, infrastructure development, energy, socio-cultural exchanges among others. It is on these agreements that Chinese engagement in the country took root in a number of notable infrastructural projects (Hillary, 2012, p. 10). These projects are partly funded by both Chinese and Kenyan government as well as multilateral lenders like African Development Bank.

China and Kenya have experienced increased level of trade and investment between the two countries. In the last decade, China has proved to be Kenya's major trade partner (Abuya, 2012, p. 35). However, trade relation between the two countries is skewed in favor of China which

registers trade surplus with Kenya. For example in the year 2017, Kenya exports to China an average of Ksh. 10 billion while China's imports to Kenya amounted to Ksh. 390 billion demonstrating the big gap. China has also become a major source of Kenya's FDI challenging historical and traditional western partners as country's source of FDI. The Chinese FDI has been directed in various sectors of the Kenyan economy. Due to increased trade and investment relations originating from China, opinions have been divided on the role of China in Kenya as discussed in proceeding section.

5. Mixed and Varied Reactions on Chinese Engagement in Kenya

Chinese engagement in Kenya's different sectors of the economy has been highly ubiquitous in civil infrastructural projects. This is especially in rail and road with notable ones being Thika superhighway and constructions of Standard Gauge Railway from Mombasa to Nairobi among others. Apart from infrastructure projects, Chinese are also engaged in other sectors of the economy like real estate, tourism and hospitality and entrepreneurship businesses. They have ranged from state owned enterprises, national to provincial state owned enterprises, private big and small and medium sized business enterprises. Therefore, composition of Chinese people in Kenya is a mixture of employees involved in state supported projects and that of individual Chinese businesses. From their diverse engagement in Kenya, opinions have varied among Kenyan political elites and ordinary citizens towards Chinese role in the country.

Previous studies based on national opinion surveys have demonstrated Kenyans to be among African citizens that have had high approval rate on role of China in the country (Aleksandra and Hanusch, 2010). Majority of Kenya at more than 60% have cited Chinese role in infrastructural development and investment in business as the reason for approving Chinese engagement in the country (Mogopodi *et al.*, 2016). Further, more than 75% of Kenyans perceive China to have good influence on the country's development aspirations, while 67% consider beneficial Chinese development assistance to the country (Mogopodi *et al.*, 2016, pp. 13–17). These findings are consistent with Sautman and Hairong, 2009, p. 757 study which also showed 64% Kenyans have positive attitude towards Sino-African

relations. Kenyan citizens' popular support for Sino-African relations is in line with Kenya's political elites who have also supported Chinese engagement in the country. However, although Kenya has had positive perceptions towards Chinese engagement in the country, in recent past, voice of discord against Chinese engagement in the country has emerged. There are group of Kenyans who have protested on the Chinese role in diverse areas of the economy.

6. Who is Against Chinese Engagement in Kenya and Why?

Anti-Chinese sentiments in Kenya have been more evident among Kenyans who have faced competition from influx of Chinese in the same line of business. Kenya has a relatively liberal economy that encourages foreign flow of capital in various sectors of the economy. In fact to enable foreign investment in the country, the Investment Promotion Act of Kenya 2004 sets a minimum of Ksh. 10 million for a foreign investor to invest in the country. This is in addition to Kenya being a member of WTO among other regional trade block bodies like Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), East Africa Community (EAC), etc. The government has overtime marketed the country as a friendly destination for foreign investors. It is against this background that the country has been open to foreign capital, both large and small scale businesses in the country.

Trade relation between China and Kenya is in favor of the former whose exports to Kenya entails finished industrial products like electrical appliances, agricultural machinery, drugs, building and construction materials, textiles among others. It is this high level of trade interactions that has also seen the entry of Chinese businesses from large, medium to small size enterprises in Kenya. An official association of Chinese enterprises in Kenya, Kenya China Economic and Trade Association (KCETA), indicates that there are more than 400 Chinese business enterprises in the country (Xinhua, 2019). These companies are also cited to have contributed local employment where more than 100,000 people out of local population have benefited (Xinhua, 2019). Despite these rosy figures on Chinese engagement in Kenya, the flow of Chinese businesses in the country has had its consequences on local businesses. It is on this front that anti-Chinese sentiments have been most vocal in Kenya as examined below.

Chinese traders have over time penetrated Kenya's small scale/petty, retail and wholesale trade in Nairobi's markets and other parts of the country. In Nairobi for example, Chinese merchants have set up shops in Gikomba, Kamukunji and Nyamakima markets which are major entry points for cheap imports of electrical, kitchen ware and second hand clothes in the country (Okoth, 2019a). Chinese businesses that seem more competitive than local traders would not be welcomed in city's hub for small scale and medium sized enterprise market. Local traders have argued that Chinese merchants had taken over the entire value chain of trade. Initially, Chinese were only involved in selling in bulk and wholesale trade, which later transitioned to retail trade thus undercutting local traders. This scenario is as demonstrated by one local trader in Gikomba as captured in news outlets:

It is not just here, we used to distribute to other towns like Kisii and Eldoret but the Chinese have also opened shops there, where they now distribute as well. It is getting worse, stocks are moving slower and traders are getting really frustrated (Okoth, 2019b).

Kenyan local traders are of the opinion that Chinese traders find easy to conduct their business in the country owing to their big capital finance and support from Chinese state. It is against this background that at one time Nairobi retailers staged a protest march against the infiltration of Chinese in local retail trade (Ngungi, 2018). They protested calling on government agencies to reign on influx of Chinese traders for fear of job loss and threat to local entrepreneurs.

Their leader under the umbrella of Kenya World Wide Importers and Traders Association (KWITA) opined that their trade which employed 'about 50,000 traders directly and a million more indirectly' was at verge of dying owing to influx of Chinese in the trade (Ngungi, 2018; Gisesa, 2012). The KWITA chairman argued that Chinese traders were undercutting them by taking control of the entire supply chain. He claimed that

They [Chinese traders] are all over in Gikomba market and Bishara Street. It is very hard for us to compete with them...if the Chinese are here as investors, let them go and start factories, and leave retail business for Kenyans (Ngungi, 2018).

In this kind of environment that tension has brewed to the extent there have been reports of violence between locals and Chinese merchants. It is reported that in downtown Nyamakima market, a Chinese trader is alleged to have slapped a Kenyan which resulted to damage of properties at a Chinese shop (Okoth, 2019b). Tension between local and Chinese traders in Kenya seems to take a similar scenario as has been reported in other African countries where Chinese have threatened local traders.

It is against this background that the Kenyan government has taken swift action to stop Chinese presence in local trade. A number of Chinese nationals found engaging in small scale trade have been arrested and deported to China especially when brought to the limelight of the authorities. In particular, a number of Chinese were widely captured in local media engaging in sale of second hand clothes in Gikomba market at the hindsight on uproar over the role of Chinese in local trade. It took the intervention of the minister to announce to the country that the Chinese found in Gikomba would be repatriated to their home country as captured in local media:

It is illegal for foreigners to engage in local trading in Kenya. We do not have a classification of foreign traders coming to Kenya to do hawking or local trading. We will escort them to the airport, bid them bye and ensure they have their dinner at their countries by tomorrow evening (Damary, 2019).

In cue with local traders, politicians have also been at forefront decrying on infiltration of Chinese traders. Politicians knowing they stand to gain politically from championing the cause of their electorate have at time called for government to restrict Chinese engagement in local businesses. They once called on government through the ministry of interior to kick out Chinese involved in petty trade, drivers or casual employment arguing such jobs are reserved for locals (Okoth, 2019b). Chinese have been able to penetrate in local small scale trade due to lax laws and improper implementation of existing laws. Immigrations and foreign investor laws seem easy to bypass by foreigners engaging in petty trade. Chinese seem to take advantage of weak immigration laws and the investment promotion law as on a minimum amount a foreign investor access Kenya and engage on trade. It is on this basis that the Minister has been quick to point out that there is no immigration visa that permits foreigners to engage in petty

trade. It is worth to note that, Chinese involved in petty trade are private individuals who came to the country out of own volition and far from the control of Chinese state.

Another front where there has been a heightened anti-Chinese sentiment in the country is in the importation of frozen fish from China. Kenyan players in fish industry have also had to contend with competition from China. Conventional fish traders who rely on fish from local sources especially from Lake Victoria have complained of stiff competition with entrant of imported Chinese fish. Local traders' complain have seemed at one point attracted the attention of the president. In a forum where the president had a meeting with Kenyan small scale enterprises (SMEs), President Kenyatta assured he would order to stop the importation of Chinese fish. He is quoted as:

I have been told about the imported fish from China. It is not possible that we import Chinese fish when our local traders are here (Mutoko, 2018).

The directive was not well received in some quarters especially from the Chinese embassy in Nairobi. The Chinese ambassador is quoted to have termed the directive as Kenya's declaration of trade war against China (Dijkstra, 2019). After a few weeks of consultation, the ban on Chinese fish was later lifted. The ban was lifted on the claim that local fish production does not meet local demand hence the need to allow Chinese fish import to meet the shortfall. More importantly, Chinese fish is considered cheap compared to locally sourced ones making them affordable to local consumers. Therefore, local importers and consumer stood to benefit from booming business and cheap fish, respectively. However, there have been concerns on quality of imported Chinese fish with some claims that imported Chinese fish does not meet basic health and sanitation standards (Olingo, 2019). Despite these misgivings, trade of imported Chinese fish is still on. If Kenya has had a genuine deficit of fish to meet local demands, anti-Chinese sentiments on imported fish seem not valid, rather it should be seen as a concern of local businesses in the industry trying to protect their niche market. This is a clear example of intended and unintended consequences of globalization and liberal trade.

Sentiments against Chinese engagement in Kenya have also been witnessed in Chinese built infrastructure especially on the viability of the SGR.

A number of scholars and commentators have argued against the project claiming it is unsustainable and has no value for money (Ndi, 2014; Manyora, 2017). This is compounded with secretive nature on the manner the project was designed and implemented. In other instances, anti-Chinese sentiments have come to public's limelight when Chinese nationals have had misconducts with locals or outright breaking the law. There are incidences where Chinese national in their diverse areas of activities in the country have been accused of racism against Kenya. A case in particular is where a Chinese national was captured on video making racist remarks against people of Kenya and the president of Kenya (Mwangi and Vidija, 2018). In almost similar version, a Chinese ran restaurant was accused of profiling Kenyans patronizing their establishment beyond certain hours of the day (Chege, 2015). These incidences elicited reactions and discussion among Kenyans who disapproved of these Chinese misconducts in the country. The two cases attracted prompt response from Kenya government that resulted in deportations, while Chinese embassy was quick to disassociate from the said Chinese nationals. From the discussion above, while role of China is highly welcomed in Kenya, there is evidence of potential disagreement that can generate resentment. As evidenced above, anti-Chinese sentiments seem to originate from particular sections of Kenyan who are not big, organized enough to generate widespread misgivings towards Chinese engagement in the country. The segmented nature of anti-Chinese sentiments has not been strong enough to undo general goodwill, attitude and perceptions that ordinary citizen hold towards Chinese engagements in Kenya. Finally, Sino-African relations and Chinese engagement in Kenya is taking different shape, and as demonstrated in this paper there is still a lot to explore on nature of their relationship from Chinese and African perspectives.

7. Conclusion

In a country that has had general positive perceptions on role of Chinese engagement, this paper sought to examine who is against Chinese engagement in Kenya and why. The study finds that anti-Chinese sentiments are most prevalent among Kenya's small scale traders whom the Chinese capital flow and trade has displaced. This has been made possible with

liberalized global economy order that promotes free movement of capital, trade and investment.

The established Chinese business enterprises have threatened and displaced a number of Kenya's small scale traders which has attracted anti-Chinese sentiments in the country. Weak and failure to enforce strict regulatory and legal framework that govern foreign involvement in small scale trade is what has enabled Chinese involvement in local trade which has threatened and displaced Kenya's small scale traders and resulted in rise of anti-Chinese sentiments. Beyond local traders' reactions, local politicians, academics and intelligentsias have also questioned the viability and sustainability of Chinese built infrastructure projects in Kenya. Further, Chinese misgiving is also evident from isolated incidences of Chinese misconduct against local populace across the country. However, despite the negative sentiments, Chinese engagement in Kenya is still welcomed by both political elites and the general public. The segmented nature of anti-Chinese sentiments has not been strong enough to undo general goodwill, attitude and perceptions that ordinary citizen hold towards Chinese engagement in Kenya. As a result of this, anti-Chinese sentiment has been evident among those who have been negatively affected with Chinese engagement in the country.

To stem the rise of anti-Chinese sentiments in Kenya, the study recommends government of Kenya to enforce relevant regulatory framework and laws with a view of safeguarding business domain. Equally, a win-win strategy that promotes working together between local and Chinese enterprises should be explored. This should be within broad framework of industry, sector and business linkages that would exist to benefit the parties involved. Finally, there is need for open, transparent and accountable processes to address misgivings towards Chinese built infrastructural projects.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for comments from Prof Myungsik Ham of Jilin University China, Oscar Otele Meywa and participants at the University of Nairobi, Department of Political Science's Annual Conference on China Africa Relations 2019. Any errors and or omissions are mine.

References

- Aleksandra Gadzala and Marek Hanusch (2010), "African Perspectives on China Africa: Gauging Popular Perceptions and their Economic and Political Determinants," Afrobarometer, Working Paper No. 117, <http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Working%20paper/AfropaperNo117.pdf>.
- Allan Olingo (2019), "Why You Should Worry about Chinese fish," Nation Media Group, February 8, <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Chinese-fish-in-Kenya/1056-4971848-q0lgaa/index.html>.
- Andrea Dijkstra (2019), "Chinese imports 'driving fishermen to despair' B.B.C Business News," <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-47611076>.
- Anna Maria Mayda (2006), "Who is against Immigration? A Cross-Country Investigation of Individual Attitudes toward Immigrants," *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 88(3): 510–530.
- Aullo E. Abuya (2012), "Kenya – China Bilateral Foreign Relations: 1963–2012," Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Nairobi Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies.
- Barry Sautman and Hairong Yan (2009), "African Perspectives on China-Africa Links," *The China Quarterly*, 199: 728–759.
- Ben Lampert and Giles Mohan (2014), "Sino-African Encounters in Ghana and Nigeria: From Conflict to Conviviality and Mutual Benefit," *Journal of Current, Chinese Affairs*, 43(1): 9–39.
- Björn Kauder and Niklas Potrafke (2015), "Globalization and Social Justice in OECD Countries," *Review of World Economics/Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv*, 151(2): 353–376.
- Brian Ngungi (2018), "Nairobi Retailers Demand Reining in of the Chinese," Business Daily, July 27, <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/news/Traders-oppose-Chinese/539546-4683560-1n726fz/index.html>.
- Chris Alden and Alves Cristina (2008), "History & Identity in the Construction of China's Africa Policy," *Review of African Political Economy*, 35(115): 46.
- Dan Haglund (2009), "In it for the Long Term? Governance and Learning among Chinese Investors in Zambia's Copper Sector," *The China Quarterly*, 199: 635.
- David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton (1999), "Globalization," *Global Governance*, 5(4): 483–496.
- David Ndi (2014), "New Railway is not Value for Money," Daily Nation Newspaper, <https://mobile.nation.co.ke/blogs/New-railway-is-not-value-for-money-/1949942-2207034-format-xhtml-bprsh4/index.html>.
- Dibie Michael (2017), "China becomes single largest contributor of Africa's FDI - Report," <http://www.africanews.com/2017/05/04China-becomes-single-largest-contributor-of-africa-fdi-report/>.

- Romain Dittgen (2015), "Of other Spaces? Hybrid Forms of Chinese Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 44(1): 43–73.
- Edwin Okoth (2019a), "Chinese Traders in Gikomba now Kicked Out of the Country," *Business Daily*, June 13, <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/economy/7-Chinese-traders-in-Gikomba-now-deported/3946234-5156562-mfh6t6/index.html>.
- Edwin Okoth (2019b), "The Chinese in Gikomba," *Business Daily*, Thursday, June 10, 2019, <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/news/The-Chinese-in-Gikomba/539546-5151338-wj86it/index.html>.
- Fei-Ling Wang and Esi A. Elliot (2014), "China in Africa: Presence, Perceptions and Prospects," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 23(90): 1012–1032.
- Giles Mohan and Ben Lampert (2013), "Negotiating China: Reinserting African Agency into China—Africa Relations," *African Affairs*, 112(446): 92–110.
- Hanson H. Gordon, Kenneth Scheve and Matthew J. Slaughter (2007), "Public Finance and Individual Preferences Over Globalization Strategies," *Economics & Politics*, 19(1): 1–33.
- Hany Besada (2013), "Assessing China's Relations with Africa," *Africa Development/Afrique et Développement*, 38(1–2): 81–105.
- Helen V. Milner and Dustin H. Tingley (2011), "Who Supports Global Economic Engagement? The Sources of Preferences in American Foreign Economic Policy," *International Organization*, 65(1): 37–68.
- Herman Manyora (2017), "This NTV Commentator's Arguments are Going Viral for Right Reasons," *The Nairobi News*, September 24, <http://nairobi.news.nation.co.ke/news/ntv-commentators-arguments-going-viral-right-reasons/>.
- Howard Shatz, ed. (2016), "Strategic Choices Abroad: China," in *U.S. International Economic Strategy in a Turbulent World* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation).
- Ian Taylor (2008), "Sino-African Relations and the Problem of Human Rights," *African Affairs*, 107(426): 63–87.
- Joseph E. Stiglitz (2002), *Globalization and its Discontents* (London: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press).
- Larry Hanauer and Lyle J. Morris (2014), "African Reactions to Chinese Engagement," in *African Reactions to Chinese Engagement, Chinese Engagement in Africa: Drivers, Reactions, and Implications for U.S. Policy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation).
- Lekorwe Mogopodi, Anyway Chingwete, Mina Okuru and Romaric Samson (2016), "China's Growing Presence in Africa Wins Largely Positive Popular Reviews," *Afrobarometer Dispatch* No. 122, p. 21, http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Dispatches/ab_r6_dispatchno122_perceptions_of_china_in_africa1.pdf.
- Marcus Power and Giles Mohan (2008), "Good Friends & Good Partners: The 'New' Face of China-African Co-operation," *Review of African Political Economy*, 35(115): 5–6.

- Mario Biggeri and Marco Sanfilippo (2009), "Understanding China's Move into Africa: An Empirical Analysis," *Journal of Chinese Economic and Business Studies*, 7(1): 31–54.
- Martin Wolf (2005), *Why Globalization Works* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).
- Melanie Mwangi and Patrick Vidija (2018), "Chinese's 'monkeys' slur angers Kenyans," *The Star Newspaper*, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2018-09-06-chineses-monkeys-slur-angers-kenyans/>.
- Mumbi Mutuko (2018), "President Uhuru Kenya Bans Chinese fish from Kenyan Market," *Kenyans* 16 October 2018. www.kenyans.com/news/33994-president-uhuru-kenyatta-bans-Chinese-fish-kenyan-market.
- Mwanawina Inyambo (2008), "China-Africa Economic Relations: The Case of Zambia," A study commissioned by the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC).
- Nita Rudra (2005), "Globalization and Strengthening of Democracy in the Developing World," *American Journal of Political Sciences*, 49(4): 704–730.
- Njoki Chege (2015), "Only 'Loyal' African Patrons are Allowed in Chinese Restaurant after Sunset," *Daily Nation Newspaper*, March 23, <https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/nairobi/Chinese-restaurant-no-African-after-5pm/-/1954174/2662642/-/svixtnz/-/index.html>.
- Nyambega Gisesa (2012), "Chinese Hawkers Rattle Retail Market," *Saturday Nation*, August 18 <https://www.nation.co.ke/News/Chinese+hawkers+rattle+retail+market+/-/1056/1482616/-/gsr0rn/-/index.html>.
- Patroba Hillary (2012), "China in Kenya: Addressing Counterfeit Goods and Construction Sector Imbalances," Occasional Paper No. 110 China in Africa Project. The South African Institute of International Affairs (SAII).
- Peter Kragelund (2009), "Knocking on a Wide-Open Door: Chinese Investments in Africa," *Review of African Political Economy*, 36(122): 479–497.
- Peter Temin (1999), "Globalization," *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 15(4): 76–89.
- Phineas Bbaala (2015), "Emerging Questions on the Shifting Sino-Africa Relations: 'Win-Win' or 'Win-Lose'?" *Africa Development/Afrique et Développement*, 40(3): 97–119.
- Rita Damary (2019), "Go Back Home: Matiang'i Orders Deportation of Chinese Gikomba Traders," *The Star*, July 12, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2019-06-12-matiangi-orders-deportation-of-chinese-gikomba-traders/>.
- Sammy Mwangi Waweru (2018), "Politicization of Sino Africa Relations in Kenya and Zambia," *The Korea Journal of Chinese Affairs*, 10.
- Simplice A. Asongu (2016), "Sino-African Relations: A Review and Reconciliation of Dominant Schools of Thought," *Politics & Policy*, 44(2): 351–383.
- World Bank (2002), *Globalization, Growth and Poverty: Building an Inclusive World Economy* (Washington, DC: World Bank).

Xinhua (2019), "Kenya Lauds Chinese Enterprises' Help for Local Communities," http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-08/27/c_138343139.htm.

Young Joon Lim (2012), "Anti-Chinese Sentiment in Zambia and the African Continent: Comparative Coverage of the Phenomenon by Zambian, Chinese, and South African Newspapers," *International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Research*, 2(7): 549–553.