
KIU Interdisciplinary Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

DEPENDENCY OR AGENCY? PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBALISATION AND CHINA-AFRICA RELATIONS

Hakeem Olatunji Tijani

Political and Governance Policy Department, Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) P.M.B. 5, UI Post Office, Oyo Road, Ojoo, Ibadan, Nigeria. Email: unjitijani2000@yahoo.com, Mobile: +2348128284444 | +2348056061697

Citation: Hakeem O. Tijani (2025). Dependency or agency? psychosocial perspectives on globalization and China-Africa relations. *KIU Interdisciplinary Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 6(2), 178-190.

ABSTRACT

Globalisation has intensified China's engagement with Africa, reshaping the continent's economic, political, and cultural landscape. Yet, the psychosocial dimensions of this relationship remain underexplored. This paper examines China-Africa engagement through an interdisciplinary lens, integrating sociological theories of dependency with psychological perspectives on identity, trust, and resilience. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative, case-study approach, analysing policy documents, media narratives, and community perceptions in Kenya, Nigeria, and Ethiopia. Findings reveal how globalization transforms African social structures and community identities while generating ambivalent psychological responses - empowerment, anxiety, and negotiation of agency. The paper argues that Africa's engagement with China should be understood not only in terms of material development but also in terms of the psychosocial dimensions that define its place in the global order. This paper, therefore, recommends that, among others, psychosocial factors should be taken into account by governments when formulating policies. To maintain legitimacy and sustainability, debt negotiations, infrastructure development, and industrialization strategies must take into account community notions of identity, fairness, and trust. Again, local communities ought to be given the authority to actively engage in globalization processes. This entails encouraging communication between Chinese and African actors, supporting grassroots resilience projects, and advancing cultural exchange activities.

Keywords: China-Africa relations, Dependency theory, Globalisation, Identity and trust, Psychosocial perspectives.

INTRODUCTION

China has overtaken traditional Western players to become Africa's biggest commercial partner over the last 20 years, changing the continent's global economic orientation (Alden & Alves, 2020). This involvement is a part of globalisation, which is redefining African societies through infrastructure, capital, and cultural exchanges. According to Dike & Owusu (2024), China has established its footprint through programs like the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), providing grants, loans, and infrastructure-for-resources agreements that are

now essential to Africa's growth path. These connections, according to Otele (2020), are more than just transactional; they reflect Africa's repositioning within the international system and the changing global power dynamics. The political and economic facets of China-Africa relations have been thoroughly studied in the literature, with particular attention paid to trade balances, debt diplomacy, and geopolitical competitiveness (Kaplinsky & Morris, 2008). For instance, according to Kaplinsky & Morris (2008), export-oriented

growth in SSA is severely hampered by China's (and, to a lesser extent, India's) emergence into the global economy as a major manufacturer. This is evident from SSA's experience about two decades ago in the apparel and textile industries, which are frequently characterized as the initial stage of the expansion of export-oriented production.

It is important to question these development narratives concerning China-Africa relations; such narratives need to be properly constructed to reveal their proclivity for development, especially in international relations, where the self-interests of states are prioritized. This is because the narratives and counternarratives arising from it may blur our understanding of the relationship that exists between China and Africa. Typically, Soule (2024) sums up that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which combines many narratives about connectedness, South-South cooperation, new forms of development, and China's infrastructure-led development model, is an illustration of such a narrative. The nation's leaders use this narrative in their discourse with developing countries, which are subsequently enticed by it and attempt, at least partially, to imitate it. Chen's (2024) brief, which Soule highlighted, illustrates this dynamic by looking at the railway industry as an illustration of how African states may effectively use China's infrastructure finance to accomplish their goals of nation-building and structural reform. Once more, as demonstrated by Soule and Chen's infrastructure adoption example, Benabdallah's (2024) analysis of narrative rivalry demonstrates how China's influence in Africa is both materially significant and discursively challenged in both local and global contexts:

Development has become a site of competition for narratives, counter-narratives and alternative narratives. In this context of global rivalries, Lina Benabdallah's brief flips the question and asks: What are Africa's China narratives? A survey by Afrobarometer between 2019 and mid-2021 across 34 countries showed that 62% of Africans see

China's influence in Africa as positive, similar to the 60% who said so in the case of the US. This suggests that US-China rivalry may not constitute an either-or dilemma for ordinary African citizens, but rather a win-win situation. Similarly, the data also goes against the 'democratic backsliding' narrative promoted by several Western powers in light of China's growing and multifaceted engagement in Africa. Surveyed Africans considered China's economic influence to be largely positive but also responded that they themselves largely adhere to democratic norms (Soule et al, 2024:8).

Despite the above illustrations on China-Africa relations, little is known about the psychosocial aspects of this interaction. African identity, feelings of dependency, and trust in foreign alliances are all affected by China-mediated globalisation in ways that influence collective agency and community resilience (Adisu et al., 2010). These psychosocial realities are crucial because they shape how globalisation is perceived in daily life, impacting cohesiveness, legitimacy, and the long-term viability of Africa's international integration. This article intends to investigate China-Africa engagement by blending sociological theories of reliance with psychological perspectives on identity, trust, and resilience. By setting Africa's experience within globalisation, the study illustrates how Chinese participation causes contradictory psychosocial responses - empowerment, anxiety, and negotiation of agency. The approach contributes to a more comprehensive view of globalisation's influence on Africa, expanding beyond material growth to encompass psychosocial realities that determine Africa's place in the global system.

Methodologically, the paper employs a qualitative, interpretive, and multidisciplinary approach. It uses case studies of Chinese-funded initiatives in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Nigeria, based on community views, media narratives, and policy papers. The psychosocial aspects of identity, trust, and dependency are identified using thematic analysis,

and the results are positioned within sociological and psychological theory. By ensuring that globalisation is analysed as both an economic phenomenon and a lived psychological experience, this African-centred epistemological perspective bridges disciplinary divisions and enhances the conversation on China-Africa relations.

Review of related studies

Scholars claim that most research on China-Africa relations have focused on political and economic issues (Alden & Alves, 2020; Kaplinsky & Morris, 2008). According to them, China is Africa's largest trading partner, with a focus on infrastructure development, resource extraction, and debt diplomacy. Dike & Owusu (2024) argued that China's engagement is altering the trajectory of Africa's development, with debates centred on whether this represents an opportunity for South-South cooperation or a new form of dependence. Given that loans, grants, and infrastructure-for-resources are the primary tactics used to court Africans, Dike & Owusu's analysis of the identified publications using the antecedents-phenomena-consequences framework suggests that China's presence in Africa is primarily driven by political and economic factors.

While some academics consider the relationship as potentially beneficial for the continent's economic development, others accuse China of merely pursuing its self-serving interests in Africa. The scholars arrived at the conclusion that, to achieve its goals of rapid economic growth and global dominance, the Chinese government devised a plan to establish political and economic ties with Africa. They also assert that China saw numerous prospects in the partnership and considered Africa as an economically underdeveloped region with a rapidly expanding population. According to Dike & Owusu (2024), this is an allegation of China's economic motivation for establishing ties with Africa. Chiyemura (2024) revealed that since the economy opened up following Xiaoping's reforms and, more recently, the Belt and Road Initiative, it

became clear that the expanding economy needed a steady and guaranteed supply of natural resources. For Africa, the increase in demand for these resources created a market opportunity. Based on the so-called "non-interference" policy and assertions of reciprocal advantages, he asserted that Chinese authorities have also expressed a desire to support economic development in Africa. Chinese authorities hinted in several policy comments and visits to African nations that China was a good partner because, having just emerged from underdevelopment, it knew how to aid in the continent's development and could transfer appropriate technology and know-how.

According to the People's Republic of China (2023), the President of China asserted that to work together to create an open and inclusive global economy, it is vital to remove barriers rather than build walls and to open up rather than close off. He advocated rejecting the winner-take-all strategy, conducting thorough consultations for cooperative contributions for mutual gain, and creating an open global economy where developing nations are better able to participate in the global division of labour and share the benefits of economic globalization. We should foster inclusivity and reciprocal learning among civilizations, overcome cultural estrangement through exchanges, and offer fresh contributions to the advancement of humanity.

Scholars (Boston University Global Development Policy Centre & African Economic Research Consortium, 2026; Selassie, Richter Hume, & Schipke, 2025; Mumuni & Murphy, 2018; Shan et al., 2018; Wang & Zou, 2014) supported the aforementioned Chinese economic national interest. They lamented that the main economic goals of China's involvement in Africa are to obtain raw materials for domestic industrial use, find energy sources to power the country's quickly growing industries, gain access to a sizable market

and inexpensive labour, and counteract domestic competitive pressures.

Sotubo and Cooper (2025) offered a thorough political overview of China's political strategic engagement with Africa. They contended that a decline in Western approval due to undemocratic practices and human rights violations in African nations, as well as a decline in West African relations at the end of the Cold War, has allowed China to deepen its ties with African nations. China offered a no-strings-attached alternative that merely asked African governments to support China's basic sovereignty interests, whereas the West placed conditions on loans and aid given to African states. Because China is not seen as meddling in the internal affairs or sovereignty of African nations and does not base its engagement on the advancement of democratic institutions or the defence of human rights, African leaders generally embrace Chinese engagement. With different degrees of success, African leaders use their connections with China to pressure the West into making concessions and treating them better. Some African governments have openly declared a policy of leaning eastward toward China and away from the West, and China offers an alternative to a rules-based order dominated by the West.

Although useful, these assessments frequently give precedence to geopolitical narratives and macroeconomic statistics over actual experiences. Globalization has been studied in terms of social change and cultural flows in addition to economics. According to research, Chinese immigration to Africa and the formation of Chinese companies have changed the social dynamics of the region, sometimes promoting cooperation but also causing conflict over labour practices and cultural differences (Adisu et al., 2010). Globalization studies contextualize these changes amid broader movements in global power, emphasizing that China challenges Western dominance and promotes alternative forms of development (Held & McGrew, 2007). Nevertheless, psychological

viewpoints on how communities negotiate identity and trust in this setting are rarely incorporated into these investigations.

The psychosocial aspects of China-Africa relations are still not well understood, despite increased interest in the topic. Few studies examine how China-mediated globalization impacts African identity, trust perceptions, and sentiments of dependency. According to postcolonial psychology, these factors are important because they influence agency, cultural resilience, and collective memory (Fanon, 1963; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986). Community psychology further highlights the need of understanding stress, resilience, and adaptability in communities impacted by fast infrastructure change (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). This gap underlines the necessity for interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate sociology and psychology to capture the entire impact of globalization on Africa. By concentrating on the psychosocial aspects of China-Africa cooperation, this article fills the identified gap. By knitting together dependency theory, postcolonial psychology, globalisation studies, and community psychology, it offers a comprehensive foundation for studying identity, trust, and dependency. By going beyond material development and incorporating psychosocial aspects that characterize Africa's position in the global system, it advances a more nuanced understanding of the effects of globalisation.

Theoretical Framework

Dependency Theory

Dependency theory is a crucial viewpoint for understanding structural differences in China-African relations. According to the thesis, which was first put forth by writers like Frank (1967) and Amin (1972), global economic systems perpetuate dependency by positioning developing countries as suppliers of raw materials while wealthier countries control capital and technology. Dependency theory raises concerns about whether Chinese investment represents a break from Western dependency or a

new form of structural subordination when it comes to China-Africa relations (Kaplinsky & Morris, 2008). This idea highlights the conflict in globalization between exploitation and empowerment.

Postcolonial Psychology

The psychological effects of colonial legacies and the continuous negotiation of identity, trust, and agency in postcolonial cultures are highlighted by postcolonial psychology, which has its roots in the writings of Fanon (1963) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986). This viewpoint examines how African populations view themselves regarding China—as equal partners or subservient actors—in the context of China-Africa relations. It also analyses how globalization mediated by China affects communal memory, cultural resilience, and the psychological negotiation of sovereignty (Otele, 2020).

Globalisation Studies

Studies of globalisation place China-Africa ties in the context of broader shifts in the global balance of power. According to academics, globalization is not only economic but also cultural and political, reshaping social structures and identities worldwide (Held & McGrew, 2007). According to Tijani (2015), globalisation is an unavoidable phenomenon that controls world politics and makes Northern governments stronger while undermining Southern states. He emphasizes how the polarization of income, poverty, and inequality caused by globalization weakens Southern states while strengthening Northern states through marketisation, liberalisation, and territorialisation. Yet again, Tijani (2022) expresses the negative impact of globalisation, such as the rise of religious extremism and its consequences for security and the destabilising force. These changes are best shown by China's engagement with Africa, which brings new paradigms of South-South cooperation and challenges Western supremacy (Alden & Alves, 2020).

Community Psychology

A micro-level perspective is offered by community psychology, which focuses on how communities perceive and adjust to globalization. In situations of fast change, it looks at psychosocial processes like stress, resilience, and group coping (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Chinese-funded infrastructure projects in Africa frequently upend established societal institutions, generating both opportunities and concerns. Community psychology aids in the analysis of how local populations deal with these shifts, striking a balance between psychological stress and empowerment, and how resilience develops in the face of the demands of globalization (Adisu et al., 2010).

Methodology

Research Design

This paper adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and multidisciplinary design. A qualitative method enables a detailed investigation of psychosocial factors, including identity, trust, and dependency, given the complexity of globalisation and China-Africa ties. While the multidisciplinary framework incorporates sociology, psychology, and political science to represent the complex nature of globalization, the interpretive position emphasizes meaning-making within African contexts.

Case Selection

The article employs a comparative case-study method, focusing on three African countries:

Kenya: The Standard Gauge Railway, a major project financed by China, represents modernization but raises questions about reliance on debt.

Nigeria: Infrastructure and oil collaborations draw attention to problems with trust in governance as well as economic potential.

Ethiopia: China-funded industrial parks show how cultural conflicts coexist with job growth.

These cases were chosen due to their varied regional settings, differing levels of Chinese involvement, and unique psychosocial reactions. When combined, they offer a fair perspective for

examining identity, reliance, and trust throughout Africa.

Data Sources

The study draws on multiple qualitative sources to ensure triangulation:

Policy documents: Agreements from the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and national development plans.

Media narratives: African and Chinese media coverage to capture public discourse and perceptions.

Secondary reports and interviews: Existing studies, NGO reports, and community-level accounts of Chinese-funded projects.

This multi-source strategy strengthens validity by combining official narratives with grassroots perspectives.

Analytical Approach

Thematic analysis is used to examine the data, concentrating on the psychosocial categories of dependency, trust, and identity. Themes are interpreted using the previously described theoretical frameworks after being inductively coded from textual sources:

Dependency theory for structural inequalities.

Postcolonial psychology for identity and agency.

Globalisation studies for contextualising power shifts.

Community psychology for stress, resilience, and adaptation.

This analytical interlace ensures that findings are not only descriptive but also theoretically grounded.

Epistemological Stance

The article adopts an African-centred epistemology, prioritizing local voices and experiences in interpreting globalization. By foregrounding psychosocial realities, the research challenges dominant economic narratives and contributes to a more holistic understanding of China-Africa engagement.

Findings and Analysis

Sociological Dimensions

Social Stratification and Inequality

The social results of Chinese investment in Africa have been inconsistent. Infrastructure developments and trade possibilities frequently benefit urban people and elites, but they may marginalize rural communities (Kaplinsky & Morris, 2008). Dependency theory's concern with uneven integration into global systems-where benefits accrue disproportionately to those already positioned within power structures-is reflected in this stratification. Ogroh (2024) asserts that Chinese engagement with the African continent has indeed brought economic inequalities cum social stratification. In his words, several African nations, unemployment, and societal instability have increased as a result of indigenous businesses being displaced by Chinese goods and labour abuses. The nature, structure, and long-term consequences of China-Africa ties must be thoroughly examined in light of these dynamics:

Chinese engagement has facilitated infrastructural growth, boosted trade volumes, and offered new financing avenues; the benefits remain disproportionately tilted in China's favour. Beijing's strategic interest in Africa is largely driven by access to raw materials and markets for its surplus industrial output. This asymmetry has contributed to the displacement of local industries, increasing unemployment, and heightened socio-economic vulnerabilities. The paper concludes that without robust national policies, regional cooperation, and continental frameworks such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Africa risks entrenching a neo-colonial economic structure (Ogroh, 2024:292).

Rural-Urban Impacts

Infrastructure projects like Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway have altered traditional social structures, made migration easier, and enhanced connections between rural and urban areas (Alden & Alves, 2020). Because these innovations disrupt established community networks while simultaneously creating opportunities for

movement and trade, they raise questions regarding resilience and flexibility in rural cultures. In a study undertaken by Murphy, Carmody, Grant, and Owusu (2019), the developmental trajectories shaped by China's presence in African cities were studied. It demonstrated how African cities are being shaped by Chinese investments, commodities, and political influence, as well as the potential for more equitable and distributive forms of development. It is unlikely that such relationships can be effectively used to address chronic poverty, reduce inequality, strengthen the livelihoods of the poor, and/or improve the prospects for industrial diversification and upgrading in cities in the absence of improved and more proactive engagement by African municipalities/states. The chapter concludes with suggestions for particular interventions.

Cultural Exchange and Social Cohesion

The inflow of Chinese workers and enterprises has transformed local cultural dynamics. For instance, cross-cultural exchanges in Ethiopia's industrial parks can lead to both cooperation and conflict (Dike & Owusu, 2024). Sociologically, these interactions force African communities to reconcile identity and unity in the face of the cultural flows brought about by globalisation. Africa's reliance on China for trade and infrastructure is reminiscent of past colonial trends, according to dependency theory. Relations between China and Africa are increasingly seen as both a challenge and an opportunity for social cohesiveness and cultural exchange. Even though economic cooperation has grown quickly, postcolonial psychology and dependency dynamics show how these connections may unintentionally prevent broader cultural unity. African countries frequently purchase manufactured commodities while exporting raw materials, which limits cultural reciprocity and strengthens structural dependency (Chen & Nord, 2017). Chinese companies sometimes import their own staff instead of hiring locals, which is a clear example of this mismatch in labour policies. For

example, Chinese-owned businesses in Zambia's mining industry have come under fire for distancing themselves from local populations, which limits chances for cross-cultural interaction (Olateju & Adebisi, 2025). African customs run the risk of becoming eclipsed by Chinese cultural exports as a result of such activities, which sustain a one-way flow of influence.

These relationships also arouse ideas of neo-colonialism when viewed through the prism of postcolonial psychology. China's influence in infrastructure projects is perceived by many Africans as an extension of external control, which discourages cultural openness and breeds mistrust. Lu & Huang (2026) lament on Kenyan artist Michael Soi's work that imagines China-in-Africa's potent cultural codes. According to Lu & Huang, Soi criticizes Chinese soft power using seduction-related clichés. Beer bottles in scenes of seduction and the unevenness of Chinese and African caricatures highlight issues of consent and agency. In these situations, "friendship" and "win-win cooperation" are neither equal nor mutually beneficial. African people, resources, and sovereignty are violated, objectified, and emasculated by the Chinese state. When African workers experience marginalization in Chinese-led initiatives, identity issues arise, perpetuating colonial-era psychological inequalities.

This tension is exemplified by Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway project, which undermined social cohesiveness and reinforced feelings of exclusion due to the substantial reliance on Chinese workers. These illustrations show how postcolonial mindsets and economic dependence interact to influence cross-cultural exchanges. Although there are clear practical benefits to China-Africa relations, if cultural interchange does not keep up with economic cooperation, social differences could worsen. Instead of reciprocal enrichment, the long-term result could be cultural uniformity and weaker social cohesion if conscious measures are not made to balance these links.

Psychological Dimensions

Trust and Fairness

The psychological elements of justice and trust have a significant impact on China-Africa relations. Africa may be seen to have benefitted from its engagement with China; trust, which is important in international relations, may be lost as a result of the debt that Africa has incurred, a situation that sees China as benefiting maximally from the relationship while Africa is at the receiving end of the spectrum. Therefore, China is seen not as a partner in progress, but as a neo-colonial player. Although investing in Africa opens doors for the continent's development, the absence of trust has eroded the benefit. Infrastructure and investment projects foster goodwill, but worries about debt, exploitation, and unfair labour practices undermine confidence, according to academics. African opinions of Chinese engagement are ambiguous. While some communities perceive China as a partner offering opportunities unavailable in Western models, Africans understand these signs as acknowledgment of their agency rather than conquest; this promotes trust.

Ironically, others express doubt about justice and transparency (Adisu et al., 2010). This ambivalence is framed by postcolonial psychology as a trust negotiation influenced by past experiences of exploitation. Kalu (2021) states that China has based its interactions with African nations on a distinctive form of public diplomacy that is embodied in the language of non-intervention in Africa's internal affairs, all the while pursuing its own interests. In contrast to conventional Western development approaches, according to Wang, Nhieu & Lu (2025), which frequently link loans and aid to standards for governance or policy change.

Identity Negotiation

African communities are forced to rewrite their identities as a result of globalization mediated by China. Chinese participation in infrastructure and oil projects in Nigeria has spurred discussions regarding cultural autonomy and sovereignty

(Otele, 2020). Fanon's (1963) concern with postcolonial identity formation - where self-definition is challenged by outside influence—is reflected in these negotiations.

Stress, Resilience, and Adaptation

Rapid infrastructure change is linked to psychosocial stress, which is highlighted by community psychology. Communities in Ethiopia and Kenya worry about cultural upheaval, debt, and relocation. However, adaptation tactics, such as group mobilization and the reassertion of local agency, lead to resilience (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). These answers highlight how globalization can be both a cause of stress and an enabler of resilience. Explaining the stress, resilience, and adaptation that African people experience as a result of their continent's relationship with China, there is an interplay of challenges and agency. That African people experience stress due to the debt owed by their leaders at various tiers of the government. The fact that this debt affects African development is a form of stress that African people complain about every day. In other words, the economic dependence, as caused by unfavourable trade balance, debt, among others, is witnessed by many African countries. This is a source of frustration and stress to the people. Despite these frustrations, African people have been resilient, as evident in their continued solidarity with the South-South solidarity.

Revisiting Dependency Theory

The results show that both continuity and disruption in dependency relationships are reflected in China-Africa engagement. On the one hand, worries about structural subordination raised by Frank (1967) and Amin (1972) are echoed by debt anxiety and unequal advantages across social strata. However, Chinese-funded initiatives offer jobs and infrastructure that suggest avenues for agency beyond Western dependency patterns (Kaplinsky & Morris, 2008). The ambivalence of globalisation is shown by this duality: dependency and empowerment coexist. African communities'

psychosocial reactions to postcolonial psychology and identity negotiation demonstrate the field's applicability. Identity is continuously fought against outside influence in postcolonial circumstances, as Fanon (1963) contended.

African societies are forced to rethink sovereignty and cultural autonomy as a result of Chinese engagement, creating conflicting views of justice and trust. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1986) focus on cultural resilience is relevant here, since communities use African-centred narratives to reinterpret globalization in order to express agency. Shifting Power Dynamics and Globalization Studies: Globalization studies place China-Africa ties within larger shifts in global power. China's rise presents new paradigms of South-South cooperation and challenges Western supremacy (Held & McGrew, 2007; Alden & Alves, 2020). However, the psychosocial results indicate that multipolarity does not necessarily ensure African agency. Instead, how communities negotiate identity, trust, and dependency within the flows of globalization determines agency. Therefore, psychosocial resilience and economic indicators both influence Africa's place in the global order.

Community psychology, which focuses on stress, resilience, and adaptation at the micro level, sheds light on how African populations perceive globalization as both a challenge and an opportunity. According to Nelson and Prilleltensky (2010), rapid infrastructural development causes worry about debt, displacement, and cultural disruption. However, resilience arises through adaptive tactics like social mobilization and reassertion of local agency. These psychological processes show that rather than being imposed from above, globalization is lived, negotiated, and fought at the community level.

Africa's Agency in Globalization focuses on Africa's agency in globalization by synthesizing social and psychological aspects. African communities actively negotiate identity and trust despite the persistence of dependent structures, exhibiting resiliency in the

face of outside forces. This agency presents Africa as a co-creator of globalization and contradicts notions of passive victimization, albeit in conflicting and ambiguous contexts. Thus, the psychosocial lens enhances our comprehension of China-Africa interactions by demonstrating that Africa's future in globalization rests not just on economic progress but also on cultural negotiation and psychosocial resilience.

Case Studies

Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway: Symbol of modernization vs. debt anxiety

China funded and built the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), which is frequently hailed as a representation of regional integration and modernity. It has facilitated trade and travel by improving the connection between Nairobi and Mombasa (Alden & Alves, 2020). Critics contend that Kenya runs the risk of becoming dependent, yet the project has also caused widespread concern about debt sustainability (Kaplinsky & Morris, 2008). Psychosocially, the railway represents ambivalence: the conflict between empowerment and reliance is shown in the coexistence of pride in modernization and fear of exploitation.

Nigeria's Oil and Infrastructure Partnerships: Trust issues and dependency debates

Nigeria's interactions with China are mostly focused on infrastructure and oil. Chinese companies have established themselves as important collaborators in Nigeria's growth by investing in power plants, roads, and refineries (Dike & Owusu, 2024). However, there are still problems with trust, especially when it comes to governance and transparency. Because oil income is linked to outside parties rather than local empowerment, communities frequently view Chinese engagement as strengthening reliance (Adisu et al., 2010). As Nigerians struggle with identity and sovereignty in the face of globalization, this psychologically feeds scepticism and ambivalence.

Ethiopia's Industrial Parks: Employment opportunities vs. cultural tensions

Ethiopia's modernization has been greatly aided by China, which has funded and built industrial parks that create jobs and draw in international capital. These initiatives are touted as chances for employment creation and economic development (Otele, 2020). However, cultural disparities in labour methods and communication approaches have caused friction between Ethiopian workers and Chinese supervisors. From a psychosocial standpoint, these parks emphasize the contradictory aspects of globalization: they offer stress through identity issues and cultural negotiation while simultaneously empowering people through work.

Synthesis

China's involvement in Kenya, Nigeria, and Ethiopia exemplifies the conflicting nature of globalization. Projects related to infrastructure and industrialization represent opportunity and modernity, but they also cause psychosocial concerns about debt, trust, and cultural identity. These case studies demonstrate that Chinese-mediated globalization is not just economic but also profoundly psychosocial, influencing how African communities view themselves, negotiate agency, and adjust to outside influences.

Conclusion

Interplay of Sociology and Psychology in Shaping Africa's Agency

The case studies show that economic or political perspectives alone are insufficient to comprehend China-Africa collaboration. Sociologically, initiatives like Ethiopia's industrial parks and Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway alter mobility, stratification, and cultural cohesiveness. Psychologically, they elicit mixed responses – pride in modernization, concern over debt, cynicism about fairness, and resilience in adaptability. Africa's agency in globalization is both structural and psychosocial, as evidenced by this interaction: communities navigate dependency pressures while negotiating identity and trust. Instead of emerging as a given, agency is a

contentious process moulded by cultural reinterpretation and group resilience.

Implications for International Relations and Globalization

China's engagement with Africa indicates deeper developments in international relations. China's ascent brings new paradigms of South-South collaboration, thus Western dominance is no longer the only factor defining globalization (Alden & Alves, 2020). However, the psychosocial results imply that empowerment is not a direct result of multipolarity. Rather, how communities understand and manage the effects of globalization determines African agency. For foreign connections to be legitimate, trust, identification, and reliance are essential. Globalization must consider psychosocial issues in addition to economic metrics if it is to be viable.

Theoretical Reflection: New Dependency or Pathway to Agency?

An uncertain reality is suggested by the facts. Dependency theory's concern with structural inequality is echoed, on the one hand, by Kenyan debt concerns and Nigerian trust challenges (Frank, 1967; Amin, 1972). Kenya's railroad and Ethiopia's industrial parks, on the other hand, offer avenues for employment and modernization. African societies reinterpret sovereignty and cultural autonomy in the face of globalization, according to postcolonial psychology, which frames this ambivalence as identity negotiation (Fanon, 1963; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986). Additionally, community psychology demonstrates that even in the face of stress, resilience develops via adaptation (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). China's involvement thus reflects a duality that characterizes Africa's psychosocial experience of globalization: it is both a repetition of reliance and a possible route to agency.

Africa's Future Beyond Economic Growth

This article has highlighted that Africa's future in globalization depends not only on economic progress but also on psychosocial resilience. Chinese-funded initiatives like Ethiopia's industrial

parks, Nigeria's oil ventures, and Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway represent opportunity and modernization, but they also raise concerns about debt, trust, and cultural identity. These psychosocial aspects are crucial because they influence how communities negotiate agency, view globalization, and maintain resilience in the face of outside pressures. Economic gains run the risk of being compromised by psychological stress and social alienation if these aspects are not addressed. China's relationship with Africa is ambivalent because it is both a means of achieving agency and a perpetuation of reliance. Its duality illustrates the paradox of globalization: resilience develops by negotiation, and empowerment and exploitation coexist. Africa's position in the global order will be determined by its ability to maintain mental resilience, assert cultural identity, and foster trust in international alliances in addition to its material progress.

Recommendations

- 1) Scholars and policymakers should adopt African-centred frameworks that foreground psychosocial realities. Dependency theory, postcolonial psychology, globalization studies, and community psychology provide valuable insights, but they must be adapted to prioritize African voices, experiences, and epistemologies.
- 2) Governments should integrate psychosocial considerations into policy-making. Debt negotiations, infrastructure planning, and industrialization strategies must account for community perceptions of trust, fairness, and identity to ensure legitimacy and sustainability.
- 3) Local communities should be empowered to participate meaningfully in globalization processes. This includes fostering dialogue between African citizens and Chinese actors, promoting cultural exchange programs, and supporting grassroots resilience initiatives.
- 4) Future research should continue to bridge sociology and psychology, examining how globalization affects not only economic structures but also psychosocial well-being. Comparative studies across African regions can deepen understanding of identity negotiation, trust dynamics, and resilience strategies.

References

- 1) Adisu, K., Sharkey, T., & Okoroafo, S. C. (2010). The impact of Chinese investment in Africa. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 5(9), 3–9. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v5n9p3> (doi.org in Bing)
- 2) Alden, C., & Alves, A. C. (2020). *China and Africa: Building peace and security cooperation on the continent*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- 3) Amin, S. (1972). *Accumulation on a world scale: A critique of the theory of underdevelopment*. Monthly Review Press.
- 4) Benabdallah, L. (2024). *Going beyond binary narratives of China-Africa relations*. APRI – Africa Policy Research Institute. [DOI]: <https://doi.org/10.59184/sa.044>.
- 5) Boston University Global Development Policy Center, & African Economic Research Consortium. (2026). *China-Africa economic bulletin, 2026 edition*. Boston University.
- 6) Chen, M., & Nord, R. (2017). China's trade with Africa: Patterns and sustainability. *Journal of Development Studies*, 53(3), 345–360.
- 7) Chen, Y. (2024). *Borrowing for belts and roads: The double edge of China's infrastructure lending in Africa*. APRI – Africa Policy Research Institute. [DOI]: <https://doi.org/10.59184/sa.044>.
- 8) Chiyemura, F. (2024). *China-Africa relations in a changing world*. Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9780429282348-29/china-africa-relations-changing-world-frangton-chiyemura
- 9) Dike, M. C., & Owusu, R. A. (2024). China–Africa relationships: A systematic literature review and future directions. *Africa Journal of Management*, 10(4), 464–499.

- <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322373.2024.2421709>
- 10) Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove Press.
 - 11) Frank, A. G. (1967). *Capitalism and underdevelopment in Latin America*. Monthly Review Press.
 - 12) Held, D., & McGrew, A. (2007). *Globalization theory: Approaches and controversies*. Polity Press.
 - 13) Kalu, K. 'Respect' and 'agency' as driving forces for China–Africa relations. *Place Brand Public Dipl* 17, 336–347 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-020-00178-z>
 - 14) Kaplinsky, R., & Morris, M. (2008). Do the Asian drivers undermine export-oriented industrialization in SSA? *World Development*, 36(2), 254–273. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2007.06.020> (doi.org in Bing)
 - 15) Lu, V. C., & Huang, M. (2026). *The orienting work of “culture” and Africa–China as method*. African Studies Review. Cambridge University Press.
 - 16) Mumuni, S. M., & Murphy, S. A. (2018). China's "Going Global" policy in Africa: An exploratory overview of an evolving policy framework. *Journal of Asian Research*, 2(1), 11–36. <https://doi.org/10.22158/jar.v2n1p11>.
 - 17) Murphy, J. T., Carmody, P., Grant, R., & Owusu, F. (2019). The impact of China on African cities: Potentials for development. In K. Bezdecny & K. Archer (Eds.), *Handbook of emerging 21st-century cities* (pp. 106–127). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781784712280.00013>.
 - 18) Nelson, G., & Prilleltensky, I. (2010). *Community psychology: In pursuit of liberation and well-being*. Palgrave Macmillan.
 - 19) Ngugi wa Thiong'o. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Heinemann.
 - 20) Ogroh, S. E. (2024). *The Political Economy of China–Africa Relations: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Development*. *International Journal of Advanced Studies in Economics and Public Sector Management*, Volume 12, Number 2.
 - 21) Olateju, O., & Adebisi, D. (2025). China–Africa relations: A critical analysis of neo-colonialism and development. *Social Science and Humanities Journal*, 9(7), 1423.
 - 22) Otele, O. M. (2020). China–Africa relations: Interdisciplinary questions and theoretical perspectives. *The African Review*, 47(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1821889X-12340019> (doi.org in Bing).
 - 23) Selassie, A. A., Richter Hume, A., & Schipke, A. (2025). Africa-China linkages: Building deeper and broader connections. *International Monetary Fund*. <https://doi.org/10.5089/9798400239182.071>
 - 24) Shan, S., Lin, Z., Li, Y., & Zeng, Y. (2018). Attracting Chinese FDI in Africa: The role of natural resources, market size and institutional quality. *Critical Perspectives on International Business*, 14(2/3), 139–153. <https://doi.org/10.1108/cpoib-11-2016-0055>.
 - 25) Sotubo, O., & Cooper, C. A., III. (2025). *Chinese engagement with Africa: A RAND research primer*. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA2989-1.html
 - 26) Soulé, F. (Ed.). (2024). *Exploring the role of narratives in China–Africa relations*. APRI – Africa Policy Research Institute. [DOI]: <https://doi.org/10.59184/sa.044>
 - 27) Springer. (2025). *Revisiting dependency in the twenty-first century: Africa–China relations*. SpringerLink.
 - 28) Tijani, H.O. (2022). Religious Fundamentalism, Globalization and National Security in Nigeria. *Ilorin Journal of Business and Social Sciences (IJBSS)*, Volume 24, Number 2, Pg. 50-68.
 - 29) Tijani, H.O. (2018). Globalization, International Order and Human Rights. *African Journal of*

Governance and Development, Volume 7, No. 2, December, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

- 30) Wang, C.-N., Nhieu, N.-L., & Lu, C.-J. (2025). Chinese influence in Africa by integrating regret theory and multi-criteria decision analysis. PLOS ONE, 20(3), e0336681. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0336681>
- 31) Wang, J., & Zou, J. (2014). China goes to Africa: A strategic move? Journal of Contemporary China, 23(90), 1113–1132. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2014.898902>.
- 32) Xi, J. (August 26, 2023). Full Text: Remarks by Chinese President Xi Jinping at China-Africa Leaders' Dialogue. The State Council, The People's Republic of China. Retrieved from https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202308/26/content_WS64e9365cc6d0868f4e8ded72.html