

Assessing the Socio-Economic Impact of the Chinese Transfer of Values, Skills, and Technology in Infrastructural Development in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the socio-economic impact of Chinese principle of transfer of values, skills and technology in infrastructural development in Kenya. This study was based on dependency, modernization and power theories which informed the conceptual framework of the research. This study adopted descriptive research design. Data was collected by the use of Questionnaires, interview guides and focus group discussion and desk top review. Qualitative and quantitative techniques were used for data analysis and presentation. The data obtained was presented in bar graphs, tables and percentages. The study found that during Chinese infrastructural development in Kenya, the informal sector benefited from China's skill transfer. The study concluded that Kenya-China bilateral relations has impacted positively on Kenya's international relation which is indicated by increased Foreign Direct Investments into Kenya by specifically Western states. The researcher recommends that Kenyan government should formulate a policy that will ensure that the technological skills impacted on Kenyan workers by the Chinese construction firms should be improved and included in the Kenyan schools' curriculum.

Keywords: Globalization, Socio-Economic Impact, Infrastructural Development

I. INTRODUCTION

Since implementing its "going out policy" in the late 1990s, China has shown a greater interest in the poor world (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2012). China presents its interactions with developing nations as an expansion of the partnerships formed by the April 2011 founding of the Non-Aligned Movement (Agbebi & Virtanen, 2017). According to Zeleza (2008), the expansion of economic relationships is achieved through the use of Chinese development funding. Opportunities in banking, commerce, and investment have arisen as a result of China's willingness to work with African nations on financial matters and its companies' investments in riskier parts of Africa, particularly in light of the global decline in Western foreign direct investment (Agbebi & Virtanen, 2017).

Nonetheless, the conversation often treats African states as a single, homogenous entity, oversimplifying their diversity. According to Moyo (2009) and Sanghi and Johnson (2016), perceptions of Africa are typically overly generalized due to its intricate historical context. According to Moyo (2009), there are notable differences in China's relations with different African countries, with some exhibiting a stronger historical relationship than others. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to assume that general themes apply to all African states.

In order to comprehend the reasons behind Kenya's preference for Chinese development money for infrastructure development since gaining independence, it is essential to take into account the unique historical connections that each African country has with China. Mutual benefit, equality, and the transfer of technologies, talents, and values to peripheral states are the guiding concepts of Chinese economic diplomacy. The goal of this soft power approach is to win over allies like Kenya. According to Procopio (2018), debt forgiveness, concessional loans, and zero-interest loans are all part of China's economic diplomacy with Kenya. There is a dearth of study on various kinds of infrastructure projects, despite studies looking at the influence of Chinese-financed roads on Kenya's infrastructure development (Mbaye, 2010).

The existing body of research on the relationship between Kenya and China is limited, but it reveals an imbalanced dynamic that heavily favors China. This imbalance is characterized by a lack of transparency in the negotiation and execution of agreements, which suggests a lack of comprehensive comprehension regarding the terms

and circumstances associated with the development of infrastructure (Wanjiku, 2018; Africa Policy Institute, 2014; Mbaye, 2010; Onjala, 2008). According to the World Bank (2013), Kenya's economic policies are influenced by various factors, including local problems, globalization, and liberalization. The country's Vision 2030 strategy is to facilitate the transformation of Kenya into an industrialized nation-state (Government of Kenya [GoK], 2008).

Given the aforementioned setting, the primary aim of this research is to assess the socioeconomic implications of the Chinese approach to technology, value, and skill transfer within the framework of infrastructure development in Kenya. The primary inquiry driving this study is: What is the influence of the Chinese philosophy of transferring values, skills, and technology on the social and economic dimensions of infrastructural development in Kenya?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in the framework of Modernization theory, as expounded by Hussain et al. (1981) and Lenin (1964). Based on this theoretical framework, strategies designed to enhance the quality of life for individuals living in poverty frequently entail the distribution of knowledge and information pertaining to more effective methods of production. According to this theoretical framework, Africa, particularly Kenya, has the potential to improve its infrastructure by engaging in bilateral relations with China, a nation that is more economically advanced.

According to a study carried out by Mlambo et al. (2016), the economic relationship between China and Africa is expected to mirror the economic progress and advancement observed in China. The acquisition of development funding from China has provided a potential avenue for engaging in negotiations to obtain advantageous conditions with international financial institutions. Academics such as Moyo (2009), Brautigam (2009), and Corkin (2016), in addition to African politicians who have expressed support for Chinese financial assistance in several industries, have embraced this viewpoint. African leaders saw China's engagement in the African infrastructure sector as a potential alternative development model that Africa may adopt, considering China's track record of development marked by substantial infrastructure growth (Fourie, 2014).

Within the framework of the aforementioned discourse, this study endeavors to examine the utilization of Modernization theory as a means to comprehend the prospective advantages of Kenya's bilateral association with China in terms of promoting its infrastructure. The hypothesis suggests that the sharing of sophisticated knowledge and effective production methods can facilitate the progress of a nation, in line with the anticipated outcomes of the ongoing economic partnership between China and Africa. Furthermore, the research examines the perspectives of African leaders who perceive China's engagement as a feasible option for attaining infrastructure development, utilizing insights from researchers who have investigated this standpoint.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Socio-Economic impact of Chinese Principle of Transfer of Values, Skills and Technology in Infrastructural Development in Kenya

Bashir (2015) conducted an in-depth analysis of the consequences associated with the Chinese policy of technology and skill transfer in recipient nations. The findings of the study indicate a substantial increase in the scope of business activities undertaken by Chinese enterprises in Africa during the previous ten years. China's total foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa had a significant increase from less than US\$1 billion in 2004 to almost US\$40 billion by the conclusion of 2015. In addition to the mining industry, Chinese investments in Africa have expanded to encompass many industries such as construction, manufacturing, financial services, and information and communications technology. China has emerged as the primary economic partner of Africa, exceeding all other nations in terms of the extensive and comprehensive nature of its engagement throughout the continent.

The evaluation undertaken by Alden and Davies (2006) examined China's involvement in Africa, revealing a significant amount of disagreement around this issue. The issue of the extent to which Chinese firms facilitate knowledge transfer and foster the development of local talents in host nations has been a topic of contention among media outlets, analysts, and policymakers. There is a contention among scholars that Chinese firms in Africa exhibit limited involvement in local skill development and knowledge transfer. This is attributed to their significant dependence on imported labor from China.

In a study conducted by Corkin (2016), an examination was made on Chinese firms operating in Africa. The findings revealed that Chinese-owned enterprises demonstrated proficient implementation of local hiring standards.

The findings of the study also indicated that the majority of Chinese expatriates in Africa were highly skilled individuals who played a crucial role in imparting training and knowledge to their African counterparts. The qualitative research conducted delved deeper into the degree to which Chinese firms contribute to the development of skills and technology in African nations. The findings of this research indicate promising indications that China's involvement has facilitated the transfer of technology and expertise. Corkin (2016) conducted a qualitative study that investigated the impact of institutional and political factors on skill development in Chinese firms. The study drew upon field research undertaken in Angola, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Zambia to get valuable insights.

Chen et al. (2016) conducted a study to examine the impact of Chinese firms on the enhancement of local talent development in African countries. The researchers observed a lack of empirical literature pertaining to this particular topic. Sun (2015), in their different studies conducted in Nigeria and Kenya, and provided empirical evidence that supports this observation. The extant literature comprehensively illuminates the complex and diverse aspects of China's influence on the enhancement of indigenous talents and technological advancement in Africa, offering valuable perspectives that are especially pertinent to the specific circumstances of Kenya's infrastructure progress.

2.2.2 The Transfer of Values, Skills and Technology

According to Haroz (2011), the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) of China in Africa has the potential to result in a range of unintended consequences. Nevertheless, an important potential consequence of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the bilateral relations between Kenya and China is the possibility for Kenyan enterprises to gain exposure to modern technology and enhanced skills. The aforementioned exposure has the potential to yield favorable outcomes in terms of enhancing the productivity and competitiveness of enterprises in Kenya. China has assumed a prominent role in imparting specialized training and advanced technology to Kenya. China successfully fulfilled its commitment to enhance Africa's professional workforce by delivering training to a total of 16,000 professionals across diverse sectors between 2000 and 2006. Furthermore, in 2012, China provided training to an additional 15,000 professionals in various sectors, further contributing to the development of Africa's skilled workforce.

According to Li (2016), the recurring strikes carried out by Kenyan workers provide a significant obstacle to the process of technology transfer within the context of China-Africa ties. Chinese enterprises encountered challenges in effectively settling labor disputes in a harmonious manner with their Kenyan employees, notwithstanding their adherence to local labor rules. The impartation of technological knowledge played a pivotal role in the advancement of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), wherein the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) facilitated the establishment of railway operation and management as well as engineering training programs in Kenya.

According to Nantulya (2019), an emphasis has been placed on Kenya's involvement in the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative, namely in the construction of the 609-kilometer-long Standard Gauge Railway (SGR). This railway is intended to establish connectivity between Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and South Sudan. The Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), which has an estimated cost of \$4 billion, is mostly funded by Eximbank, while the Kenyan government contributes the remaining 10% of the financing.

The assessment conducted by Abdirahman (2020) regarding the infrastructure diplomacy between China and Kenya highlights the cooperative aspect of the SGR project, which serves as a demonstration of the amicable relationship between China and Kenya. The building project was a collaborative effort between the Kenya Railway Corporation and the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC).

Wambare (2017) conducted an analysis on the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), with particular attention given to its early completion in May 2017, a remarkable 18 months ahead of the projected schedule. The proficiency of Chinese construction workers in adhering to planned schedules, exemplified by their work on the Tan-Zam Railway during the 1960s, was emphasized.

Pius (2016) conducted a comparative analysis to examine the Chinese railway building projects in Tanzania and Kenya. The findings of the study revealed that the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) had made a commitment to transfer technical expertise to the local population. The railway operation would be initially entrusted to Chinese laborers for duration of five years. Subsequently, there would be a concerted effort to teach over 15,000 Kenyan individuals in the skills required for its operation and maintenance. This particular endeavor signifies a notable change in the Chinese standpoint, as they transition towards assuming the role of a development partner.

According to Githaiga et al. (2019), it has been argued that the Chinese government has extended financial assistance to several of Kenya's ambitious projects, constituting more than 50% of Kenya's overall bilateral debt. According to Githaiga (2021), the Stand Gauge Railway is recognized as the most significant collaborative project

between China and Kenya. Its primary objective is to foster economic development in Mombasa, Nairobi, and other interconnected urban centers. However, the initial stages of its operation were marred by financial difficulties.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research utilized a descriptive research design, with a particular emphasis on Kenya. The study specifically examined the counties of Nairobi, Kiambu, and Lamu, which are home to infrastructure projects funded by China. The target population comprised of officials from prominent organizations, including the Kenya Investment Authority, the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure Development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, the National Treasury, the Kenya Bureau of Statistics, the Kenya Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Sports, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Youth Affairs.

A total of 384 individuals were selected for the sample through a combination of purposeful and random sampling procedures. The collection of primary data was facilitated through the utilization of questionnaires, an interview guide, and a focus group discussion guide. The secondary data utilized in this study was obtained from a variety of sources including books, scholarly journals, newspapers, magazines, and other pertinent resources.

The responses from the questionnaire and interviews were methodically organized and assigned codes in accordance with the research questions and objectives. The data was subjected to analysis utilizing both descriptive and analytical methodologies. The analysis of quantitative data received through surveys was conducted using version twenty-seven of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The data obtained from secondary sources of information was subjected to content and thematic analysis in order to extract significant insights.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Impact of China-Kenya Relations on Kenya’s Infrastructure development

The participants were requested to provide their viewpoints regarding the influence of the Kenya-China relationship on Kenya's foreign policy. The results are depicted in Figure 1.

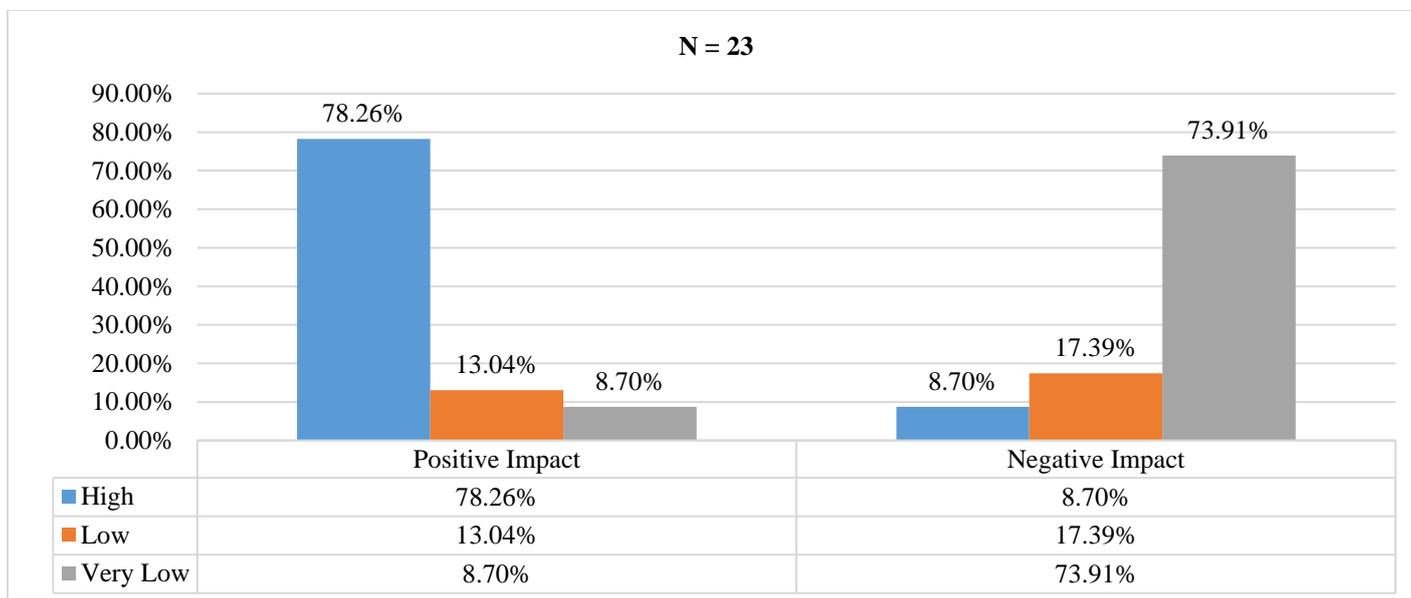


Figure 1
Views from Respondents on Impact of Kenya China Relations on Kenya’s International Relations

According to the data presented in Figure 1, it can be observed that a majority of the respondents, specifically 18 individuals representing 78.26 percent of the total sample, expressed agreement with the notion that the bilateral relationship between Kenya and China has yielded positive outcomes. The aforementioned dynamic posed a threat to Western powers, hence necessitating the enhancement of diplomatic relations with Kenya. According to the research



findings, a total of three participants, accounting for 13.04% of the sample, perceived the impact to be low. Additionally, two participants, representing 8.70% of the sample, characterized the impact as extremely low. The individuals who assigned a poor rating to the impact indicated that it lacked tangibility and seemed to be distant in nature.

In contrast, a significant majority of respondents, comprising seventeen individuals (73.91%), held the belief that the adverse effects of the Kenya-China relations on Kenya's international relations were of minimal magnitude. The authors contended that the diplomatic links between Kenya and China did not have a detrimental impact on Kenya's diplomatic connections with Western nations. They supported their claim by highlighting the recent surge in Kenyan exports to the United States in contrast to China. A total of four individuals, accounting for 17.39% of the sample, reported low ratings for the detrimental effects. Conversely, two participants, representing 8.70% of the sample, indicated high ratings for the bad effects.

Furthermore, the findings obtained from the focus group talks were documented. A representative associated with the Confucian Institute at Nairobi University expressed the following viewpoint during a focus group discussion on the implications of Kenya-China relations for Kenya's foreign relations:

The Western world perceives Kenya's increased emphasis on Eastern matters as a strategic betrayal in East Africa. The investment of China in Kenya's infrastructure poses a significant challenge to Kenya's diplomatic ties with Western nations. As a result, the United States dispatched its most powerful person, President Obama, in opposition to the Chinese high-profile visits. Representatives to Kenya. This visit occurred shortly after the Chinese prime minister signed several trade agreements during his recent trip to Kenya (Administrator, Nairobi, 18/5/2023).

Another respondent at the Kenyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed similar views:

The economic diplomacy of Kenya has undergone significant changes during the administrations of President Daniel Moi, Mwai Kibaki, and Uhuru Kenyatta. In contrast to Moi's policy of prioritizing good neighborliness over economic development, Kibaki's administration focused on expanding funding sources to encompass additional economic sectors. A "Look-East Policy" was implemented by President Uhuru's administration, which facilitated greater Chinese funding for large-scale infrastructure projects in Nigeria. In contrast, Kenya-China bilateral relations were strengthened during President Uhuru's administration" (Director, 3/5/2023 Nairobi).

The findings indicate a predominantly favorable perception of the effects of the Kenya-China relationship, accompanied by an acknowledgment of its significance in shaping global diplomatic dynamics as posited by Kioko (2011). The existence of divergent perspectives emphasizes the necessity for nuanced evaluations and draws attention to the complex character of international relations within the framework of Kenya's interactions with China (Sautman & Hairong, 2009).

4.2 Impact on Kenya's Political Economic and Cultural Relations

The participants were requested to provide their viewpoints regarding the Kenya Impact on Kenya's Political Economic and Cultural Relations. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Respondents' Level of Agreement on China's Impact on Kenya's Political Economic and Cultural Relations

	Yes	No
Political Relations	14 (60.86%)	9(39.13%)
Economic	16(69.56%)	7 (30.43%)
Cultural	3(13.04 %)	20(86.95%)

(N=23)

According to the data shown in Table 1, it can be observed that a majority of the respondents, specifically 16 individuals accounting for 69.56% of the total, acknowledged the influence exerted by China on Kenya's economic relationships. The aforementioned acknowledgement indicates a tension in Kenya's association with Western countries, characterized by China's significant investments in Kenya's economy and a decrease in investments from Western nations. In relation to cultural interactions, a notable majority of 20 participants (86.95%) recognized the language barrier as the primary hindrance, highlighting its enormous influence on the cultural connections between Kenya and China.

Regarding political relationships, a mere three participants (13.04%) expressed the belief that China's heightened engagement with Kenya had influenced political relations with Western nations. The aforementioned sentiment was reiterated by an assistant director at the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructural Development during an interview who stated that:

“Kenya continues to depend on traditional donors for liquid money donations due to the condition that China's donation is contingent on the infrastructure in question” (Assistant director, 29/6/2023, Nairobi).

The findings of the study indicate that Kenya continues to rely extensively on bilateral funding from traditional donors. Moreover, despite the increased funding from China, the country's association with Western nations has not experienced a substantial decline (Mlambo, 2022).

4.3. Transfer of Values to Kenya's Site Workers on Chinese Firms

The study determined the extent to which Kenyan site laborers gained value from Chinese firms, and the findings are depicted in Figure 2.

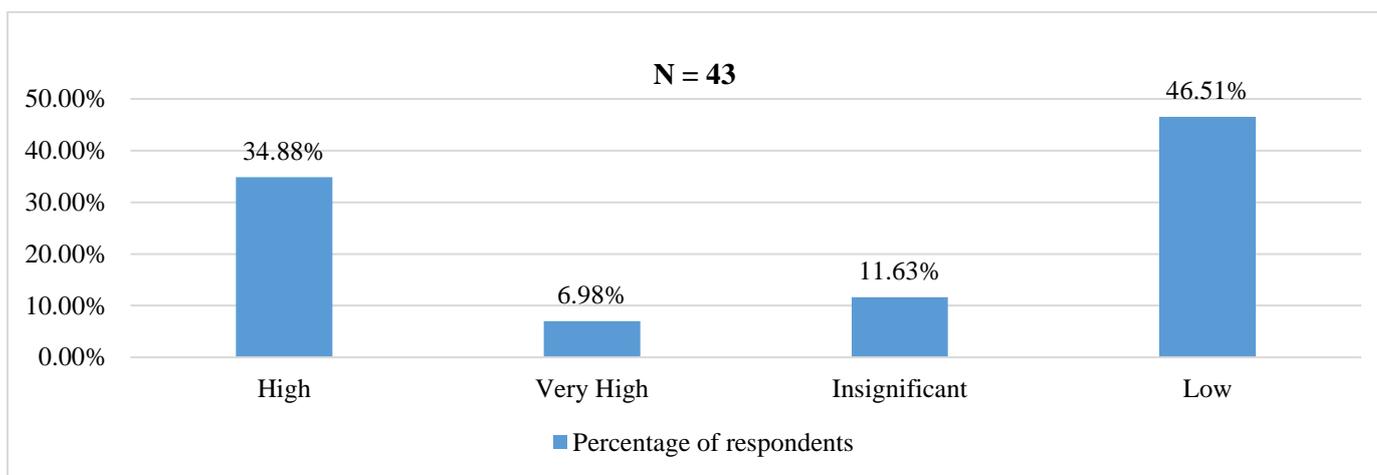


Figure 2

Views from Respondents on Degree of Values and Skills Gained from Chinese Firms

Figure 2 demonstrate that a notable majority of the Kenyan site workers, precisely 20 out of 43 (46.51%), had the perception that they acquired minimal values from their Chinese counterparts. The respondents' low evaluations were indicative of this perception. Several workers mentioned concerns such as harassment and abrupt termination, even during periods of illness, as contributing elements to their diminished ratings. In contrast, 15 participants (34.88%) expressed a high rating for the values acquired from the Chinese. The aforementioned characteristics encompassed elements such as effective time management, deference towards elders, collaborative efforts, and adherence to truthfulness, all of which are congruent with the principles espoused by Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.

Nevertheless, a considerable proportion of the participants conveyed diverse perspectives regarding the importance of the acquired values. Three participants (6.98%) expressed insignificance towards the values, whilst five participants (11.63%) evaluated them as being of great significance.

The findings indicate that Kenyan site workers hold a diverse perspective on the values acquired from their Chinese colleagues, encompassing both favorable and unfavorable aspects of the intercultural interaction within the professional environment. However, Benjelloun (2015) advises against forming premature hypotheses regarding the ease of cross-cultural interchange across diverse ethnic groups.

According to Lin et al. (2021), Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism have been recognized as the three philosophical traditions that have exerted considerable effect on Chinese foreign policy. The fundamental premise underlying Chinese orientation is deeply based in Confucianism, which places emphasis on the need of leading via personal example rather than employing coercive methods of persuasion. According to a Foreign Service officer at the Chinese Embassy, China strategically employs Buddhism as a means to bolster its global standing, particularly in response to unfavorable depictions in the international media.

During a focus group discussion, a scholar affiliated with the Confucius Institute at Nairobi University substantiated this claim by asserting that:

The Chinese foreign policy of a harmonious world was profoundly influenced by the Taoist principle of departing in harmony. Cooperation and harmony stand as the preeminent traditional Chinese values. Illustrative instances encompass Chinese principles such as cooperation, mutual benefit, and win-win (Nashieo, senior director, 4/5/2023).

This disclosure unequivocally delineates the paramount Chinese principles of collaboration and reciprocal advantage, which foster bilateral associations that transcend a zero-sum dynamic. A Foreign Service officer at the Chinese Embassy in Kenya stated the following in an interview:

Buddhism is utilized by China to enhance its international reputation. The foreign media frequently present China in an unfavorable light. Illustratively, Tibetan self-immolations, human rights violations, suppression of Christian underground churches, pollution, corruption, and food safety controversies are a few examples (Foreign service officer" Nairobi, 4/5/2023).

This observation suggests that Buddhism is frequently regarded as a religion that promotes harmony. China may be employing this tactic to evade Kenya's suspicion. However, there is a contention that Chinese corporations operating abroad do not adhere to the principles and policies of their home government (Brown, 2012).

4.4. Transfer of Skills and Technology to Kenya's Informal Sector

Respondents were asked about skill and technology transfer to workers in a Chinese firm. The results are as shown in Table 2.

Table 1

Level of Agreement by respondents on Transferring of New Skills and Technology to Kenya's Workers by Chinese Firms

Level of Agreement	Are transferring	Are not transferring
Chinese construction firms in infrastructure	88(61.53%)	55 (38.46%)
Bridge construction by Chinese firm	84(58.74%)	59(41.25%)

(N=143)

From Table 2, it is evident that 88 of the respondents (61.53%) admitted having acquired new skills from Chinese firms engaged in infrastructure developments in Kenya. Fifty-five (55) of them (38.46%) however, felt no skills were being learnt. Pertaining bridge constructions, 84 of the site workers (58.74%) stated that they had learnt new skills against 59 (41.25%) who said that they had not learnt any skills.

Furthermore, the study sought to find out the types of skills learnt and the results were as shown on Table 3:

Table 2:

Skills Learned by Kenyan Employees on Selected Chinese Construction Firms.

	Skills Learned	Percentage
1	Civil Engineering	5(4.16%)
2	Concrete walling	5(41.16%)
3	Truck driving	6(5%)
4	Environmental Health (e.g., dumping)	5(41.16%)
5	Laboratory technology/soil analysis	6(5%)
6	Leveling	5(4.16%)
7	Loading	5(4.16%)
8	Machine operator (e.g., shovel, grader)	30(25%)
9	Automotive engineering	31(25.83%)
10	Metal works (metal binding, steel fixing)	5(4.16%)
11	Welding	5(4.16%)

(N=120)

In accordance to Table 3, it was established that out of the 120 site workers under the study, a majority of 31 site workers (25.83%) affirmed that they had acquired skills in automotive engineering followed closely by machine operation at 30 (25%). Truck Driving and Laboratory Technology/Soil Analysis skills were the third highly learnt

skills on Chinese construction firms in Kenya. This revelation was represented by 6 of the respondents (5%) in each category. Civil Engineering, concrete walling, Environmental health (e.g., environmental guidelines on dumping), levelling, loading, metal work (metal binding and steel fixing) and welding skills were also mentioned as having been learnt by a smaller percentage of 5 (4.16%) each.

This study therefore established that these were the major skills applied for capacity building by Chinese project(s)/investments to Kenya's informal sector. These findings align with the findings by Brautigam (2009) who argued that Chinese aid packages also contribute significantly to Africa's capacity building through their training programs, technical assistance in the disciplines of health and agriculture and with their scholarships and cultural exchange programs. From this assertion it can be argued that Kenya is likely to achieve its vision of becoming an industrialized country through its bilateral relations with more developed countries like China.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

The study concluded that China-Kenya bilateral relations has impacted positively on Kenya's international relation which is indicated by increased Foreign Direct Investments into Kenya by specifically Western states.

5.2. Recommendation

Both governments should collaborate to ensure that some of the skills and knowledge being impacted on Kenyans are improved on by revising the Kenyan syllabus and equipping more Kenyan schools with the required infrastructure. This will make more impact from China's principle of transfer of values and technology. Chinese firms engaged in infrastructure development in Kenya should also work in harmony with their government to ensure transfer of values and technology to Kenyan employees.

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