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The Nature of Economic Engagement between China and Liberia in the Period 1977-1990

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Abstract:

Purpose: The research was done to analyse the nature of economic engagement between China and Liberia in the period 1977-1990.

Methods: The study used descriptive research design. The study was carried out in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia. The study had a population of 100 personnel. The researcher organized three (3) focus group discussions of mainly ten to fifteen participants from three different institutions and a member of personalities was interviewed. Selected informants and focus group discussions were chosen based on their willingness to participate. The study used both purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used because the participants were considered by the researcher to be having relevant information about the study. The snowball sampling was used because the research topic involves researching sensitive information which may not be easily availed to the public. The informants were sampled from specific sections in the ministries, Chinese construction sites, and market places. Other informants were gotten from their referrals. The research instruments used in the study consisted of questionnaires, interview guides, and focused group discussion guide. The questionnaire was open-ended which allowed the adequate probing of information from the respondents. The collected data was coded and analyzed thematically. Secondary data was subjected to critical textual analysis and interpretation to test the relevance and accuracy of the document. Descriptive statistic such as percentages and frequencies were used to describe basic data, and other analyzed data was also reported in the narrative, coupled with the first-hand quotation from the primary data.

Results: The findings indicated that trade volume between China and Liberia picked up in 1997. Trade between both countries from 1997-2003 totalled US\$407.14 million with exports at US\$269.9 million while imports at US\$137.34 million.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The researcher recommended that it is necessary for the Liberian government to create a comprehensive strategy that would effectively balance its relations with China and the West. In addition, the Liberian government needs to unleash its full potential and establish a policy for long-term development that corresponds with the interests of its citizens

Keywords: *Economic engagement, China and Liberia*

1. Introduction

The emergence of China has become one of the significant features of the era of capitalist globalization, and its presence has changed the international economic system of politics (Nolan, 2012). The rise of China on the global stage has become a major debate in the 21st century. The economy of China in 1949 was directed toward the Western nations, and when the contention of the Soviet bloc began during the 1960s, the Chinese economy was additionally directed toward the Eastern bloc alliance by 1978. According to Qian (2000), the Chinese economy was one of the most tied economies in the world but the government of China decided to expand its foreign trade in welcoming foreign direct investment in 1979 and since, China's economy has experienced significant growth. China is emerging as the 21st century's economic superpower (Diaouari, 2004). Although not yet a superpower, China has propelled itself to both challenges and the existing status quo that has brought China into direct competition with the remaining superpowers in the world. China, in 1978 was at the 32nd place and 10th in 1997, according to Dellios (2005) in the intentional trade China is the fourth largest trading nation in the world. Second to the US is China, with a GDP of 13% of world output (a purchasing power parity) (Dellios, 2005).

The transition in China's economy from 1979 to 2000 has taken a different path from those countries in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (Qian, 2000). Dellios (2005) argues that China, an inheritor of 5000 years of civilization, is also the world's fastest growing economy in this present age, having developed a totalled of 9.5% annually for the past 20 years. According to Maddison (1998), the reform period in China's economy was one of the much reduced international tensions. China's high growth rate, low labour costs and a huge emerging market have attracted the world's highest foreign

direct investment (FDI). China into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in December 2001, had also become one of the most open economies in the international market, with average tariff dropping from 41% in 1992 to 6% after its accession to WTO (Dellios, 2005). According to Fung and Lau (1997) regions that China trades with benefit from cheaper verities of imported goods, raw materials and intermediate products. China also provides a large and developing export market. Sen (2010) observes that China's export grew at an annual average rate of nearly 22% over 2005-2007. However, the slump in the world economy affected its export, especially with its close links with the USA, which had been reducing more than 20% on an average since 2000. During the period of 2009, the value of goods exported was the about US\$ 1.2 trillion down, 16% year-on-year, while the value of products imported was US\$ 1.0 trillion, decreasing by 11.2% from the previous year (Sen, 2010).

Prassad (2004) notes that China's trade with the world has increased; the proportion and geographical setting of China's trade have changed the global economy. In addition, the share of imports by industrial economies accounted for by China had increased, and exports to those markets have become more diversified. China is a major contributor to the world's economy, and it had strengthened the commodity prices, it is now the world's largest importer of raw materials, including iron ore, aluminium, cooper, coal and cement and also, the second consumer of oil after the USA (Lotta, 2009).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

China and Liberia have had a long history of over 40 years of bilateral relations. Bilateral relations between both countries were established in 1977 after Liberia terminated 20 years of bilateral relations with Taiwan. Relations between China and Liberia after the establishment of bilateral relation in 1977 began to experience significant growth during the administration of William R. Tolbert, including the signing of bilateral agreements like the '1978 technical and economic cooperation agreement' and the '1979 trade agreement'. These agreements between China and Liberia opened up formidable economic relations for both countries.

In 1980, the death of William R. Tolbert ushered in the regime of Samuel K. Doe. The administration of Samuel K. Doe maintained relations between China and Liberia until 1989 when Doe administration decided to shift its diplomatic relations to Taiwan, which led to China severing diplomatic relations with Liberia. In 1991, both countries decided to re-establish bilateral relations which were maintained up to 1997 when Charles Taylor decided to recognize China and Taiwan. This decision led to another severing of bilateral relations between China and Liberia.

The cordial relations between China and Liberia in the period 1977-2016 have seen diverse way the two countries operate including peace keeping missions, Liberia's commitment to the 'one China policy,' the signing of many bilateral agreements, including the six pillars of 2010 among others. The study began by tracing the emergence and growth of Sion-Liberia economic relations in the early period of 1977-1990. The study then proceeded to interrogate changes that have occurred in the way the two countries have engaged economically.

2. Methodology

The study used descriptive research design. The study was carried out in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia. The study had a population of 100 personnel. The researcher organized three (3) focus group discussions of mainly ten to fifteen participants from three different institutions and a member of personalities was interviewed. Selected informants and focus group discussions were chosen based on their willingness to participate. The study used both purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used because the participants were considered by the researcher to be having relevant information about the study. The snowball sampling was used because the research topic involves researching sensitive information which may not be easily availed to the public. The informants were sampled from specific sections in the ministries, Chinese construction sites, and market places. Other informants were gotten from their referrals. The research instruments used in the study consisted of questionnaires, interview guides, and focused group discussion guide. The questionnaire was open-ended which allowed the adequate probing of information from the respondents. The collected data was coded and analyzed thematically. Secondary data was subjected to critical textual analysis and interpretation to test the relevance and accuracy of the document. Descriptive statistic such as percentages and frequencies were used to describe basic data, and other analyzed data was also reported in the narrative, coupled with the first-hand quotation from the primary data.

3. Results

3.1. Emergence and Growth of Sino-Liberia Ties; 1977-1990

China's approach that attracts relations with Africa started earlier before the independence of many African countries. The relationship that had been established between China and Africa from the 1950s was defined as non-imperial in its intentions (Omenka, 2014). Furthermore, China's approach was different from that of the Western colonial intervention because China supported some African countries to gain independence and China's renewed interest African states is considerably one of a kind from that of Western relations.

During the 2015 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) held in Johannesburg, former Chinese ambassador to South Africa Liu Guijin explained that the relationship between China and Africa had proven concrete because the intention of China in Africa since Ming Dynasty era had been primarily at supporting African countries to improve their development agenda (Omenka, 2014). Furthermore, Guijin disputed the allegation China's intention in Africa as 'neo-colonialism' and 'Western noise', because since China came into contact with Africa 600 years ago when Zhen He led the largest fleet in the world, China did not occupy any part of Africa, unlike Christopher Columbus in the New World.'

When most of the African states began to gain independence, trade relations between China and Africa were at low level (Uchehara, 2009). Moreover, language and cultural barriers kept trade levels relatively low as compared to the West that had already established colonies in Africa. The policy of China towards Africa during this period was influenced by the search for ideological allies that could oppose the influence of the Western powers. Considering China's position in the non-aligned movement and its assistance to get African states in forums such as the Bandung Conference, the government of Liberia was committed to its Western partners, especially the United States and could not embrace a communist government since it was also anti-communist due to its allegiance to the United States (Shinn & Eisenman, 2012). During the Bandung Conference of 1955, Liberia, including Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Libya, and Sudan were among the 29 Asian and African states that were present. The conference targeted the promotion of economic and cultural relations between China and African states. Despite Liberia's encounter with the Chinese leader, Zhou Enlai during the 1955 Bandung Conference, Liberia still saw China as an unlikely ally (Andersen, 2008).

When the leadership of Deng Xiaoping witnessed a great shift in China-Africa relations from a period of indirect political and ideological assistance to direct assistance for several liberation movements. Liberia as the oldest independent state in Africa was also against the white supremacy in South Africa and joined other African states including Nigeria to support the liberation of South Africa (Looy, 2009). This interface increased Liberia's encounter with China but did not lead to the establishment of bilateral relations because Taiwan was a favored trading partner with Liberia at the time. Meanwhile, Taiwan benefited immensely through America anti-communist efforts after the start of the Korean War, which supported Taiwan to gain some Western diplomatic allies like Liberia (Andersen, 2008). Most African states before 1963 had strong economic relations with Taiwan, including Liberia, Nigeria, among others (Omenka, 2014). In November 1961, Liberia became the first African country to sign assistance agreement with Taiwan (Sim, 1971). A Taiwanese team sponsored by the United States Joint Commission of Rural Reconstruction (JCRR) was entrusted with the task of farming a demonstration site at Gbedin, Liberia, where UN and American missions had previously tried fruitlessly to grow rice. Within four months, the plot yielded a harvest six times greater than the average harvest of the area (Sim, 1971). This success encouraged other African countries to accept or request assistance from Taiwan.

Between 1960 and 1963, Taiwan was receiving diplomatic recognition from 13 independent African states out of 23 with only five for China. Despite the competition, five countries did not recognize Taiwan, either China: Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Niger, and the Central Africa Republic. According to Rich and Vasabjit (2015) in 1971 China was given a permanent seat on the UN Security Council replacing Taiwan, which led to eventual split between both countries, with China having 22 African allies and Taiwan 20 African allies. Since the replacement of Taiwan in the UN Security Council in 1971 by China, China's relationship with African countries began to increase, by 1974 the number increased from 22 to 30. Liberia still supported Taiwan and still did not establish relations with China after the replacement of Taiwan on the UN Security Council. Liberia maintained its relations with Taiwan until 1977 when China had wooed over 40 African countries; the government then realized the significance of China's presence and decided to shift its relations to China in 1977.

Considering China's economic 'meltdown' and having won the tussle with Taiwan in the UN Security Council, China's interest shifted to its domestic issue, such as its economic reform (Omenka, 2014). China has made significant progress in achieving high rates of economic growth, developing its manufacturing sector, and building export growth since the 1970s. According to Adaora (2018), China's share of the world's exports had risen from 1.1% in 1981 to 6.8% in 2005, making China the world's largest exporting nation. Giving these positive results of China's economic reform, rapid economic growth, subsequent reform of China's economic growth and China's investment in Africa, Sino-Liberia relations have assumed a new trend.

3.2.Socio-Political Relations between Liberia and China, 1977-1989

Liberia established official diplomatic relations with China on February 17, 1977. Liberia considered it's the new established relations with China as an advantage to secure new sources of external support on the global stage as China emerges as an economic giant. Before Liberia snowballed into the bilateral relations with Communist China, Liberia was an unlikely ally for a communist government due to its ties with the United States. However, in the 1970s, Liberia decided to shift from its traditional alliance to the United States to form a foreign policy that was more autonomous, clearly anti-colonial, and Africanist (Dunn, 2016). For instance, in 1972, the administration of William R. Tolbert (1971-1980) established diplomatic relations with the communist world, including China and several Eastern bloc states.

Liberia, as a small power in the world, had and retained the need to establish alliances with greater powers in order to survive (Thomson, 1999). Following the growth of Chinese economy in the 1970s, China's assertive position in Africa, and the rise of newly independent African countries provided the opportunity for Liberia to form a foreign policy that was autonomous, therefore, allowing the country to establish diplomatic relations with the Western and Eastern blocs (Shinn & Eisenman, 2012). During the period, Liberian policies became more radical. On the domestic level, the government cultivated a policy of socialist for development, while on the international stage, the foreign policy opted for non-aligned movement. However, the change in Liberia's foreign policy did not favor her ally, the United States.

Having established bilateral relations with China, Liberia broke its relations with Taiwan even though it has had almost 20 years of relations with Taiwan before snowballing into diplomatic relations with China. The Chinese government in the same year of establishing diplomatic relations with Liberia sent 225 Chinese technicians to replace the Taiwanese personnel on a sugar project, refinery, and rice cultivation projects (Shinn & Eisenman, 2012). In 1961, Liberia became the first African country to sign an assistance agreement with Taiwan. Through the agreement, Taiwan supported Liberia through agricultural projects, for example, the Gbedin rice project in Nimba County, which employed a large

number of local farmers, especially before the civil war in 1990. Political interests have been one of the major interests in China's foreign policy toward Africa. According to Diaouari (2004), China's major goal on the continent in the 1970s was its political goal, to secure diplomatic support against Taiwan.

When Liberia broke bilateral relations with Taiwan in favor of China, China saw its relationship with Liberia as an important policy objective to make sure it overtakes Taiwan both economically and politically in Liberia (Kuo, 2003). Gray (2018) notes that Liberia was among few other countries, including Lesotho, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique that would switch relations to Taiwan and in many cases China again as competition continued. Therefore, China's effort to woo Liberia was based on the shifting of its relations to Taiwan. In 1978, William R. Tolbert was invited for a state visit to China. The visit resulted in major agreements between the government of Liberia and the People's Republic of China. Technical and economic cooperation and trade were part of the agreements during the visit of William R. Tolbert to China. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, both countries during the Tolbert administration began to experience healthy and steady cooperation (Shinn & Eisenman, 2012).

On April 12, 1980, a group of 17 armed men, noncommissioned soldiers of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), headed by Sergeant Samuel K. Doe entered the Executive Mansion of Liberia shortly before midnight and shot President Tolbert. Early that same morning, the leader of the coup, Samuel Doe announced on state radio that a military coup had taken place and that a military junta under the name of the People's Redemption Council (PRC) had taken power under his leadership (Hahn, 2009). Doe administration was the first military administration since the independence of Liberia in 1847, which highlights the 'Second Republic of Liberia (1980-1990).'

Whilst Tolbert's regime shifted from its Western orientation to a more autonomous and Africanist policy, Doe's regime solidified its relations with the West, especially the United States for what he saw as the United States support to his government (TRC, 2009). For instance, the government of Liberia closed down the Libyan embassy in Monrovia and reduced the staff of the Soviet embassy by May 1981 and was later closed in September the same year. However, Doe maintained his relations with the People's Republic of China because he believed that the Chinese government would support his military government. In 1982, President Doe visited China, and the Chinese government pledged its support to the administration of Doe. According to Shinn and Eisenman, (2012) during the visit of Doe in China, major agreements such as; economic and technical cooperation and agricultural assistance were signed between both governments. Moreover, months later, after Doe visited China, the Chinese government sent twenty military jeeps, two limousines, and buses to support the Doe military government (Shinn & Eisenman, 2012).

Sino-Liberia relations intensified further during Doe's administration from 1980 to 1989 when Doe decided to switch diplomatic relations to Taiwan in order to seek foreign aid to support his government. In 1984, after the completion of the 30,000 seat stadium in Monrovia, financed by an interest-free loan the Vice President of China, Tian Jiyun visited Liberia for the dedication of the project which was the major centerpiece of China's investment in Liberia in the 1980s (ChinaDaily.com, accessed June 12, 2017). Doe maintained his relationship with China as the Chinese government embarked on a number of small aid projects, mainly agricultural projects.

However, the Doe administration began to face a lot of challenges, including a series of military coup and reduction in the United States aid from 1986. In order to seek financial assistance, Doe decided to diversify his source of funds. In 1988, the government of Liberia reestablished relations with the Soviet Union and Libya, but those bonds were no longer strong because Doe had appeared hostile to both countries in the first half of the 1980s (Hahn, 2009). Due to the Liberian government financial constraints, Taiwan decided to cease the opportunity by offering the Doe administration financial assistance of US\$200million in return for recognition of Taiwan, but a number of officials from the Liberian government saw the offer from Taiwan as a US-coordinated effort to isolate Liberia in the UNSC where China held veto power and advised President Doe not to accept the offer (Hahn, 2009). However, Doe accepted the offer from the government of Taiwan and announced his reestablished diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1989. Following the recognition of Taiwan, the Chinese government responded by severing diplomatic relations with Liberia.

The government of China shut down its embassy in Monrovia and withdrew Chinese personnel that were implementing series of projects in Liberia. This move affected the government of Liberia greatly because all the projects that were being financed by the government of China came to a standstill. In the absence of China, Liberia benefited from Taiwan's financial aid while Taiwan also benefited from Liberia's recognition over China.

In 1993, during Amos Sawyer's regime of the Intern Government of National Unity (IGNU), Liberia and China resumed diplomatic relations in 1993. Since Liberia was engulfed into a civil war during this period, the need for reestablishing diplomatic relations with China was considered important to Liberia due to China's veto power in the UNSC. In 1994, the then Deputy Foreign Minister of China, Tian Zengpei visited Liberia. John, a 65-year old social worker who served the IGNU noted that during the visit of Tian Zengpei to Liberia, the government of Liberia pleaded for the Chinese government to intervene in the peace process of Liberia since Liberia was battling the civil conflict. In addition, the Chinese government agreed to support the peace process and the growth of the country's economy. Furthermore, the IGNU also recognized and committed itself to the 'one China policy'. In 1995, the first Deputy Speaker of the Transitional Government, Samuel Saye Dokie visited China, while the following year of 1996 the then Vice Chairman of the State Council, Alhagi Kromah also visited China. The reestablishment of bilateral relations between China and Liberia was a gain for Liberia as the Chinese government reopened its embassy in Monrovia and contributed to the peace of the country.

3.3. Economic, Trade, Aid and Technical Cooperation, 1977-1990

Economic relations between states are established due to numerous factors, including the exchange of trade, investment between both countries, the flow of aid, and the provision of technical assistance. Since Liberia and China

snowballed into bilateral relations in 1977, relations between both countries have been influenced by economic activities (Moumouni, 2014).

The economy of Liberia is largely dependent on the country's natural resources, foreign direct investment and foreign aid. Liberia economy growth picked up in the early 1950s when the country introduced its 'Open Door Policy'. The establishment of the open door policy was very significant in the country's economy by allowing foreign direct investments to explore its natural resources. The indications are that real domestic product increased by approximately two and a half times during the period 1950-62, while exports increased from US\$28 million to almost ten times that amount 1950 US\$67 million in 1962 and government revenues from US\$3.8 million to almost ten times that amount over the same year (Qureshi et al., 1964).

In 1954-55 after the Korean war, both rubber and iron ore prices experienced major declined, but from 1955 upward, the gradual improvement in the production of both rubber and iron ore facilities, the prices again picked up momentum. This new development according to Qureshi, et.al (1964:291) captivated many foreign direct investments in the country, like B.F. Goodrich Company, African Fruit Company, Liberia Mining Company (LMC), Liberia-American-Swedish Mineral Company (LAMCO), National Iron Ore Company (NIOC), and the German-Liberian Mining Company (DELIMCO).

The influx of foreign direct investments in Liberia by the 1950s-70s were mainly American, German and Swedish investments which were mostly involved in the mining and rubber sectors. Also, the Republic of China (Taiwan) was involved in the agricultural sector. In order to assist the Liberian government in the agricultural sector, the Taiwan government sent technicians to Liberia for the establishment of a pilot project which could facilitate the production of swamp rice. Over 500 acres of land in Gbadin was cultivated for the swamp rice production. A former agriculture employee noted that Taiwan's involvement in Liberia between 1960s and 1970s was mostly involved in agriculture. 'The government of Taiwan helped the Liberian government in large scale farming, especially for the production of rice. Many Liberian farmers used the opportunity that the Taiwanese provided to cultivate their rice farms', he said.

However, despite Taiwan's contribution to the government of Liberia especially in the agriculture sector, the government of Liberia decided to switch its diplomatic relations to the People's Republic of China in 1977. The move of Liberia to sever bilateral relations with Taiwan was seemed as a great slap in the face of Taiwan as the country struggled against China's recognition. In order to support the effort of the Liberian government, a series of agreements were signed between the Chinese and Liberian governments.

The agreements signed under the umbrella of economic, trade, aid, and technical cooperation between China and Liberia include: The Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation Between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of Liberia (February 17, 1977); Trade Agreement Between the Government of Republic of Liberia and the Government of the People's Republic of China (May 16, 1979); Protocol on the Projects of Economic and Technical Cooperation Between the Government of the Republic of Liberia and the Government of the People's Republic of China (August 27, 1982); and Culture Agreement Between The Government of The Republic of Liberia and the Government of the People's Republic of China (May 6, 1982).

3.4. *Aid and Technical Cooperation, 1977-1990*

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Liberia and China in 1977, Liberia had been benefiting from China foreign aid. According to Moshi (2008) China's relations and aid flow with Africa countries are longstanding and have evolved significantly over the past 40 years. Moreover, it is important to note that China as an emerging economic power had been able to offer significant amounts of aid since 1960 and other development assistance to African countries. A Chinese participant noted that China aid to Liberia has been on the basic of China solidifying its economic relations with Liberia. In addition, China aid and technical cooperation is intended to contribute to the development process of developing and underdeveloped country like Liberia.

For instance, in 1978 when William R. Tolbert visited China, the Chinese government agreed to provide at least US\$23million for the three radio transmitters, agricultural projects and a stadium (Shinn & Eisenman, 2012). The 30,000 seat stadium project in Monrovia financed by an interest-free loan became one of the major outstanding investments of China in Liberia in the 1980s. Moreover, the stadium which is named after former president Samuel K. Doe is the biggest sports stadium in Liberia. China initiated a number of small aid projects, mainly agriculture, and signed culture and technical agreements with the Liberia government. The Chinese government also sent a team of fifty persons to Liberia following the established bilateral relations to determine the feasibility of rehabilitating Taiwan's sugar project. The team concluded that the project was not feasible, and funds intended for the project was directed to other projects (Gray, 2018). A 45-year old informant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that China strongly opposes the recognition of Taiwan, so many of the projects that were initiated by the Taiwanese government in 1960s and 1970s, including Say-Dude rice farm, Garwalu-Tombe rice and vegetable project, renovation of Gbedin Water Conservancy project, feasibility studies on setting up improved rice seed station vegetable growing centers, the sole technical studies on assessing the possibility of cultivating paddy rice in some areas along the valley of St. John and other three rivers, the technical guidance to the three water conservancy projects of Foya, Zleh-Town, and Juarzon were all cancelled by the Chinese government.

However, despite the cancellation of the Taiwanese projects by China, there were several channels through which Chinese activities impacted the development process of Liberia. For example, from 1984 to 1989, the Chinese government sent three medical teams to Liberia with accumulative total personnel reaching 42. By 1989, China initiated a number of joint ventures, some of which had linked to its foreign aid program. Liberia benefited from these projects as they contributed to the development of the country.

3.5. Trade Relations between China and Liberia, 1997-2003

Economic relations have been one of the major factors in China foreign policy on the African continent. Its reform and opening up in 1978 had been one of the most significant economic events of the world economy in the past few decades. China has increased its economic relations both domestically and internationally, which has led to the result of the rapid increase in the Chinese economic growth and development (Sun, 2014). Africa had played a significant role in China's development during this period, not least because Africa had been one of the important markets for China's exports.

According to Prasad (2004) China has now become a major partner for development among continent of Africa countries, and its trade, investment, diplomatic, and political relationships with Sub-Sahara Africa continue to strengthen. Most countries in West Africa established economic relationships with China during the 1960s, in most cases shortly after independence. For instance, Guinea was the first to sign economic and technical cooperation with China in 1960, and several regional neighbors followed suit (Pigato & Gourdon, 2014).

In the case of Liberia, the trade agreement with China was signed in 1979 two years after the signing of diplomatic relations between the two countries. According to Shinn and Eisenman (2012), Liberia did not rush to establish trade relations with China because its economic relations were tied to the West. Most of Liberia trade during this period was with its traditional partners, such as the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and France. However, after the signing of a trade agreement between Liberia and China, the agreement opened formidable economic relations between the two countries. In 1982, Chinese companies began to enter the Liberian labor market, but trade volume between Liberia and China from the 1980s to 1990 continued to grow at low levels until 1997 when the Charles Taylor government came to power.

Liberia's main exports to China include rubber, round logs, and wood chips, while Liberia's major imports from China include machinery and transport equipment, foodstuffs, manufactured products, crude minerals and inedible except fuel, chemical products, electronics, beverages and tobacco, and steel.

Since 1997, despite the severing of diplomatic relations between Liberia and China trade relations between both countries has been growing over the period. Liberia's totaled trade with China averaged US\$ 449 million during the period 1997-2003. Trade volume was mainly dominated by imports. Liberia's import volume totaled US\$ 322.8 million, while export totaled US\$ 126.47 million during the period, with China accumulating 72 percent of the total trade during the period 1997-2003. The figure below indicates the balance of trade between Liberia and China during the period 1997-2003.

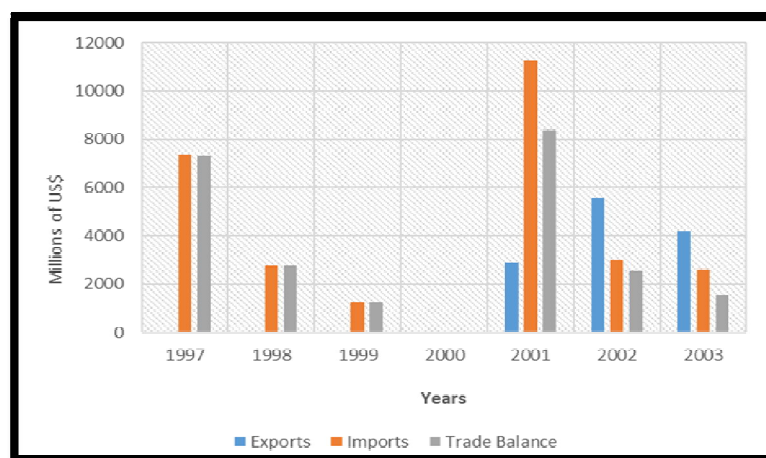


Figure 1: Trade Balance between Liberia and China; 1997-2003 (in millionsof US\$)

Source: China Statistical Yearbook 2005 /Central Bank of Liberia 2001-2003

Figure 1above shows the balance of trade relations between Liberia and China during the period 1997-2003. The total trade volume between Liberia and China began to grow from 1997. Two-way trade between China and Liberia averaged US\$73.76 million in 1997, Liberia's imports accounted for US\$60.76 million while exports to China were US\$13 million. Total trade volume in 1998 was US\$27.78 million, accounting only for Liberia's imports from China. In 1999, trade volume decreased to US\$12.37 million from US\$27.78 million in 1998, accounting for only imports. In 2000, that year did not account for any trade between China and Liberia.

As evident from the figure, the volume of trade between China and Liberia significantly increased in 2001. Trade volume between both countries totaled US\$141.51 million, mainly dominated by imports with US\$112.72 while exports were US\$28.79 million. In 2002, trade volume decreased from US\$141.51 in 2001 to US\$83.70 million, and import that year accounted for US\$30.11 million while export increased to US\$53.59. Also, in 2003, trade volume totaled US\$68.15 million with import at US\$26.19 million while import at US\$41.96 million.

The change of trade relations between China and Liberia during the period 1997-2003 was influenced by two major factors: The first factor is the severing of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1997. In 1997, the Taylor administration announced the recognition of both Taiwan and China which led to China severing diplomatic

relations with Liberia. Due to the termination of diplomatic relations between China and Liberia, between 1998-2000 China stopped its exports from Liberia but Liberia was still importing from China between 1998-1999.

The second factor that had influenced the change in China-Liberia trade relations during the period 1997-2003 is the Liberian civil war. The Liberian civil war which started in 1989 continued to 2003. Between 1999-2003, the Taylor administration was under attack by two rebel groups, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) to unseat Charles Taylor. In order to fuel his government with military support, the Taylor administration started trade with China despite the severing of diplomatic relations. As indicated in Table 1 China's major export from Liberia between 1997-2003 was round logs. In 2001, China's share of export accounted for US\$ 28.76 million in round logs which has been recorded as the highest commodity exported between Liberia and China during the period 1997-2003 (see Table 1).

Commodities Export	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Rubber	2.7	0.005	0.006	0	0.018	0.01	0.01
Round Logs	4.1	0.01	0.006	0	28.76	0.19	0.013
Others	0.2	0.0003	0.0006	0	0.001	0.001	0.002
Total	7.0	0.015	0.0126	0	28.78	0.201	0.025

Table 1: China's share of Exports by Commodity Composition (in millions of US\$)

Source: Central Bank of Liberia: 2001-2003

3.5.1. China Statistical YearBook:1997-2005

Meanwhile, in 2002 two-way trade between Liberia and China decreased from US\$ 141.51 million in 2001 to US\$ 85.7 million in 2002. However, exports to China increased to US\$ 55.59 million, while imports decreased to US\$ 30.11 million. Furthermore, in 2003 the total trade volume between Liberia and China decreased from US\$ 85.7 million in 2002 to US\$ 68.15 million in 2003. In 2003, Liberia's exports to China were US\$ 41.96 million while imports were US\$ 26. 19 million (see Table 2).

Commodities Import	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Food & Live Animal	0.0068	0.008	0.033	0.000	0.0054	0.017	0.0194
OW/Rice	0.01	0.0009	0.0076	0.000	0.001	0.0045	0.0031
Beverages & Tobacco	0.0006	0.0005	0.0044	0.000	0.0005	0.0019	0.0021
Crude Minerals	0.0004	0.0003	0.0015	0.000	0.0004	0.0007	0.0014
Minerals, Fuel & Lubricants	0.0002	0.0003	0.0008	0.000	0.0002	0.0005	0.0005
Animal & Vegetable Oil	0.0003	0.0003	0.0023	0.000	0.0002	0.0009	0.001
Chemical & Related Products	0.0007	0.0006	0.0053	0.000	0.0008	0.0025	0.0026
Manufactured Products	0.002	0.0016	0.0074	0.000	0.0016	0.004	0.0057
Machinery & Transport Equipment	0.003	0.0043	0.0138	0.000	0.0031	0.0048	0.0057
Miscellaneous Articles	0.002	0.0019	0.01	0.000	0.0016	0.0068	0.0124
Total	0.026	0.0187	0.086	0.000	0.0148	0.0436	0.0539

Table 2: China's share of Imports by Commodity Composition (in millions of US\$)

Source: Central Bank of Liberia 2001-2003

3.5.2. China Statistical Yearbook 1997-2005

According to the Central Bank of Liberia (CBL) (2003) the decrease in trade was due to the sanction imposed on Liberia major export commodities including round logs (timber), diamond, and gold by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). In 2001, the government of Liberia was accused by the international community of using its natural resources to fuel violence in the West African region including Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast. As a result of the violent conflict in Liberia and its neighboring countries including Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast, the UNSC on May 6, 2001, imposed sanctions against Liberia through Resolution 1343. Despite the sanctions against the Liberian government in between 2001 and 2003, the Liberian government continued in illegal trade, especially in the timber industry. The illegal trade of Liberia's round logs (timber) during the period 2001 and 2003 also resulted in the exponential exports of round logs between Liberia and China, despite both countries did not resume diplomatic relations. For example, the Oriental Timber Company (OTC) that

was operating in the timber industry in Liberia had its exporter to China, the Global Star Asia which was directly linked to a large Chinese timber processor the Global Timber Corporation that had close ties to the government of China.

4. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1. Summary

The study sought to interrogate the change and continuity in Sino-Liberia economic relations in the period 1977-2016. Having carried out an analysis of the data collected for the study, findings of the study revealed that the changes in Sino-Liberia relations were informed by the shifting of bilateral relations from 1989-2003. Economic engagement between China and Liberia during the period 1977-1990, findings of the study accounted for foreign aid, economic and technical cooperation between both countries. The study revealed that trade volume between China and Liberia picked up in 1997. Trade between both countries from 1997-2003 totalled US\$407.14 million with exports at US\$269.9 million while imports at US\$137.34 million.

4.2. Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher has examined the economic engagement of China and Liberia within the period 1977-1990. The establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Liberia in 1977 was formed on political interest for China, while on the other hand, Liberia needed investments to fund its development programs and improve its economic growth. China's political interest was to terminate Liberia's relationship with Taiwan since Liberia was among a few other countries that still maintained bilateral relations with Taiwan and gain its full support. It is generally accepted that after Liberia had established diplomatic relations with China, the Chinese government sent some Chinese technicians to replace the Taiwanese personnel that were working on major projects in Liberia.

Trade relations between China and Liberia during this period, continued to grow on low levels because the Chinese government was focused on investing in Liberia agricultural sector like the Taiwanese government. China initiated agricultural projects and infrastructure like the 30,000 seat stadium, which was one of its biggest investments in Liberia in the 1980s.

The study notes that trade relations between China and Liberia picked up in 1997. However, after the Liberian government announced the recognition of both Taiwan and China in 1997, the Chinese government severed diplomatic relations with Liberia. The severing of bilateral relations between the two countries led to a decline in trade relations. Between 1998 and 1999, total trade volume between Liberia and China was at US\$ 40.15 million accounting for only Liberia's imports from China in 1998 and 1999.

Meanwhile, while both countries were yet to resume diplomatic relation trade relations between Liberia and China picked up again in 2001. Between 2001 and 2003, total trade volume between Liberia and China averaged US\$ 295.36 million. The rise of trade relations between China and Liberia during this period was a result of China's interest in the round logs (timber) industry which recorded the highest export of commodities.

4.3. Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the study recommended that it is necessary for the Liberian government to create a comprehensive strategy that would effectively balance its relations with China and the West. In addition, the Liberian government needs to unleash its full potential and establish a policy for long-term development that corresponds with the interests of its citizens. In order for the government of Liberia to reduce the trade imbalances with China, Liberia needs to take advantage to expand its export to China with value-added products and commodities.

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