

# AN ETHICAL INTERROGATION OF THE STANDARD OF CHINESE PRODUCTS IN NIGERIA'S MARKET SYSTEM

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## Abstract

*This study undertakes an ethical interrogation of the standard of Chinese products in the Nigeria's market system. The study in addition to consulting extant literatures on the subject matter, equally solicits information from veteran entrepreneurs in the area of study. The data obtained were analyzed qualitatively via phenomenological approach. Adopting the Queer ladder theory, findings posit that irrespective of the fact that China wields the capacity to produce authentic commodities; the predominant nature of their products in Nigeria constitutes of spurious and substandard wares. These products are equally smuggled into Nigeria through organized crime syndicates. Owing to the fact that such category of Chinese products poses great dangers to Nigeria's consumers in addition to affecting the country adversely, this study proposes eschewing from the integration of unethical stance in manufacturing to capitalizing on integrity, contentment, sincerity and testimony of clear conscience by the Chinese manufacturers in production of commodities as well as general business transactions among others towards effecting the importation of authentic Chinese products into Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Ethical, Interrogation, Nature, Products, Market System, Spurious, Substandard, Standard.

## Introduction

China is renowned for her growing expertise in manufacturing business as Hu and Khan (1997) and West and Lansang (2018) assert. The quality of Chinese products in the Nigerian Markets however, negates the supposed status of China in the manufacturing world. Ahodipe (2012) in view of the aforementioned assertion laments that China dumps spurious and counterfeit products in the Nigerian markets. She exclaims that the increasing menace of such treachery is seriously undermining the competitiveness of Nigeria's already distressed manufacturing sector. Investigations by financial vanguard (2012) reveal that products from China are heavily subsidized for exports which make it

possible for them to be sold at much cheaper rates in Nigeria than relative or similar products that are manufactured locally in Nigeria. They remark that China exports goods at “rock-bottom prices to Nigeria” (p.2). Nigeria consumers on the other hand owing to their high price-sensitivity, keep picking up the imported goods without questioning their quality. The team affirms that the systematic smuggling and flooding of Chinese fake products into the Nigerian market system is very organized and coordinated.

Abayomiet al (cited by Business Day 2015) maintain that what they can easily afford to buy and sell in order to make profit are Chinese products. They expose that Chinese products like mobile phones normally has many accessories like double Sim cards space yet are sold at affordable rates. They identified the major problem with Chinese products as being fabricated by placing fake brands on them to assume being made by big European companies whereas they were Made-in-China. More so, Chinese products are rarely durable. Oluwafemi (2023) registers that the National Agency for food and drugs Administration and control (NAFDAC) arraigned two businessmen (Emmanuel Ejidike and AnayoOkoye) in Awka around May 2023; over the alleged sale and distribution of fake and unregistered pharmaceutical products mainly produced in China and India. Onyedinefu (2021) intimates that NAFDAC once destroyed falsified and counterfeit drugs, vaccines, cosmetics, and expired food items worth over 2 Billion Naira in Kano and Anambra States respectively. He acknowledges that the majority of the destroyed counterfeit products were Made-in-china. In the same vein Obianeri (2023) equally explicates that NAFDAC destroyed fake, substandard goods and products worth over 4.2 billion naira in Awka, Anambra State. Francis Ononiwu (Cited by Obianeri) declares that the products comprise Made-in-China spurious and substandard medical and several other unsafe regulated products.

Tony Okafor (cited by Ashiru, 2023) reports that in July 2023, the Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON) confiscated fake electric cables worth over 100m naira in Obosi and Awka towns in Anambra State. He emphasizes that the fake cables were shipped into Nigeria from China. Okafor (2016) points out that SON raided some companies in Obosi, Onitsha, Awka and their environs, arresting some persons suspected to be dealing on fake tooth brushes and shaving sticks. The Director of SON operations, Mr. Felix Nyado (cited by Okafor), explicates that at Bendusco international Agency Limited and Disk Golding City Investment Limited in Awada, Obosi, near Onitsha, a Chinese, Ning Tiandong, suspected to be an accomplice working for the two companies were equally arrested then.

Okwoche (2016) records how 2.5 tonnes of plastic rice were seized in Nigeria in 2016. He insists that the plastic rice was smuggled into Nigeria by unscrupulous businessmen from China. MamuduHaruna (cited by Okwoche) expatiates that the rice were very sticky after it was boiled. He intimates that the rice had faint chemical odour. Bijl (2019) elucidates that Chinese plastic rice flooding the Nigerian food market highlights the poor image of Chinese goods in Africa and its effects in China's economic engagement with the continent. AdejokeEwaede (cited by Bello, 2023) raises attention to Chinese counterfeit

cotton fabrics by spreading awareness about the abundance of “Adire” clothing Made-in-China that is marketed in Nigeria. The principal point is that Chinese manufactures, importers and vendors conspire with their Nigerian counterparts to gain control of and destroy domestic batik, tie-dye and textile productions in Nigeria.

Oyebola and Adepetun (2017) record that in 2017 alone, the Nigeria custom service (NCS) intercepted the following fake products: three container loads of fake drugs electricity cables and other contraband goods valued at 356 million naira in Lagos state, the duty paid value (DPV) of the fake drugs alone among the seized products worth over 31 million naira; and 5,056 cartons of imported fake drugs which had a DPV of 252.6 million naira, this excluded the drugs market value that runs into several millions of naira. These seized contraband products were all imported from China into Nigeria as Oyebola and Adepetun declare. Oyebola and Adepetun disclose that SON raised alarm in 2016 that 40 percent of electrical and electronic appliances imported into Nigeria from China are substandard and have caused disaster with destruction of lives and properties. Oyebola and Adepetun exclaim that in reality, every sector of the Chinese economy is affected by the Chinese counterfeit products phenomenon; stressing that it is more pronounced in pharmaceutical, information communications technology (ICT) and electrical appliances. The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) (cited by Oyebola and Adepetun) disclose that about 250 million substandard phones were being sold yearly in Nigeria Courtesy of China Counterfeit smuggling enterprise. Umar Dantata (Cited by Oyebola and Adepetun) affirms that the damaging impacts of Chinese counterfeit products on the Nigerian economy cannot be quantified in socio-economic terms.

In view of the foregoing, this study interrogates the nature of Chinese products in the Nigeria's market system particularly in Awka town in Anambra State and objects to the unethical modes that Chinese manufacturing companies adopt in business transactions in the country. Ethically sound cum practical means of ensuring the importation of only authentic products from China into Nigeria were proposed in this study. Both the primary and secondary methods of data collections were employed in this study. The study adopts the Queer Ladder Theory. The necessary generalizations and conclusions in this study were drawn purely on the qualitative analysis and synthesis of the gathered data made through phenomenological approach.

### **The Standard of Chinese Products in the Nigeria's Market System**

E. Obinna, N. Ekeh, I. Edeh and J. Allison (personal communication, 28th October, 2023), express that Chinese products in Nigeria are predominantly counterfeit and sub-standard. Chekkit (2023) highlights that the 6 of the most dangerous Chinese counterfeit products in Nigerian market today are counterfeit pharmaceutical products, counterfeit baby products, fake cosmetics, fake car parts, counterfeit wines and spirits as well as

counterfeit food products. Adepoju (2010) laments that Chinese products in Nigeria are predominantly counterfeit and substandard. He advises that Nigeria should not allow China and their propensity for dumping cheap and fake goods to have undue influence in Nigeria. He exclaims that Nigeria deserves quality and not quantity.

Lewis (2009) in her research stresses that in June 2009, 600,000 counterfeit anti-malarial tablets produced and shipped from China were intercepted by the Nigerian government. She expresses that they bore an unexpected label of “Made-in-India”, whereas they were actually made in China. Lewis concludes that even the fakes were being faked. She laments that it was discovered in 2001 that an estimated half of the entire drugs in Nigeria were fake courtesy of China and their manipulations. Okereke et al (2021) point China as one of the highest distributors of counterfeit and sub-standard routine drugs. From their study, majority of routine drugs imported from China into Nigeria are either fake or substandard. They underscore that in 2011, 64% of anti-malarial drugs circulating in Nigeria were reported to be substandard. Imagining the level of health hazard this will evoke considering that Okereke et al equally ear mark that 70% of routine drugs in Nigeria are imported.

In 2014, Technology times Staff (2014) underscore that the United States of America had to trail Chinese firms selling fake products through Ikeja computer Village. Thus Nigeria had become the dump-Site for Chinese fake products from where they export to other parts of the world. This is actually exacerbated by unregulated open markets for imported products as well as porous cross-border monitoring and surveillance systems. Dosunmu (2023) elucidates that Chinese e-commerce fosters counterfeit fashion in Nigeria. Dosunmu streamlines that in Nigeria, these “Knockoffs or Counterfeits are known as fake originals. Modeled or popular sports or Luxury brands, they cost a fraction of the price of an original” (p.2). He delineates that these Chinese counterfeit products start their journey on Chinese shopping platforms before reaching Lagos Balogun market.

Dosunmu (2023) insists that despite years of battling against importation of fake Chinese products into Nigeria, Chinese e-commerce platforms are rife with imitations of beloved global apparel brands. According to him, the United State government has identified websites, including AliExpress, Taobao, and DHgate, as what he tagged “notorious markets” (p.2) for counterfeiting and piracy. Deepankar Rustagi, co-founder and CEO of Lagos-based BzBe- commerce platform omniBiz Africa (Cited by Dosunmu) exposit that fake originals has been circulating in Nigerian markets like over a decade, and China has always been the supplier.

Prof. Dora Akunyili (cited by Sahara Reporters, 2010) avers that China perceive Nigeria as dumping ground for their counterfeit products. She stresses that such evokes undue and unhealthy influence on the Nigeria's economy since it equally stains the dignity and prestige of the nation in the Global market. Adesina (2016) and Bivbere (2020) aver that Chinese products are counterfeited for Nigeria; thus China is responsible for direct

importation of fake products to Nigeria. ECOWAS (Cited by Adepegba and Adejoro, 2023) even declare that Chinese illicit routine drugs are dumped in Nigeria. Emeka (2023) adds that Chinese imports equally undermine local production since it implies low prices which the consumers like; it simply mean unemployment, poverty and influence for local manufactures in Nigeria. Irrespective of the fact that the Chinese products are cost effective, yet they do not serve their purposes because they are seldom durable. They are predominantly of substandard and spurious quality.

### **The Queer Ladder Theory**

According to Okoli and Agada (2014) the Queer Ladder theory was influenced by an American sociologist, Daniel Bell (1919-2011), who coined the idea of “Queer Ladder” in an attempt to explain the structure and system of organized crime as a despondent means of economic empowerment, acquisition of quick wealth and social climbing. Organized crime had equally been defined in ways that succinctly showed that importation and marketing of spurious, counterfeit and substandard Chinese products in Nigeria adopts its structure. For instance; Finckenauer and Voronin (2001) define Organized crime as crimes committed by criminal organizations whose existence has continuity over time and across crimes, and that use systematic treachery, racket, intimidation, bribery and corruption to facilitate their criminal activities.

Hagan (2010) adds that the stock in trade of organized crime is the use of propaganda, cheap popularity, racketeering and various strands of fraudulent irregularities and absurdities to front and foster its agenda. Hess (2009) definition collaborates with that of Hagan's as he maintains that Organized crime is a continuing criminal conspiracy seeking high profits with an organized structure that uses propaganda, cheap popularity, fear, intimidation, blackmail, illegality and corruption. The basic assumptions of the Queer Ladder theory as Mallory (2007), Okoli and Olinya (2013), posited respectively are:

- Organized crime is an instrumental behavior; it is a means to an end.
- It is an instrument of social climbing or socio- economic advancement.
- It is a means to accumulate quick wealth, build power and dominate through seeking for cheap popularity, blackmailing, swindling and intimidation of the government and the public.

Often ascribed to this theory is the notion that organized crime thrives in perverse, permissive, gullible and complacent milieu; contexts where the government's capacity to dictate, sanction and deter crime is poor; where public corruption is endemic; and where prospects for legitimate livelihood opportunities are slim as Nwoye (2000) and Lyman (2007), posit respectively. Within such enclaves, contentment ethos is non-existence, the incentives and prospects of indulging in crimes are high, while deterrence from criminal living is low. In order words, the benefits of committing crime surpass the cost or risks therein along with the gains of ensuring sanity and civility.

Applied to the analysis of this research, The Queer Ladder theory will enable one to come to terms with the prevalence of the treachery and criminality of exportation and importation of spurious, counterfeit and sub-standard products and sundry acts of criminality in Nigeria. In this regard, it is observed that the phenomenon of production and easy marketing of Chinese products in Nigeria is facilitated by criminal quest for economic accumulation in an environment that more or less condones and perpetrates crimes.

### **The dangers of counterfeit and substandard Chinese products in Nigeria**

In lieu with the detections of this research work, the dangers of counterfeit and substandard Chinese products in Nigeria are as follows:

**A. It constitutes health hazards to the Nigerian consumers:** This is more feasible with edible products like canned foods, drinks and pharmaceutical products like routine drugs. Such products can cause kidney and liver problems by damaging those tissues. Edible products that are counterfeits or low quality can be cancerous. Such products can cause sicknesses to become perpetual, pathological and terminal.

**B. It affects the economy of Nigeria adversely:** It shuts down as well as discourages local manufacturing factories in Nigeria since they can never meet up with the staged unhealthy competition courtesy of Chinese counterfeiters. Nigeria losses the gains they ought to be making from such domestic factories that shuts down and displaces because of counterfeiters. Local manufacturing factories on the verge of coming up get discouraged by Chinese counterfeiters.

**C. It brands Nigeria negatively in the global perspective:** Nigeria will be perceived as the major dumping site for Chinese spurious and low quality products. This may discourage and scare off other foreign investors to Nigeria.

**D. Chinese manufacturing factories abuse Nigerian labour employees:** Nigerian workers employed by Chinese manufacturing companies face untold abuse and exploitation. Since jobs in these companies more often than not are unregulated and low paid, workers are placed in a vulnerable position and are not granted the same form of protection as in the more regulated employment market. Safety and security concerns are bound to be ignored, while benefits are non-existent.

**E. Environmental pollution:** The negative environmental impact of counterfeiting is often underrated. Afunugo (2023) underscores that a good number of manufacturing factories in Awka contributes to the environmental pollution of the town via toxic wastes dumped indiscriminately in Awka. Relatively, with no regulation since the production of fake and substandard commodities is illegal, Chinese counterfeit manufacturing companies situated in Nigeria in their production of counterfeit goods can present pollution challenges to the environment. For instance, through disposing of toxic dyes, acidic substances and other related chemicals unlawfully and indiscriminately thereby facilitating air as well as land pollution; rendering the air acrid cum unhealthy, and the land unfit for agricultural enterprise.

**F. Formation of more criminal gangs in Nigeria:** Since counterfeit and substandard products are moved via smuggling, and since smuggling is included in organized crime; whereas organized crime is a stock in trade of criminal syndicates like the triads pertinent to smuggling of Chinese counterfeit products; they may begin to initiate Nigerian innocent citizens into such criminal gangs. Besides, there are allegations of further unethical practices especially according to Ogunseyin (2023) and Sandner (2023) that most Chinese manufacturing and construction companies in Nigeria employ the services of their home country prisoners as labourers. Prisoners can corrupt innocent citizens in Nigeria into joining bad gangs. The role social influence can play on human beings can never be over emphasized.

### **The Ethics in Manufacturing and Production Entrepreneurship**

There are moral codes and principles of morality apposite to manufacturing. Regarding these right and accorded rules or standards for right conduct and practice in manufacturing and production entrepreneurship, Williams (2019) posits that the ethics of manufacturing and production implies ensuring that everything in a company's supply chain matches exceeds or is not below the standards of the international labour rights. Other ethical codes in manufacturing and production business according to Williams includes; fair living wages and safety for workers; acceptable working hours; supplier's safety standards which equally guarantees the workers safety; it forbids the use of child labour or enforced labour; ensures supplier's commitment to improving working conditions; and above all the production of authentic and durable quality commodities without guiles for the consumers in each given setting.

Jermyn Street design (2023) intimates that manufacturing and production ethics is effected or reflected when the manufacturing process prioritizes good health for all parties involved, including the environment, employees, and consumers. It behooves that products which are designed and created with sustainable materials and have a positive impact on communities are products of ethical manufacturing. Ethics in manufacturing and production entrepreneurship as Jermyn street designs designates take into cognizance the health and being of the natural environment; ensuring that the working and shopping environment encourages sustainability and positive well-being; and that manufacturers prioritize on health and happiness of both their workers and consumers beyond standard requirements.

Marquette University Business (2022) and Meghmani Group (2024) elucidates that the code of ethics or ethical principles in production and manufacturing business covers and includes the following: Health and environment safety; human rights and labour standard; anti-corruption; conflict of interest; quality of products and services; data integrity; respect for human rights, dignity, autonomy, interests and privacy of all personnel; honesty, which involves commitment to telling the truth regarding standard of products, in all forms of communication and in all actions; fairness, which expresses

treating others as one would like to be treated; integrity, reflecting consistency between actions and words that inspires trust and credibility; compassion, indicating commitment to being kind and caring toward all personnel, business partners and customers; loyalty, expressing faithfulness to customers; in addition to law-abiding, which is fully complying with all applicable laws and codes from local, state and federal agencies.

It is sufficient to add that the manufacturing digital (2023) explicate that Artificial Intelligence (AI) also brings ethical considerations that need to be employed by manufacturers and production entrepreneurs; and this involves the responsible development, deployment, and use of AI systems that align with moral values, societal norms and legal regulations. They stress that digital marketing requires companies to prioritize the ethical implications of their AI initiatives and actively work towards mitigating potential harms to workers, consumer and the environment. All The outlined manufacturing and production AI cum general ethical precepts will combat all forms of digital marketing manipulations as well as all physical market systems were fake and substandard products are sampled.

#### **Ethical scrutiny of the Standard of Chinese products in the Nigeria's market system**

Singer (2023) asserts that ethics is the field concerned with what is morally, good, bad, as well as that which is equally morally right and wrong. It is a concept that also applies to any structure or thesis of moral values or principles. Annabelle (2017) avers that ethics is a discipline in philosophy that involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of rights and wrong conducts. Velasquez and Andre et al (2010) elucidate that ethics is based on well-founded standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually in aspects of rights, obligations or duties, emoluments cum benefits to society, fairness, just, upright or specific virtues.

Standing on the afore-elucidations on ethics, this study based on its realizations streamline that the standard of the Chinese products in the Nigeria's market system falls short of the ethical codes of the international labour rights in addition to the ethical principles for manufacturing and production entrepreneurs cum business executives. The nature of the Chinese products in Nigeria's market system depicts commodities produced by morally debased, deplorable and corrupt manufacturing and production entrepreneurs. Chinese manufacturers are only engrossed with making more profits; gaining more customers; staging unhealthy competitions via price reduction or cost effective modes; domination in the international market; and supplanting of Nigeria's domestic or local manufacturing companies; without caring for the customer's health and general interests. Chinese manufacturers are fraudulent, dishonourable, selfish, deceptive, treacherous, and greedy. They simply do not manifest the ethical codes in manufacturing and production entrepreneurship. The nature of the Chinese products in the Nigeria's market system shows that Chinese manufacturers do not value their Nigeria

customers and equally do not care for the peculiarity of their environment, interest, situations or circumstances.

### **Conclusion**

It has been underscored in this study that the predominant nature of Chinese products in the Nigerian market system is spurious and substandard. Organized criminal Syndicates facilitate the smuggling of those counterfeit products from China into Nigeria. The extent to which counterfeiting can tarnish the image of a nation and her entrepreneurs cannot be overemphasized.

The adverse effect of counterfeiting in every nation both the manufacturing nation and the host nation that receives such products comes with indescribable dire consequences. The Nigerian government must ensure that Chinese manufacturers employ ethical codes for manufacturing and production entrepreneurship in business transactions in her shores.

### **Recommendations**

In consonance to the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Nigeria's custom services, and relevant authorities should employ the use of high technical infringement detection software's so that they can always easily detect fake products both at the Nigerian borders as well as digital online fake peddlers.
2. Chinese manufacturing companies in Nigeria should endeavour to start prioritizing on engaging the ethical codes in manufacturing and production as posited in this study in their business engagements. They should eschew from all unethical means of business transactions which includes production of fake commodities, smuggling of spurious commodities via organized crime syndicates and engaging prisoners from China in construction labour services in Nigeria.
3. Chinese government authorities should fight organized criminal syndicates in their country. They should be sincere in their battle against fake product manufacturers in their home country since the irregularity originates from their country.
4. The battle against counterfeiting should be a collective responsibility. Citizens of Nigeria should assist the government authorities by always reporting any counterfeit products to the appropriate authorities.
5. Incorrupt, sincere, and honourable persons of integrity renowned for their discipline, dignity, ingenuity and idealism should always be appointed to serve as heads and staff members of the government administrative bodies in charge of counterfeiting in Nigeria.

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