BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN NIGERIA AND SOUTH KOREA FROM 1980 TO 2025

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BEING A RESEARCH DISSERTATION WRITTEN IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND DIPLOMACY

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND DIPLOMACY

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BENIN CITY

August 2026

DECLARATION

I, Peace Ozioma Martins, hereby declare that this research dissertation titled “Bilateral Relations Between Nigeria and South Korea from 1980 to 2025” is an original work carried out by me and has not been submitted, either wholly or in part, for the award of any degree in this or any other institution. All sources of information have been duly acknowledged.

_____ _____

Peace Ozioma Martins Date:

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research dissertation titled “Bilateral Relations Between Nigerian and South Korean from 1980 to 2025” was carried out by Peace Ozioma Martins in the Department of International Studies and Diplomacy, Benson Idahosa University, Benin City, Nigeria. It has been read and approved as meeting the requirements for the award of Master of Arts (M.A.) in International Studies and Diplomacy.

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External Examiner Date:

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty for His grace, strength, and guidance throughout the course of this study.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	i
Declaration	iii
Certification	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Table of Contents	vii
List of Abbreviations	ix
Glossary of Non-English Words	xii
List of Tables	xiv
Abstract	xv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background to the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Research Problem	3
1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study	4
1.4 Significance of the Study	4
1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study	5
1.6 Research Methodology	5
1.7 Conclusion	6
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1 Introduction	7
2.2 Literature Review	7
2.3 Conceptual Analysis	26
2.4 Conclusion	29

CHAPTER THREE: NIGERIA–SOUTH KOREA POLITICAL RELATIONS FROM 1980 TO 2025 31

3.1 The Foundation of Nigeria-South Korea Political Relations 32
3.2 Institutional Architecture and Diplomatic Infrastructure 39
3.3 Nigeria-South Korea Summit Diplomacy 43
3.4 Bilateral Relations Expressed in Multilateral Diplomacy 47
3.5 Security Cooperation 52
3.6 Ideological Framing 56

CHAPTER FOUR: NIGERIA–SOUTH KOREA ECONOMIC RELATIONS FROM 1980 TO 2025 64

4.1 Energy Diplomacy 65
4.2 Asymmetrical Trade Structures 69
4.3 Infrastructure Development 78
4.4 Technology Transfer Aspirations 83
4.5 Institutional Framework Development 87

CHAPTER FIVE: NIGERIA–SOUTH KOREA SOCIO-CULTURAL RELATIONS FROM 1980 TO 2025 92

5.1 Shared Values with Religion 93
5.2 Interactions in Sports 99
5.3 Shared Values with Food 101
5.4 Media in Nigerian–South Korean Relations 105
5.5 Education in Nigerian–South Korean Relations 111
5.6 Migration 116
5.7 Institutional Frameworks of Social and Cultural Exchange 125

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION 131

BIBLIOGRAPHY 137

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full Form
ACTEA:	Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa
ADTA:	Avoidance of Double Taxation Agreement
AU:	African Union
CERPAC:	Combined Expatriates and Resident Permit
ECOWAS:	The Economic Community of West African States
EGDI:	E-Government Development Index
EPC:	Engineering, Procurement and Construction
FPSO:	Floating Production Storage and Offloading
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
GKS:	Global Korea Scholarship
ICT:	Information and Communications Technology
IPPA:	Investment Promotion and Protection
IPU:	Inter-Parliamentary Union
ITU:	Inter-Parliamentary Union
KAF:	Korea Africa Foundation
KAL:	Korean Air Lines
KBS:	Korean Broadcasting System

KCCN:	Korean Cultural Centre Nigeria
KDIC:	Korea Deposit Insurance Corporation
KICS:	Korean Institute of Communication and Information Sciences
KNOC:	Korea National Oil Corporation
KOAFEC:	Korea–Africa Economic Cooperation
KOICA:	Korea International Cooperation Agency
LASUTH:	Lagos State University Teaching Hospital
LNG:	Liquefied Natural Gas
MAP:	Mutual Agreement Procedure
MOU:	Memorandum of Understanding
NAM:	Non-Aligned Movement
NAN:	News Agency of Nigeria
NDIC:	Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation
NIIA:	Nigerian Institute of International Affairs
NNPC:	Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation
NOCs:	National Oil Companies
OAU:	Organisation of African Unity
ODA:	Official Development Assistance
OEC:	Observatory of Economic Complexity

OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPL:	Oil Prospecting Licenses
SAP:	Structural Adjustment Programme
SCDDD:	Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development
TIPF:	Trade and Investment Promotion Framework
UN:	United Nations
UNCURK:	UN Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea
UNFPA:	United Nations Population Fund
USAID:	United States Agency for International Development
VVF:	Vesico-Vaginal Fistula
WAI:	War Against Indiscipline
WHO:	World Health Organization

GLOSSARY OF NON-ENGLISH WORDS

Term	Language	Meaning/Explanation
Akara	Yoruba	Bean fritters; a popular Nigerian street food
Chaebol	Korean	Large family-owned industrial conglomerate (e.g. Samsung, Hyundai)
Communiqué	French	Official joint statement issued after diplomatic meetings
Détente	French	Easing of strained relations between states
Egusi	Igbo/Yoruba	Melon seeds used in a popular Nigerian soup
Façade	French	An outward appearance that conceals the true nature
Hallyu	Korean (한류)	"Korean Wave"; the global spread of South Korean popular culture
Hanbok	Korean (한복)	Traditional Korean attire/clothing
Ìyàn	Yoruba (Nigerian)	Pounded yam; a staple Nigerian dish
Jollof rice	West African	A one-pot rice dish popular across West Africa
Juche	Korean (주체)	North Korea's state ideology of self-reliance
K-drama	Korean	Korean television drama series
K-pop	Korean	Korean popular music genre
Kimchi	Korean (김치)	Fermented vegetable dish; staple of Korean cuisine
Saemaul Undong	Korean (새마을 운동)	"New Village Movement"; Korea's 1970s rural modernisation programme
Suya	Hausa	Spiced grilled meat skewer; popular Nigerian street food

Term	Language	Meaning/Explanation
Taekwondo	Korean (태권도)	Korean martial art and Olympic sport
Tuigi	Korean (투이기)	a derogatory Korean slur meaning "mixed-blood/crossbreed," used insultingly for mixed-race people
Yaji	Hausa	A dry spice mix used in preparing suya

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Nigeria – South Korea Bilateral Trade Data From 1980–2025

Table 2: Products Traded between Nigeria and South Korea, by Direction

ABSTRACT

This study examines Nigeria–South Korea relations from 1980 to 2025, with particular emphasis on bilateralism as a framework for understanding the evolution and dynamics of interactions between the two countries. Despite the growing importance of Asia–Africa relations in the contemporary international system, scholarly attention to Nigeria–South Korea relations remains limited. Thus, knowledge on the political, economic and socio-cultural relations between the two countries remains inadequate. This study addresses this gap by analysing the political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions of the bilateral relationship. The study adopted a qualitative method and historical approach, drawing on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources comprised oral interviews, archival materials, government publications, and historical newspaper records consulted at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) Library. These were complemented by books, journal articles, and other relevant secondary sources. The findings reveal that Nigeria–South Korea relations have evolved into a structured yet asymmetrical bilateral partnership shaped by complementary interests and differing national capacities. Politically, the relationship has been sustained through diplomatic engagement, high-level exchanges, and the gradual development of institutional frameworks despite identifiable strategic limitations. Economically, cooperation has expanded from pre-1980 commercial interactions to encompass energy diplomacy, technology transfer, trade, and investment, creating a more diversified partnership. Socio-culturally, bilateral relations have deepened through education, religious exchange, migration, and other people-to-people interactions, reflecting the growing significance of soft power and civic exchanges in bilateral engagement. The study concludes that although Nigeria–South Korea relations have demonstrated resilience and considerable potential, structural challenges, including limited policy coordination and competing foreign policy priorities, continue to constrain their full development. It recommends a more deliberate and institutionalized approach to bilateral engagement in order to strengthen cooperation in strategic sectors such as trade, technology, and education.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Bilateralism remains one of the principal mechanisms through which sovereign states pursue their foreign policy objectives and manage international relations. It involves the conduct of political, economic, and socio-cultural relations between two states through direct negotiation, cooperation, and institutional engagement. Unlike multilateral arrangements, which require consensus among multiple actors, bilateral relations provide governments with greater flexibility to negotiate agreements that reflect their specific national interests and strategic priorities. Consequently, bilateralism continues to occupy a central position in international diplomacy, particularly in areas such as trade, investment, security cooperation, development assistance, and technology transfer, where states often seek tailored and mutually beneficial arrangements. Robert J. Art portrays it as the strategic cultivation of bespoke ties with pivotal states to advance national foreign policy aims, underscoring its flexibility and capacity for direct governmental dialogue.[1]

Since attaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has pursued an outward-looking foreign policy aimed at safeguarding its national interest while promoting regional stability, economic development, and international cooperation. Although Africa has consistently remained the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy, successive administrations have simultaneously cultivated bilateral relations with countries outside the continent to attract foreign investment, acquire technical expertise, expand trade, and strengthen diplomatic partnerships. This pragmatic approach has enabled Nigeria to maintain constructive relations with states across different ideological and geographical divides, reflecting the country's recognition that bilateral engagement complements its commitments within regional and multilateral organisations.[2] Nigeria's diplomatic engagement with the Republic of Korea represents an important dimension of this broader foreign policy orientation. Formal diplomatic relations between both countries were established on 22 February

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[1] Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), p.1.

[2] Usman A. Tar and Sharkdam Wapmuk, eds., *Nigerian Foreign Policy 60 Years After Independence* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), p.30.

1980, providing the foundation for cooperation in trade, investment, energy, education, science and technology, cultural exchange, and development assistance. Over the years, both governments have institutionalised their engagement through high-level diplomatic visits, bilateral agreements, and technical cooperation programmes, demonstrating a shared commitment to expanding mutually beneficial relations.[3] Despite these developments, Nigeria–South Korea relations have received relatively limited scholarly attention compared with Nigeria's relations with major Western powers, China, or India, and South Korea's engagements with countries such as South Africa.

South Korea's emergence from a war-devastated state to one of the world's leading industrial and technological economies has significantly expanded its diplomatic and economic engagement beyond East Asia. Through trade, investment, official development assistance, technology cooperation, and capacity-building initiatives, South Korea has increasingly strengthened its partnerships with African countries in pursuit of both economic opportunities and broader foreign policy objectives. For Nigeria, South Korea represents a valuable partner in industrialisation, technological advancement, human capital development, and economic diversification. Conversely, Nigeria offers South Korea access to one of Africa's largest consumer markets, abundant natural resources, and strategic opportunities for commercial and energy cooperation.[4] Notwithstanding these complementary interests, the bilateral relationship continues to exhibit important asymmetries arising from differences in economic capacity, technological development, policy priorities, and levels of institutional engagement. Furthermore, the growing prominence of Asia–Africa cooperation and the increasing diversification of Nigeria's foreign policy underscore the need for a more comprehensive examination of Nigeria–South Korea relations. While existing studies have generally focused on trade or investment, relatively few have examined the evolution of the relationship from a broader bilateral perspective encompassing its political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions. It is against this background that this study examines Nigeria–South Korea relations from 1980 to 2025 with a view to analysing the dynamics

[3]Republic of Korea, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Nigeria*, https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/nation/m_4902/view.do?seq=167&utm_source Accessed: July 4, 2025.

[4] Kelechi A. Kalu, Jiyoung Kim, *Foreign Aid and Development in South Korea and Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Economic Growth* (Routledge: London, 2023), p.5

of bilateralism and assessing the opportunities and constraints that have shaped the relationship over the past four decades.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Existing scholarship has examined bilateralism from strategic, economic, legal, and institutional perspectives. Robert J. Art,[5] Jagdish Bhagwati,[6] Charles A. Kupchan,[7] Arie Reich,[8] and Alexander Thompson and Daniel Verdier,[9] among others, have analysed the role of bilateralism in shaping interstate cooperation and international order. Studies on South Korea's engagement with Africa, however, have focused largely on its continental diplomacy and development partnerships rather than on its bilateral relations with Nigeria.[10] However, rigorous analysis of Nigeria–South Korea relations between 1980 and 2025 remains conspicuously absent. This lacuna limits understanding of the political, economic, and socio-cultural dynamics that define this bilateral partnership and its strategic significance within Nigeria's wider foreign policy architecture. The present study addresses this deficiency by furnishing a historically grounded, systematic analysis of how bilateralism has functioned as the foundational framework for interaction between both countries. It elucidates the constraints that have impeded cooperation, evaluates the mechanisms through which both states have navigated asymmetrical power relations,

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[5] Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

[6] Jagdish N. Bhagwati, *Termites in the Trading System: How Preferential Agreements Undermine Free Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[7] Charles A. Kupchan, *How Enemies Become Friends: The Sources of Stable Peace* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[8] Arie Reich, "Bilateralism Versus Multilateralism in International Economic Law: Applying the Principle of Subsidiarity," *University of Toronto Law Journal 60*, no. 2 (2010): pp.263–287.

[9] Alexander Thompson and Daniel Verdier, "Multilateralism, Bilateralism, and Regime Design," International Studies Quarterly 58, no. 1 (2014): pp.15–28.

[10] Kelechi A. Kalu, Jiyoung Kim, *Foreign Aid and Development in South Korea and Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Economic Growth* (Routledge: London, 2023).

and delineates prospects for consolidating future ties. In so doing, this research makes a substantive contribution to the extant literature on non-Western diplomatic alignments.

The following research questions are pertinent:

1. What is the nature, evolution, and key determinants of Nigerian–South Korean political relations between 1980 and 2025?
2. What are the main features, trends, volume, and impacts of Nigerian–South Korean economic relations between 1980 and 2025?
3. How have Nigerian–South Korean social and cultural relations developed, and what is their significance, between 1980 and 2025?

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the evolution and dynamics of Nigeria–South Korea bilateral relations from 1980 to 2025. Its specific objectives are threefold:

1. To delineate the nature, trajectory, and principal determinants of political relations between Nigeria and Korea between 1980 and 2025;
2. To analyse the salient features, prevailing trends, trade volumes, and developmental impacts of their economic engagement over the same period;
3. To evaluate the evolution and strategic significance of socio-cultural exchanges between the two nations between 1980 and 2025.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study holds academic, policy, and practical significance. Academically, it contributes to the literature on bilateralism by extending the analysis to an understudied relationship in the Global South. It also enriches discourse on South–South cooperation and the diversification of African foreign policy in the post–Cold War era. For policy-making, the study offers insights for both Nigerian and South Korean governments. Understanding the successes and shortcomings of past interactions can guide policymakers in formulating strategies to deepen cooperation in trade, technology, and education. Practically, the research benefits students, scholars, and practitioners

of international relations, diplomacy, and development studies, providing empirical data and conceptual understanding that can inform future bilateral and multilateral engagements.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study examines Nigeria–South Korea relations within the framework of bilateralism from 1980 to 2025. The period begins in 1980, when formal diplomatic relations were established between the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Republic of Korea, and extends to 2025 in order to capture the evolution of the relationship over four decades, including recent developments in political, economic, and socio-cultural cooperation. The study is geographically limited to Nigeria and South Korea, although reference is made to other African and Asian countries where necessary to provide comparative context and enhance the analysis. Thematically, the study focuses on the political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions of Nigeria–South Korea relations, explored across multiple chapters. It examines diplomatic engagements, economic cooperation, trade and investment, technology transfer, educational exchanges, cultural interactions, and other areas of bilateral cooperation relevant to understanding the evolution and dynamics of relations between the two countries.

The study acknowledges certain limitations. First, the relative scarcity of scholarly literature specifically addressing Nigeria–South Korea relations necessitated greater reliance on government publications, archival materials, official documents, newspaper reports, and oral interviews to complement existing academic sources. Second, language barriers limited direct access to some Korean-language materials, making reliance on translated sources necessary. Third, logistical and financial constraints affected the extent of fieldwork and access to government officials and diplomats for in-depth interviews. Nevertheless, these limitations were mitigated through the triangulation of primary and secondary sources to enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings.

1.6 Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, historical, and analytical approach. The qualitative method allows for a nuanced exploration of the political and socio-economic dimensions of Nigeria–South Korea relations. Primary sources include interviews, official statements,

memoranda of understanding, and government publications from both countries. Secondary sources encompass scholarly books, journal articles, conference papers, and credible online materials. Data were analysed through thematic and historical interpretation, focusing on continuity, change, and patterns of cooperation from 1980 to date.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the central theme of the study: Nigeria–South Korea relations from 1980 to 2025 within the context of bilateralism. It outlined the background, identified the research problem, and established the study's objectives, significance, and methodology. In essence, this study seeks to fill a scholarly gap by examining an under-researched bilateral relationship that encapsulates the dynamics of contemporary South–South cooperation. The subsequent chapter will review relevant literature and theoretical perspectives on bilateralism, situating Nigeria–South Korea relations within the broader framework of international diplomacy and development partnerships.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This literature review is structured in four substantive sections. The first section furnishes a concise introduction that establishes the analytical context, delineates the scope of inquiry, and articulates the significance of examining Nigeria–South Korea relations within broader scholarly debates on South–South cooperation and non-Western diplomatic alignments. The second section critically surveys the extant literature, identifying seminal contributions on Africa–Asia relations, South Korea's engagements with the African continent, and the specific, though limited, body of work addressing Nigerian foreign policy and its bilateral partnerships; this section additionally elucidates the lacunae that the present study seeks to redress. The third section provides rigorous conceptual clarification on the concept of bilateralism, thereby establishing the theoretical scaffolding upon which subsequent analysis rests. The fourth and final section synthesises the foregoing discussion, summarising the review's principal findings and underscoring the imperative for historically grounded, systematic scholarship on Nigeria–South Korea relations.

2.2 Literature Review

There are no substantial scholarly works devoted exclusively to Nigeria–South Korea relations during the period covered by this study. Existing literature instead examines South Korea's engagement with Africa, Nigeria's foreign relations, Africa–Asia interactions, or specific aspects of cooperation between the two countries. Among the most significant works relevant to this study is the edited volume *The Routledge Handbook of Africa–Asia Relations* by Ana Cristina Alves Carvalho, David Arase, and Scarlett Cornelissen.[1] Although the handbook does not focus specifically on Nigeria–South Korea relations, it provides the historical, political, economic, and socio-cultural context within which the bilateral relationship evolved. It is therefore valuable for situating Nigeria–South Korea relations within the broader framework of Africa–Asia interactions.

[1] Pedro Amakasu Raposo, David Arase, Scarlett Cornelissen (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Africa–Asia Relations* (London: Routledge, 2020), p.1.

The handbook is organised into three broad sections. The first examines the historical foundations of Africa–Asia relations, tracing interactions from the colonial era through the postcolonial period. Contributions by Ojo and Ndlovu-Gatsheni on African and Asian diasporas,[2] Domingues da Silva on Iberian Trade and Slave connections,[3] Nimako on sovereignty and state formation,[4] Akhtar on South Asian Muslim communities in East Africa,[5] Haustein and Tomalin on religion and development,[6] and Lee on nationalism[7] collectively demonstrate how shared colonial experiences, migration, religion, and nationalism shaped relations between the two continents. Although these studies do not directly examine Nigeria–South Korea relations, they provide an important historical context for understanding the emergence of diplomatic and societal links between the two countries. The second section explores modern political, diplomatic, economic, and societal interactions between Africa and Asia. Of particular relevance to this study is Kim's chapter, *The Role of Aid in South Korea's Relations with Africa during the Cold War*, which examines South Korea's diplomatic engagement with African countries through development assistance and political cooperation. The chapter discusses important milestones in Nigeria–South Korea relations, including President Chun Doo-hwan's 1982 visit to Nigeria and President Roh Moo-hyun's historic visit in 2006, demonstrating how aid and high-level diplomacy strengthened

[2] Samuel Ojo Oloruntoba and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Africa and Asia Diaspora: Reconstructing a Neglected History," in *The Routledge Handbook of Africa–Asia Relations*, eds. Pedro Amakasu Raposo, David Arase, Scarlett Cornelissen (London: Routledge, 2020), p.22.

[3] Daniel B. Domingues da Silva, "Iberian Trade and Slave Connections," in *The Routledge Handbook of Africa–Asia Relations*, p.33.

[4] Kwame Nimako, "Lost and Found: Sovereignties and State Formations in Africa and Asia," in *The Routledge Handbook of Africa–Asia Relations*, p.46.

[5] Iqbal Akhtar, "South Asian Muslims in East Africa," in *The Routledge Handbook of Africa–Asia Relations*, p.60.

[6] Jorg Haustein and Emma Tomalin, "Religion and Development in Africa and Asia," in *The Routledge Handbook of Africa–Asia Relations*, p.76.

[7] Christopher J. Lee, "Nationalism in Africa and Asia," in *The Routledge Handbook of Africa–Asia Relations*, p.94.

bilateral cooperation.[8] Other contributions, including those by Bhattacharya, Adem and Thomas, Iwata, Mine, Kaag, Potter, and Takyi-Amoako, broaden the discussion by examining diplomatic exchanges, academic networks, civil society, religion, and education within Africa–Asia relations. Collectively, these studies illuminate the wider environment within which Nigeria and South Korea have interacted, but they do not provide a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of bilateral relations between the two countries.

The final section examines contemporary Africa–Asia relations from the perspectives of economic cooperation, development, security, governance, migration, and environmental politics. Chapters by Taylor, Chun, Mendes, Hansen, Chawla, Haynes, Swatuk, Ferreira-Pereira and Vieira, Carvalho, Feldhoff, and Bose illustrate the expanding scope of Africa–Asia engagement in the twenty-first century. While these contributions demonstrate the increasing complexity of intercontinental relations, their primary focus remains continental or regional rather than bilateral. Consequently, Nigeria–South Korea relations receive only limited attention and are not examined as an independent subject of historical inquiry. Overall, The Routledge Handbook of Africa–Asia Relations makes an important contribution to understanding the broader historical and contemporary context of Africa–Asia relations and provides useful insights into the diplomatic, economic, and socio-cultural processes that have influenced Nigeria–South Korea interactions. However, its treatment of Nigeria–South Korea relations is largely incidental, with the relationship discussed only within wider analyses of South Korea's engagement with Africa. This limitation reinforces the need for the present study, which offers a sustained historical examination of Nigeria–South Korea relations from 1980 to 2025 through the framework of bilateralism.

Another work that is related to the subject is written by Kalu and Kim and it titled “Foreign Aid and Development in South Korea and Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Economic Growth.”[9] This book explores South Korea's remarkable economic development journey over several decades and compares it with the development experiences of sub-Saharan African countries, including

[8] Hyo-sook Kim, “The Role of Aid in South Korea’s Relations With Africa During the Cold War,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Africa–Asia Relations*, p. 126.

[9] Kelechi A. Kalu, Jiyoung Kim, *Foreign Aid and Development in South Korea and Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Economic Growth* (Routledge: London, 2023), pp.1-292.

Nigeria. It aims to understand why South Korea achieved such impressive growth while similar countries in Africa faced challenges. In the 1950s, South Korea's economic situation was comparable to that of many African nations, including Nigeria at the time of independence in 1960. However, South Korea has managed to transform itself into one of the world's leading economies. The book investigates the political and developmental strategies employed by South Korea and how they differ from those of African countries. The key argument of the book is that effective state capacity in South Korea played a pivotal role in its development, both domestically and in international politics. This argument can be relevant to Nigeria-South Korea relations by providing insights into how state capacity and political strategies have shaped South Korea's success. Understanding these factors may offer valuable lessons for Nigeria and its relations with South Korea in terms of economic development and diplomatic engagement.

An article that speaks directly to Nigeria-South Korea Relations is one written by Ogbonna and Uma, titled "Restrategising Nigeria's Industrialisation and Industrial Policy for Economic Recovery: Lessons from South Korea."[10] This study sheds light on the need for Nigeria to revamp its industrialization efforts as a crucial step toward economic recovery. It draws a comparison between Nigeria and South Korea, emphasizing how South Korea successfully transformed from a poor nation into a thriving industrialized economy through effective industrialization strategies and policies. The study highlights key lessons from South Korea's industrialization journey that can benefit Nigeria. South Korea's success story began with substantial macroeconomic reforms, infrastructural development, and the promotion of domestic manufacturing capabilities. The establishment of interconnected industries, a strong reliance on local resources, specialized workforce training, and unwavering government commitment to economic improvement were pivotal factors that contributed to South Korea's success. In contrast, the study points out that Nigeria has struggled to adopt and implement similar strategies and policies, leading to the failure of its industrialization efforts. As a result, the study recommends that Nigeria should prioritize inward-looking strategies, focusing on developing domestic technology and skilled manpower capable of harnessing the country's own resources. This approach aims to reduce dependence on foreign raw materials, spare parts, and expatriate labour, thus ensuring sustainable industrial

[10] B.M. Ogbonna and K.E. Uma, "Restrategising Nigeria's Industrialisation and Industrial Policy for Economic Recovery: Lessons from South Korea," *International Journal of Research in Management, Economics and Commerce* vol 7, no.7 (July 2017): pp.88-97.

production in Nigeria. In the context of Nigeria-South Korea relations, this study underscores the importance of learning from South Korea's industrialization experience. Nigeria can benefit by implementing similar strategies and policies that prioritize domestic resources and capabilities, potentially leading to stronger economic ties and mutual growth between the two nations.

A second article that directly discusses Nigeria and South Korea is "Vision for Change in Nigeria Based on Lessons from South Korea" by Okereke.[11] This study essentially talks about the need for Nigeria to have a solid plan for economic growth, taking inspiration from how South Korea turned into a successful, tech-savvy nation. It highlighted how Nigeria had failed to lay out a clear roadmap for its development after its 2015 elections and shows how this lack if a strategic vision could impede national growth economically and otherwise. The study looks at South Korea as an example and illustrates how it achieved remarkable progress by having a clear vision, and specific goals, and then meticulously working on them. South Korea transformed from a struggling economy into a technological powerhouse because it had a plan and followed through. The work argued that in Nigeria, the lack of a coherent vision has held back national progress. So, the study recommends that Nigeria should take a page from South Korea's book and aim to become a knowledge-based economy. This means focusing on using information and technology to drive growth, which is the way of the future. In terms of Nigeria-South Korea relations, this study highlights how Nigeria could benefit from South Korea's success story. By developing a clear vision, setting achievable goals, and sticking to well-organized plans, Nigeria could boost its industrialization and overall economic development. Collaboration between the two countries could also help Nigeria learn from South Korea's experiences and progress in areas related to economic growth and technology.

Park's article, titled "Africa and Two Koreas: A Study of African Non-Alignment," also provides a glimpse into the history of Nigeria-South Korean relations.[12] The paper focuses on the historical and political dynamics between African countries and North and South Korea during the Cold War era when African nations, including Nigeria, followed a policy of non-alignment. This

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[11] Chima O. Okereke, "Vision for Change in Nigeria Based on Lessons from South Korea," *PM World Journal* vol 4, no.8 (August 2015) pp.1-9.

[12] Sang-Seek Park, "Africa and Two Koreas: A Study of African Non-Alignment," *African Studies Review* vol.21, no. 1 (1978): pp.73–88.

policy of non-alignment essentially meant that African countries stayed neutral, steering clear of taking sides in the rivalry between the Western and Eastern blocs. Instead, these African countries, Nigeria included, sought to safeguard their independence and pursue their interests on their own terms. This approach according to the research paper opened doors for them to seek support from various nations, including both North and South Korea. The study goes on to reveal how the historical political dynamics may have influenced the relationship between Nigeria and South Korea during those Cold War years. It offers insights into situations where Nigeria, as a non-aligned nation, found itself engaging with both North and South Korea for various diplomatic, economic, or political reasons. Understanding this historical backdrop helps us grasp how their bilateral relations have evolved over time and how past interactions might have left a mark on their present-day engagement. The study also shines a light on how African countries' voting patterns at the United Nations were shaped by their diplomatic ties with the two Koreas. This nugget of information is particularly valuable in deciphering how Nigeria's diplomatic connections with South Korea or a lack of it may have influenced its voting behaviour on global issues within the United Nations. In a nutshell, this study is not just about African non-alignment during the Cold War; it's a key that unlocks insights into how this policy could have moulded Nigeria-South Korea relations in the past. It enriches our understanding of their diplomatic history and reveals the intricate dynamics that have played a role in shaping their relations over the years.

"The State in Changing Circumstances: Insights from South Korea and Nigeria on Political Theory of Development" by E.B.A. Agbajea is an academic article that explores the political theory of development in South Korea and Nigeria.[13] The article discusses the historical and political contexts of both countries and how they have influenced their development trajectories. The article offers insights that can help contextualize Nigeria’s relationship with South Korea and discusses specific ways in which South Korea’s political climate has contributed to its overall development, in contrast to Nigeria’s political experience.

[13] E.B.A. Agbaje, “The State in Changing Circumstances: Insights from South Korea and Nigeria on Political Theory of Development,” *International Review of Public Administration* vol.16, no.2 (2011): pp.1-32.

Nicolas' research paper titled "Korea in Africa: Between Soft Power and Economic Interests" is another work that extensively deals with Nigeria-South Korean relations.[14] This study examines the evolving economic relations between South Korea and Africa, shedding light on their interactions, instruments used by South Korea (including official development assistance and private investments), as well as its underlying objectives for engaging with the continent of Africa, including Nigeria. The study showed that while Africa is often viewed as a promising frontier for growth, South Korea has increasingly shown interest in the region since the mid-2000s and has launched various initiatives and forums aimed at strengthening its presence in Africa, alongside the growing involvement of Korean companies in the continent. This research acknowledges Korea's competition with China for influence in Africa, particularly in infrastructure and smart city development, while exploring South Korea's unique approach to engaging Africa, an approach that hinges on leveraging its remarkable economic trajectory to position itself as a different kind of actor in Africa and emphasizes experience-sharing and potential benefits for African countries. However, the study also delves into the realities of South Korean aid, its intentions, and its actual impacts. The study further examines the practice of public support for sectors seen as potential growth drivers for private companies in South Korea's developmental state framework. It highlights the importance of public-private investment programs in this context. Lastly, the study assesses South Korea's positioning in Africa in comparison to China, tracing the historical interest of South Korea in the region and analyzing the various forms of economic interactions, such as development assistance, trade, and direct investment. It seeks to identify the motivations behind South Korea's increasing involvement in Africa and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of what could be South Korea's strategy towards Africa. In this context, it explores the dynamics of Nigeria-South Korea relations and the potential impact of South Korean investments and initiatives in Nigeria and other African countries.

The article written by Jonathan, Ayo and Misra titled, "A Comparative Study of E-Government Successful Implementation between Nigeria and the Republic of Korea" also discusses Nigeria-South Korean relations extensively.[15] This paper explores the adoption of e-

[14] Francoise Nicolas, *Korea in Africa: Between Soft Power and Economic Interest*, (Paris: Etudes de l'Ifri, Ifri, 2020), pp.1-36.

[15] Oluranti Jonathan, Charles Ayo, and Sanjay Misra, "A Comparative Study of e-Government Successful Implementation between Nigeria and the Republic of Korea," *Journal of Asia-Pacific*

government practices in Nigeria and its comparison with South Korea, shedding light on the dynamics of their relations in this context. It showed that in 2014, the Nigerian government enlisted the support of the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) to develop an e-government master plan, aiming to align with global e-government standards and argued that this initiative underscores Nigeria's commitment to enhancing citizen services and governance through technology. The paper further showed that e-government leverages information and communication technologies (ICTs) to make governments more accessible, efficient, and accountable and that many developing countries, including Nigeria, recognize its potential for citizen-centred leadership, thereby embracing its potential to deliver better services, foster transparency, reduce corruption, and empower citizens through access to information. The paper posits that South Korea's prominence in e-government, as reflected in its consistent top rankings in the United Nations E-Government Development Index (EGDI) since 2010, led Nigeria to collaborate with South Korea for its e-government master plan. This partnership signifies the importance of learning from South Korea's e-Government experiences. The study employs data from UN e-government surveys conducted between 2008 and 2014 to evaluate Nigeria's e-government progress in comparison to South Korea's. The lessons drawn from South Korea's e-government development serve as a valuable guide for Nigeria's efforts to improve its EGDI ranking. Ultimately, the paper provides recommendations based on these findings to further strengthen Nigeria's e-government initiatives. In summary, this paper highlights the role of South Korea in assisting Nigeria with its e-government development endeavours, emphasizing the significance of cross-country learning and cooperation in the realm of digital governance.

Omigie, Zo and Rho's article, "User Acceptance of Mobile Broadband in Nigeria" delves into the acceptance of mobile broadband in Nigeria and its comparison with South Korea, offering insights into the dynamics of their relations in the context of technology adoption.[16] In Nigeria, broadband access is considered crucial for economic growth, and mobile broadband is seen as a means for developing countries to advance into the post-industrial era. The paper discusses the growth of mobile internet subscribers in Nigeria and highlights the challenges in achieving

World Congress on Computer Science and Engineering, APWC on CSE 2014 (March 2015): pp.1-7.

[16] Newman Osaosemwengie Omigie, Hangjung Zo, Jae Jeung Rho, "User Acceptance of Mobile Broadband in Nigeria," *Information and Knowledge Management* vol.5, no.7 (2015): pp.62-78.

widespread acceptance of mobile broadband, especially in rural areas. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the factors that stimulate users' intention to adopt mobile broadband. The study investigates various factors, including mobile broadband motivation, government support, perceived price value, social influence, and facilitating conditions, to determine their significance in influencing user behaviour regarding mobile broadband adoption. Notably, the article recognizes South Korea's leadership in broadband technology and its relevance to the Nigerian context. It also underscores the critical role of broadband in national development, economic growth, and government accountability. The study's findings are valuable for telecom and broadband service providers, helping them understand the factors driving mobile internet adoption. Additionally, it provides insights for government policymakers to align their strategies with the goal of increasing broadband penetration. This collaborative effort between Nigeria and South Korea in the technology sector contributes to their evolving relations in the digital era.

Yaaba's essay, "Strategy for Economic Development in South Korea: Lessons for Nigeria" delves into South Korea's economic development and considers how Nigeria may benefit from its success, stressing the opportunity for cooperation and mutual development between the two nations.[17] It starts off by recognizing the enormous economic change that East Asia underwent in the second half of the 20th century, with South Korea standing out as a star performer. This lays the groundwork for comprehending the significance of South Korea's development and its applicability to Nigeria. From its modest origins as a rural economy with few resources in the 1950s to its amazing position as one of the world's leading economies by 2010, South Korea's incredible path is chronicled. Emphasis is placed on the function of export-led growth and its effects on GDP per capita. The article compares the historical economic struggles of South Korea and Nigeria, emphasizing that despite their promise, both nations encountered obstacles. It acknowledges that although Nigeria had a bright future in the 1960s, there were roadblocks along the way. The article's main body examines the causes of South Korea's quick development and gives insightful insights into what Nigeria might learn from this experience. It explores a variety of topics, including economic development techniques, what made South Korea successful, the difficulties it currently faces, and how Nigerian politicians might use these lessons. In essence, this

[17] Yaaba, B.A., "Strategy for Economic Development in South Korea: Lessons for Nigeria," *CBN Bullion* vol.35, no.1 (2011): pp.24-34.

article emphasizes the value of studying South Korea's economic development and contends that Nigeria might gain from this understanding. It suggests the possibility of a successful collaboration between the two countries for their mutual advancement and expansion.

Sohn's paper, "If Nigeria's Economic Performance From 1960 to 2020 Resembled China's and South Korea's: Exploring the Counterfactual and Subjunctive in Economics" examines Nigeria's economic development since 1960 in comparison to China and South Korea and considers any consequences for the relationship between Nigeria and South Korea.[18] The essay opens by underlining Nigeria's difficulties in raising living standards during the previous 60 years, particularly in light of the remarkable progress and growth experienced in China and South Korea over the same time period. It explains the idea of counterfactuals and applies it to economics. Counterfactuals are a tool used by historians to imagine alternative historical scenarios. The author speculates on what may have happened in Nigeria during a 60-year period if population and economic development rates were comparable to those of China or South Korea. The purpose of this "invented scenario" is to illuminate the effects of Nigeria's long history of governance and economic management issues. Although the primary focus of this essay is economic analysis, it also subtly emphasizes Nigeria's potential to learn from the growth paths of nations like South Korea, which could improve economic cooperation and knowledge exchange between the two countries.

The National Policy on Fifth Generation (5G) Networks for Nigeria's Digital Economy is a valuable national document that speaks to a potential area for Ngeria-South Korean engagement. The National Policy, approved by the Federal Executive Council in September 2021, represents a significant development in Nigeria-South Korea relations, with implications for the technology sector.[19] This policy, the result of meticulous planning involving trials and extensive stakeholder consultations, underscores Nigeria's commitment to ensuring the safety and security of 5G networks. The trials confirmed the safety of 5G, a perspective shared by international organizations

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[18] Ira Sohn, "If Nigeria's Economic Performance From 1960–2020 Resembled China's and South Korea's: Exploring the Counterfactual and Subjunctive in Economics," *Journal of Applied Business and Economics* vol.24, no.1 (2022): pp.32-50.

[19] Federal Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy, *National Policy on Fifth Generation (5G) Networks for Nigeria's Digital Economy* (Abuja: Federal Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy, October 2021), 1–26.

like the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The Policy submits that 5G technology offers a range of advantages, including improved connectivity, reduced latency, and enhanced network flexibility, with potential benefits across various sectors of the economy. It also highlights how several countries, including South Korea, have already adopted 5G technology and are reaping its rewards. The National Policy on 5G Networks aligns harmoniously with Nigeria's overarching digital economy strategies, establishing an enabling environment for 5G deployment. Importantly, this policy development paves the way for potential collaboration and knowledge exchange between Nigeria and South Korea, a prominent player in the global 5G arena. South Korea's expertise in this domain positions it as a valuable partner for Nigeria as it enters the 5G era, deepening their technological relations.

Danjuma, Batet, and Yusuf's article "Oil Exploration and Nigeria's Underdevelopment: The Need to Escape the Natural Resource Curse" explores the difficulties of Nigerian oil exploration and how they relate to the underdevelopment of the nation.[20] Although the research primarily focuses on the situation in Nigeria, its lessons and findings may be applicable to the context of relations between Nigeria and South Korea. The article demonstrates how Nigeria's disproportionate reliance on oil earnings has hampered national economic growth and contributed to the phenomenon known as the "resource curse." It explores the negative impacts of this calamity, such as economic instability, crime, and the disregard for other crucial industries like manufacturing and agriculture. This study serves as a lesson for Nigeria in the context of relations between South Korea and Nigeria. It highlights how despite not having as many natural resources as Nigeria, South Korea has managed to experience tremendous economic growth. When it comes to diversifying its economy and lessening its reliance on oil, Nigeria may learn a lot from the contrast between the two nations. The report also underlines how crucial it is to have efficient organizations, institutions, and policies in place to manage natural resources for the benefit of the populace. This point is especially important for Nigeria because if it wants to improve its governance structures and policies, as this is something that South Korea may help with through cooperation and knowledge exchange. In conclusion, the report indirectly emphasizes the possibility for Nigeria to learn from nations like South Korea that have successfully managed their

[20] Joshua Danjuma, Dick Peter Batet, and Yusuf Achi, "Oil Exploration And Nigeria's Underdevelopment: The Need To Escape The Natural Resource Curse," *Arts and Social Science Research* vol.11, no.1 (2023): pp.73-90.

resources and diversified their economies, despite the article's primary focus on Nigeria's issues with oil exploration and underdevelopment. Knowledge exchange in the areas of resource management and economic diversification could be advantageous for relations between Nigeria and South Korea.

A Press Release issued by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education in October 2019 announced a collaborative effort between Nigeria and South Korea in the field of multimedia training, emphasizing the strengthening of Nigeria-South Korea relations.[21] According to this Press Release, this collaboration aims to enhance the capacity of Nigerian students and professionals in multimedia-related fields by drawing on South Korea's recognized expertise in this domain. It underscores the importance of knowledge exchange and cooperation between the two countries. The Press Release highlights how South Korea, known for its advanced technology and multimedia industry, offers valuable expertise in this sector, and that by partnering with South Korea, Nigeria seeks to tap into this knowledge pool to develop its own multimedia capabilities. This initiative not only highlights the willingness of both nations to collaborate and share expertise but also signifies the potential for deeper and mutually beneficial relations between Nigeria and South Korea. It reflects the broader context of cooperation in various fields and the strengthening of diplomatic ties between the two countries. This is an important resource that sheds light on an interesting area of cooperation between Nigeria and South Korea in contemporary times.

A report by the United Nations Population Fund states that in a past collaborative effort between Nigeria and South Korea, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) received funding support from KOICA, the South Korean Government's agency responsible for implementing its grant aid programs.[22] Together with the Centre for Population and Reproductive Health, they initiated a program to address Visico Viginal Fistula (VVF) among women in Northeast Nigeria. This initiative featured surgical procedures for VVF patients and a comprehensive Competency-

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[21] Federal Ministry of Education, Office of the Director, (Press and Public Relations *"Nigeria, South Korea to Collaborate on Multimedia Training,"* press release, October 2019, https://education.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Nigeria-South-Korea-To-Collaborate-On-Multimedia-Training..pdf.

[22] United Nations Population Fund, (UNFPA), *"UNFPA, KOICA Signs Memorandum of Understanding on Its Humanitarian Support to Borno State, Nigeria,"* press release, May 15, 2018, https://nigeria.unfpa.org/en/news/unfpa-koica-signs-memorandum-understanding-its-humanitarian-support-borno-state-nigeria.

Based Fistula Repair Training program for medical professionals from multiple Nigerian states. Participants from Kwara, Sokoto, Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States took part in the training, highlighting the cooperative engagement between Nigeria and South Korea. The program, conducted at Specialist Hospital Yola, resulted in numerous successful VVF surgeries, showcasing the positive outcomes of this collaborative healthcare effort. This joint initiative underscored the commitment of both nations to improving healthcare standards, ultimately contributing to the strengthening of Nigeria-South Korea relations.

The study, titled "Revamping the Nigerian Manufacturing Sub-Sector as a Panacea for Economic Progress: Lessons from South Korea" by Kalu E Uma and others, sheds light on the potential of Nigeria-South Korea relations in revitalizing the manufacturing sub-sector and propelling economic growth.[23] The research delves into the challenges facing the Nigerian economy, emphasizing issues like the lack of indigenous technology, heavy reliance on foreign resources and labor, policy inconsistencies, and a lack of domestic production linkages. These challenges have hindered the establishment of a robust manufacturing sub-sector capable of harnessing resources, reducing unemployment, and fostering economic development. Drawing lessons from South Korea's successful industrial policies, the study highlights key factors that could transform Nigeria's manufacturing sub-sector. These include improving the economic environment with infrastructure and public services, maintaining consistency, persistence, and determination in pursuing economic goals, adopting appropriate indigenous technology, and implementing effective monitoring, evaluation, and strategic adjustments. Ultimately, this study underscores the potential for Nigeria-South Korea collaboration to replicate the success of South Korea's manufacturing sub-sector in Nigeria, offering valuable insights into how Nigeria can overcome its economic challenges and achieve sustainable growth.

Emodi and Yusuf's article "Improving Electricity Access in Nigeria: Obstacles and the Way Forward" explores the crucial problem of power access in Nigeria and its potential effects on

[23] Kalu Uma, *et. al*, "Revamping the Nigerian Manufacturing Sub-Sector as a Panacea for Economic Progress: Lessons from South Korea," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* vol.10, no.4 (July 2019): pp.111-123.

relations between Nigeria and South Korea is discussed by Vincent Emodi and Samson D. Yusuf.[24] The study analyzes the issues that prevent Nigerians from having reliable access to electricity, such as poor infrastructure, insufficient power generation, and ineffective distribution. These difficulties have significantly impacted both Nigeria's economic growth and the standard of living of its people. The study also examines potential remedies and the function of international collaborations in overcoming these barriers. It emphasizes the necessity of working together with nations like South Korea, which is renowned for its energy sector expertise, to give technical assistance, investment, and knowledge transfer to help Nigeria increase its access to and use of power. This essay emphasizes the importance of Nigeria-South Korea cooperation in addressing one of Nigeria's most serious problems, reliable energy supply. Nigeria's electricity supply might significantly increase with cooperation between the two countries in the energy industry, which would ultimately help the nation's economy and people.

Chemonics International Inc.'s "Overview of the Nigerian Sesame Industry," published for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Nigeria, offers information on the sesame business in Nigeria and possible ramifications for relations between Nigeria and South Korea.[25] In-depth information about the sesame industry in Nigeria, including its production, difficulties, and potential, is provided in the report. Given Nigeria's good climate and substantial fertile territory, it emphasizes the tremendous potential for sesame cultivation and export in that nation. The paper underlines the value of international trade alliances for the expansion of Nigeria's sesame sector in regard to interactions between Nigeria and South Korea. As a significant participant in global trade, South Korea might play a significant role in importing goods made with sesame from Nigeria. This paper essentially emphasizes the potential for Nigeria-South Korea relations to flourish in the context of the sesame business, with South Korea perhaps serving as a lucrative market for Nigerian sesame exports. Such cooperation might boost economic development and improve diplomatic ties between the two countries.

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[24] Nnaemeka Vincent Emodi, and Samson D. Yusuf, "Improving Electricity Access in Nigeria: Obstacles and the Way Forward," *International Journal of Energy Economics and Policy* vol.5, no.1 (2015): pp.335-351.

[25] Chemonics International Inc., *Overview of the Nigerian Sesame Industry,* (Nigeria: The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) 2002), pp.1-34.

The "International Labour Organization Country Study: Potential for Skills Partnerships on Migration in Nigeria" authored by Ogwo and Ezekoye explores the potential for skills partnerships related to migration in Nigeria, with potential implications for Nigeria-South Korea relations.[26] The study delves into Nigeria's labor migration landscape, emphasizing the challenges and opportunities it presents. It highlights the significant potential for skills partnerships and collaborations to enhance the mobility and employability of Nigerian migrants. Regarding Nigeria-South Korea relations, the study suggests that South Korea, known for its robust industrial and technological sectors, could become a valuable partner in skills development and migration-related initiatives in Nigeria. This partnership could involve knowledge transfer, capacity building, and collaboration on training and employment opportunities for Nigerian migrants. In summary, the study suggests that Nigeria-South Korea relations could extend into the realm of skills partnerships and migration initiatives, potentially benefiting both nations by addressing labour market needs, facilitating economic growth, and fostering cooperation in the field of human resource development.

"The U.S. Energy Information Administration's Background Reference on South Korea" reveals an interesting aspect of Korea's energy supply that is intricately linked with Nigeria.[27] It emphasizes South Korea's position as a significant player in the world energy market in the context of relations between Nigeria and South Korea. It shows how, despite having few local energy resources, South Korea has constructed cutting-edge oil refineries and is a key supplier of refined petroleum, globally. This area of South Korea's energy know-how may present Nigeria with prospects for energy sector collaboration. Furthermore, Nigeria may be able to learn from South Korea's evolving energy policy, particularly its move away from nuclear energy and its dedication to decreasing greenhouse gas emissions, as it handles its own energy demands and environmental issues. Furthermore, this material presents South Korea's history of purchasing LNG from many nations, including ones like Indonesia, underlines its capacity to diversify its energy imports. It hints that as Nigeria considers possibilities for exporting its energy resources, including LNG, this

[26] Benjamin Ogwo and Benadeth Ezekoye, "The International Labour Organization Country Study: Potential for Skills Partnerships on Migration in Nigeria," *International Labour Organization Publications* (Geneva, 2020).

[27] U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Background Reference: South Korea*, (Last Updates: October 2020).

experience may be helpful. It highlights the large natural gas storage capacity and investment made by South Korea in LNG regasification plants and how they show the country's dedication to guaranteeing a steady supply of energy. The work also suggests that the construction of this infrastructure could spark discussions about possible energy trade and collaboration between South Korea and Nigeria. This material concludes South Korea's energy know-how, changing policies, experience with LNG imports, and knowledge of storage facilities may provide useful information and prospects for collaboration for Nigeria in the area of energy, boosting their bilateral relations.

The National Migration Policy of 2015 emphasizes the significance of interacting with the Nigerian diaspora to spur economic development.[28] It acknowledges that Nigerians who live abroad possess valuable knowledge, skills, and financial resources, including remittances and foreign direct investment, which might significantly accelerate the nation's economic growth. According to the Policy, this tactic was modelled after the success of countries like Pakistan, India, China, and South Korea, for whom engagement from their nationals in the diaspora was crucial for them to thrive economically. It highlights that by bringing in foreign cash, serving as an ambassador for foreign companies, and making direct investments in their home nations, the diaspora was able to participate because of important domestic economic reforms. In the framework of their bilateral relations, this Policy underscores the potential for collaboration and information sharing between South Korea and Nigeria. With its own successful economic development trajectory and involvement with its diaspora, South Korea may be able to provide Nigeria with helpful insights and collaboration prospects as it attempts to utilize the knowledge and resources of its diaspora for national development. This coordinated strategy for utilizing the diaspora could improve bilateral ties between South Korea and Nigeria.

A 2022 analysis conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) entitled "Growing the Nigerian Technological Ecosystem through the Capital Markets," underscores the profound impact of technology adoption on the future of countries, businesses, and individuals.[29] This analysis emphasizes that economic vitality and the creation of wealth in developed nations are increasingly

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[28] The International Organization for Migration, *The National Migration Policy of 2015*, Published for the Federal Government of Nigeria, 2015, pp.1-99.

[29] PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Analysis "Growing the Nigerian Technological Ecosystem through the Capital Markets," 2022, pp.1-9.

intertwined with technological advancements and the transformation brought about by digital innovation. It draws parallels with the trajectory of countries such as South Korea, which has emerged as an economic powerhouse, thanks in large part to its technological edge, particularly through the activities of major conglomerates involved in both software and hardware manufacturing. South Korea's remarkable economic success, characterized by its impressive technological capabilities, serves as a compelling example of what can be achieved through strategic investments in technology-driven industries. Notably, the analysis highlights the pivotal role played by prominent conglomerates within South Korea in advancing its technological prowess. Within the context of Nigeria-South Korea relations, this analysis serves to underscore the critical importance of technological development and innovation. It suggests that these domains hold great potential for collaboration and knowledge exchange between the two nations. South Korea's rich experience in building and nurturing a robust technology sector offers valuable insights and lessons that Nigeria can leverage as it aspires to cultivate its technological ecosystem and drive economic growth. In essence, the PwC analysis serves as a clarion call for Nigeria to harness the power of technology in its pursuit of economic progress and prosperity. It positions technology firms and innovation as pivotal drivers of future growth, and it encourages Nigeria to draw inspiration from countries like South Korea in its own technological journey.

In a comprehensive white paper authored by George Psacharopoulos, the state of education in Nigeria is thoroughly examined, revealing a significant disparity between the country's economic standing and its educational outcomes.[30] Despite possessing a moderately high per capita income, Nigeria struggles with educational achievement, marked by high illiteracy rates and substantial disparities in performance among different social groups. The white paper underscores Nigeria's placement in the UN's Human Development Index, where it ranks 152 out of 187 countries, falling behind several African nations like Kenya, Ghana, Botswana, and Rwanda. One of the paper's focal points is the importance of early years education. Regrettably, Nigeria faces a considerable challenge in terms of pre-primary school attendance, with a rate of only 13%, notably lower than the sub-Saharan African average of 20%. However, research consistently highlights the manifold advantages of early childhood education, including improved academic performance,

[30] George Psacharopoulos, *White Paper: Nigeria Perspectives in Education* (Copenhagen Consensus Center), pp.1-37.

reduced dropout rates, decreased involvement in criminal activities, and higher adult earnings. Moreover, the report sheds light on the issues surrounding primary school enrolment in Nigeria, where rates remain relatively low, characterized by a significant number of over-age students and frequent grade repetitions, extending the average completion time for primary education to nine years. High rates of grade repetition are associated with increased dropout rates, and only 77% of students successfully complete basic education, a figure falling below regional benchmarks. These challenges result in severe consequences, with approximately 7 million primary school-age children out of school, and an alarming half of the population over 15 classified as illiterate. The paper stresses how education quality exacerbates these challenges, as Nigeria fares poorly in comparison to 22 sub-Saharan and North African countries assessed by the World Bank in 2008. According to the paper, the contributing factors for this include inadequate physical infrastructure, substandard sanitation conditions, a shortage of textbooks, and a substantial number of unqualified teachers. Gender disparities persist, driven by an overrepresentation of male teachers in Northern regions, prompting many families to withdraw their daughters from school. These inequities create stark disparities among social groups, particularly in the Northern states. To contextualize these findings within the framework of Nigeria-South Korea relations, the report briefly draws a parallel between the economic trajectories of the two countries. Both Nigeria and South Korea had comparable per capita incomes of approximately $800 in 1950 (at 1990 values). However, by 2008, South Korea's per capita income had surged to over $19,000, marking a thirteenfold increase compared to Nigeria. This stark difference is largely attributed to divergent education policies. South Korea prioritized achieving universal primary education, while Nigeria primarily invested in universities while literacy rates remained stagnant. In light of these findings, the report recommends concrete actions to address Nigeria's educational challenges. It underscores three key areas for targeted intervention: enhancing school quality, expanding primary school enrolment, and increasing preschool coverage. These measures are demonstrated to yield substantial social and economic benefits, particularly for disadvantaged populations in the Northern States. In summary, the white paper underscores the urgent need for Nigeria to bridge the gap between its economic aspirations and educational achievements. In juxtaposing Nigeria's situation with South Korea's educational success, it provides valuable insights for Nigeria's policy formulation. The report emphasizes the critical importance of targeted investments in early education, primary

schooling, and educational quality, with the potential to drive Nigeria's development and create a brighter future for its citizens, especially those in underserved regions.

The Chatham House report titled "Thirst for African Oil: Asian National Oil Companies in Nigeria and Angola," authored by Alex Vines, Lillian Wong, Markus Weimer, and Indira Campos, delves into the intricate relationships between Asian National Oil Companies (NOCs) and oil-rich African nations, particularly Nigeria and Angola.[31] The report highlights the growing interest and involvement of Asian NOCs in these African oil-producing countries, shedding light on the economic and geopolitical dynamics at play. While the report primarily focuses on the activities of Asian NOCs, it indirectly underscores the significance of energy partnerships and relations between Nigeria and Asian nations like South Korea. As the report argues that as Asian countries seek to secure energy resources to sustain their growing economies, particularly through investments in African oil production, it becomes evident that Nigeria's oil-rich landscape holds a strategic role in these global energy dynamics. Understanding the interactions and collaborations between African nations like Nigeria and Asian counterparts, including South Korea, is essential in comprehending the broader implications of these energy-driven relationships on geopolitical and economic fronts.

In a comprehensive dissertation authored by Ogbodo and published at Golden Gate University School of Law, the evolving and complex roles of specific international financial institutions in developing nations are thoroughly examined.[32] This analysis, which focuses primarily on Nigeria, South Korea, and Brazil, explores the multifaceted dimensions of these institutions' engagements within the context of international law. While the central theme of the article revolves around the legal intricacies, it implicitly illuminates the diplomatic and economic relations existing between Nigeria and South Korea. The study scrutinizes the challenges and responsibilities borne by international financial organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as they interact with these three nations. By doing so, it underscores

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[31] Alex Vines, *et al, Thirst for African Oil: Asian National Oil Companies in Nigeria and Angola* (London: Chatham House, 2009), p.1-74.

[32] Sunday C. Ogbodo, *The Evolving and Challenging Roles of Certain International Financial Institutions in Developing Countries Under International Law with Particular Reference to Nigeria, South Korea, and Brazil* (San Franscisco: Golden Gate University School of Law, 2007). Theses and Dissertations Paper 26, pp.1-361.

the parallel experiences and potential areas of cooperation between Nigeria and South Korea in navigating the intricate landscape of international finance and development. Furthermore, the article accentuates the diplomatic avenues for collaboration and the exchange of knowledge between the two countries. This collaboration can facilitate their mutual quest to address shared challenges and capitalize on opportunities within the domain of international financial institutions. Understanding the evolving roles of these institutions is paramount for Nigeria and South Korea, as it enables them to forge stronger diplomatic ties and effectively advocate for their respective interests on the global stage. To sum up, the article offers a comprehensive perspective on the changing roles of international financial institutions in developing nations. While its primary focus is on the legal aspects, it implicitly underscores the potential for enhanced Nigeria-South Korea relations in addressing common challenges and opportunities within the international financial arena.

2.3 Conceptual Analysis

Bilateralism is one of the principal modes through which sovereign states conduct international relations. In its simplest sense, it refers to the conduct of relations between two states through direct diplomatic engagement, negotiation, and cooperation in pursuit of mutually beneficial political, economic, security, or socio-cultural objectives.[33] Unlike unilateralism, which involves the independent action of a single state, or multilateralism, which involves three or more states acting through collective arrangements, bilateralism is founded upon reciprocity and direct interaction between two actors. Contemporary International Relations scholarship further recognizes that bilateralism and multilateralism are not mutually exclusive but constitute complementary approaches through which states pursue foreign policy objectives in different institutional and strategic contexts.[34] From a legal perspective, bilateralism is understood as an institutional framework through which two sovereign states establish legally binding obligations by means of treaties, agreements, and diplomatic exchanges. Gabriella Blum explains that bilateral

[33] Gabriella Blum, "Bilateralism, Multilateralism, and the Architecture of International Law," *Harvard International Law Journal* vol.49, no.2 (2008): pp.323-379.

[34] Thomas Rixen "Bilateralism or multilateralism? The Political Economy of Avoiding International Double Taxation," *European Journal of International Relations* vol.16, no.4 (2010): pp.589-614.

arrangements remain an indispensable component of the international legal order because they permit states to negotiate agreements tailored to their specific interests while operating alongside multilateral legal instruments.[35] Similarly, Elisa Morgera argues that bilateral agreements should not necessarily be viewed as alternatives to multilateral cooperation; rather, they frequently reinforce broader international objectives by complementing multilateral efforts in areas such as environmental governance and the protection of global public goods.[36] Together, these perspectives demonstrate that bilateralism derives its significance not from its opposition to multilateralism but from its flexibility in addressing issues requiring direct cooperation between two states.

Economic scholarship similarly views bilateralism as a practical mechanism for advancing interstate cooperation. Thomas Rixen argues that bilateral agreements often provide the most efficient means of resolving issues such as international double taxation because negotiations involve only two parties with clearly defined interests.[37] Likewise, Howard S. Ellis, although critical of excessive reliance on bilateral trade agreements, acknowledges bilateralism as an important instrument for regulating trade between states, even while cautioning that excessive reliance on bilateral arrangements may contribute to the fragmentation of the global trading system.[38] From a historical perspective, Markus Lampe demonstrates that bilateral trade agreements have long served as instruments through which states pursued economic cooperation based on shared commercial and political interests, as illustrated by the Cobden–Chevalier Treaty

[35] Gabriella Blum, "Bilateralism, Multilateralism, and the Architecture of International Law," p.330.

[36] Elisa Morgera, "Bilateralism at the Service of Community Interests? Non-Judicial Enforcement of Global Public Goods in the Context of Global Environmental Law," *European Journal of International Law* vol.23, no.3 (August 2012): pp.743–767.

[37] Thomas Rixen "Bilateralism or multilateralism? The Political Economy of Avoiding International Double Taxation," p.600.

[38] Howard Sylvester Ellis, "Bilateralism and the Future of International Trade," *International Finance Section, Department of Economics and Social Institutions*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp.1-22.

between Britain and France.[39] These studies collectively show that bilateralism has historically served as a flexible framework through which states negotiate economic cooperation while responding to changing political and commercial realities. From the standpoint of diplomacy and foreign policy, bilateralism provides governments with an institutional mechanism for pursuing national interests through sustained interaction with another state. Xinsheng Liu argues that bilateral relations are shaped not only by material considerations such as economic and strategic interests but also by perceptions, diplomacy, and political leadership, all of which influence foreign policy decisions and the quality of interstate relations.[40] Alexander Thompson and Daniel Verdier similarly contend that states choose between bilateral and multilateral arrangements after weighing the costs and benefits associated with each form of cooperation.[41] Rather than viewing bilateralism and multilateralism as competing models, they argue that both represent complementary institutional choices whose suitability depends upon the specific issue area and the transaction costs involved.

The significance of bilateralism is particularly evident in regional and developing-country contexts. Dawn Nagar and Charles Mutasa observe that African states increasingly employ bilateral diplomacy alongside multilateral engagement to promote trade, investment, security cooperation, and broader foreign policy objectives.[42] Likewise, N. Ganesan and Ramses Amer demonstrate that bilateral and multilateral diplomacy coexist, with states selecting the approach most appropriate to the political and strategic circumstances confronting them.[43] The foregoing

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[39] Markus Lampe, "Explaining Nineteenth-Century Bilateralism: Economic and Political Determinants of the Cobden-Chevalier Network." *The Economic History Review* vol.64, no. 2 (2011): 644–668.

[40] Liu Xinsheng, *Modeling Bilateral International Relations: The Case of U.S.-China Interactions* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp.5-15.

[41] Alexander Thompson and Daniel Verdier. "Multilateralism, Bilateralism, and Regime Design." *International Studies Quarterly* vol.58, no. 1 (2014): pp.15–28.

[42] Dawn Nagar, Charles Mutasa (eds.) *Africa and the World: Bilateral and Multilateral International Diplomacy* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p.10.

[43] Ramses Amer, N. Ganesan (eds.) "International Relations in Southeast Asia: Between Bilateralism and Multilateralism," *Institute of Southeast Asian Studies* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2010), p.25.

perspectives converge on several important propositions. First, bilateralism refers to direct relations between two sovereign states conducted through diplomacy, negotiation, and mutually agreed frameworks of cooperation. Second, bilateralism and multilateralism are not inherently contradictory but frequently complement one another in the conduct of international relations.[44] Third, bilateralism provides states with greater flexibility in pursuing political, economic, and socio-cultural objectives while allowing agreements to reflect the particular interests and capacities of the parties involved. Finally, bilateralism functions not merely as a diplomatic practice but as an analytical framework for understanding interstate cooperation. Accordingly, bilateralism is employed in this study as the conceptual framework for analysing Nigeria–South Korea relations between 1980 and 2025. The concept provides an appropriate lens for examining how the two states have developed and sustained cooperation through diplomatic engagement, economic collaboration, and socio-cultural exchanges over the period under review. Rather than treating bilateralism as the principal subject of investigation, this study utilises it as a framework for explaining the evolution, character, and dynamics of the bilateral relationship between Nigeria and South Korea.

2.4 Conclusion

Whilst existing scholarship has illuminated the broad contours of Africa–Asia engagements and South Korea's continental forays, the specific evolution, modalities, and implications of Nigeria–South Korea bilateral relations since 1980 remain substantially under-theorised. This lacuna proves particularly consequential given both nations' status as significant middle powers within their respective regions, their shared commitment to diversifying diplomatic partnerships beyond traditional Western alignments, and their mutual interest in fostering sustainable development through mutually beneficial cooperation. The review has demonstrated that bilateralism has operated as the predominant framework structuring Abuja–Seoul interactions, yet the precise mechanisms through which this diplomatic modality has been negotiated, institutionalised, and adapted to shifting geopolitical circumstances including the end of the Cold War, democratisation processes, and the ascent of the digital economy, warrant deeper interrogation. Furthermore, the asymmetrical character of this partnership wherein South Korea

[44] Elisa Morgera, "Bilateralism at the Service of Community Interests? p.750.

possesses markedly superior economic and technological capabilities, necessitates critical examination of how Nigeria has sought to maximise strategic benefits, enhance indigenous capacity, and mitigate dependency risks through prudent policy calibration. By furnishing a historically grounded, systematically structured analysis of political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions, this study redresses a significant gap in the literature. It contributes original insights into the functioning of South–South cooperation between asymmetrically endowed partners and illuminates how bilateral frameworks can be leveraged to advance developmental objectives and regional stability within an increasingly multipolar international order.

CHAPTER THREE

NIGERIA-SOUTH KOREA POLITICAL RELATIONS FROM 1980 TO 2025

This chapter is on Nigerian–South Korean political relations from 1980 to 2025, which evolved through diplomatic recognition, asymmetrical partnership, high-level engagements, institutional frameworks, and mutual strategic cooperation within shifting global contexts. It examines the evolution of Nigerian–South Korean relations as a case study in bilateral diplomacy. It traces how their association developed from initial diplomatic recognition into a structured, albeit asymmetrical, partnership sustained through high-level political engagement, institutional frameworks, and convergent diplomatic interests. Diverging from multilateral or regional analyses that subsume African–Asian interaction within expansive "South–South" narratives, this chapter approaches the Nigeria–South Korea relationship as a discrete bilateral system, one shaped by the respective priorities, constraints, and strategic agency of both states. The analytical focus rests upon diplomacy as a dynamic process of continuity, adaptation, and negotiated adjustment across shifting domestic and international contexts. At its core, the chapter advances the argument that the political relationship between Nigeria and South Korea demonstrates how bilateralism functions simultaneously as an instrument of foreign policy and a reflection of national character. Each state approached the partnership with distinct motivations: Nigeria sought to expand its global diplomatic reach and consolidate its leadership credentials within the post-colonial international order, whilst South Korea aimed to diversify its strategic alliances beyond the immediate East Asian theatre. Over subsequent decades, the relationship evolved through recurrent political exchanges and institutional agreements that transmuted symbolic recognition into sustained, substantive interaction. Nevertheless, the trajectory of their association also reveals persistent asymmetries that have fundamentally shaped the tone and texture of bilateral diplomatic practice for more than four decades.

The chapter comprises five thematic sections. The first, "The Foundation of Nigeria-South Korean Political Relations," examines the constellation of geopolitical, economic, and ideological factors that established the preconditions for formal diplomatic relations in 1980. The second, "Institutional Architecture and Diplomatic Infrastructure," assesses how the relationship was progressively formalized through joint commissions, bilateral agreements, and permanent

diplomatic missions that imparted administrative coherence to political commitments. The third, "Nigeria-South Korean Summit Diplomacy," investigates how presidential, ministerial, and ambassadorial engagements served as principal instruments for cultivating political trust and sustaining dialogue across successive administrations in both states. The fourth, "Bilateral Relations Expressed in Multilateral Diplomacy," explores how both nations strategically deployed their bilateral partnership to advance mutual objectives within international organizations and global summits, converting reciprocal endorsement into tangible political capital. The fifth, "Security Cooperation," examines the interplay between defence collaboration, crisis management protocols, and the circulation of governance norms, demonstrating how each state's domestic political culture fundamentally shaped the modalities of its diplomatic practice. The sixth and final section, "Ideological Framing," assesses how the relationship was initially articulated through rhetoric of equality and mutual benefit, yet rapidly disclosed structural disparities in capacity and influence that have endured throughout the partnership's history.

Taken together, these sections argue that Nigerian–South Korean relations exemplify the endurance and adaptability of bilateral diplomacy as a mode of international engagement. Despite divergent geopolitical contexts and marked disparities in national capacity, both states have evinced consistent commitment to maintaining political dialogue and institutional connection across four and a half decades. The chapter consequently situates the Nigeria–South Korea relationship as a study in diplomatic persistence: a partnership defined both by perceived ideological alignment and by the steady accretion of political interaction, procedural cooperation, and symbolic reciprocity that continue to anchor their state-to-state relations within the contemporary multipolar order.

3.1 The Foundation of Nigeria-South Korea Political Relations

The Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Republic of Korea formally established diplomatic relations on February 22, 1980,[1] before which both nations had already endured complex political trajectories shaped by colonial legacies, post-independence instability, and the larger Cold War

[1] Republic of Korea, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Nigeria." https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/nation/m_4902/view.do?seq=167&utm_source Accessed: July 4, 2025.

context. Despite vast geographic and cultural differences, their historical experiences reveal instructive parallels and decisive divergences that influenced their respective foreign policy orientations and eventual diplomatic convergence at the dawn of the 1980s. A critical foundation for comparison lies in their contrasting colonial inheritances. Nigeria's colonial period, extending nearly a century from the annexation of Lagos in 1861 to independence in 1960, operated through the British system of indirect rule. This administrative model relied on local chiefs and traditional hierarchies to govern a vast, ethnically diverse territory, resulting in a decentralized political structure that entrenched ethnic and regional cleavages and fostered networks of personal loyalty and patronage. These structures, while effective for maintaining colonial control, complicated the emergence of a unified national identity and hindered post-independence state consolidation. The British emphasis on regional autonomy and traditional authority structures left Nigeria with a fragmented political landscape where centrifugal forces often overwhelmed centripetal ones, contributing to the devastating civil war of 1967-1970 and persistent challenges of national integration throughout subsequent decades. [2]

By contrast, Korea's thirty-five years under Japanese rule (1910-1945) were characterized by direct and centralized administration, marked by assimilationist policies, bureaucratic discipline, and infrastructure expansion.[3] Although coercive and primarily designed to serve Japanese imperial interests, colonial rule also established centralized administrative and institutional structures that post-liberation South Korea later adapted in building its developmental state.[4] The Japanese colonial administration dismantled many traditional governing structures and introduced modern bureaucratic institutions, strengthening state capacity and providing an institutional foundation that later governments utilized during state-led industrialization.[5]

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[2] Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), esp. chaps. 3–5.

[3] Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 140–190.

[4] Atul Kohli, "Where Do High Growth Political Economies Come From? The Japanese Lineage of Korea's 'Developmental State,'" *World Development* 22, no. 9 (1994): 1269–1293.

[5] *Ibid.*

Furthermore, the shared experience of anti-colonial resistance, followed by national division after 1945 and the Korean War, fostered a strong sense of national purpose and developmental urgency that contributed to South Korea's rapid transformation during the latter half of the twentieth century.[6]

The divergent colonial experiences of these two nations profoundly shaped their post-independence developmental trajectories and international alignments. Nigeria's federal structure was designed to accommodate the country's ethnic and regional diversity. However, persistent ethnic competition, constitutional tensions, and repeated military interventions undermined the effective operation of the federal system, disrupting long-term economic planning and reducing consistency in foreign policy implementation.[7] The discovery of oil in the late 1950s transformed Nigeria into a petro-state, creating rentier economic dynamics that distorted development priorities and fostered corruption while simultaneously elevating its importance in global energy markets. South Korea, devoid of significant natural resources, was compelled to pursue export-oriented industrialization strategies under authoritarian leadership, prioritizing human capital development and technological acquisition.[8] These contrasting pathways of Nigeria's resource-dependent federalism versus Korea's labor-intensive developmental authoritarianism created distinct models of state-society relations that would influence their bilateral engagement when diplomatic relations were finally established. The timing of their diplomatic normalization in 1980 reflected not merely bilateral interests but also shifting global geopolitical configurations, as both nations sought to diversify their international partnerships beyond traditional Western alignments while navigating the complex dynamics of the late Cold War era.

Following independence, both states grappled with profound political instability, yet their experiences diverged sharply in outcome. South Korea, established as the Republic of Korea in

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[6] Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern,* p.150.

[7] Rotimi T. Suberu, "The Nigerian Federal System: Performance, Problems and Prospects," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 28, no. 4 (2010): 459–477.

[8] Bruce Cumings, "The Legacy of Japanese Colonialism in Korea," in *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945*, ed. Ramon Myers and Mark Peattie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 469–500.

1948, endured the devastation of the Korean War (1950–1953), which entrenched the peninsula's division but also forged a strong sense of national identity and external alliances, particularly with the United States. Successive authoritarian governments, especially under Park Chung-hee (1961–1979), leveraged this unity to build a powerful developmental state. Nigeria, by contrast, experienced a series of military coups beginning in 1966 and a brutal civil war (1967–1970), events that revealed and deepened pre-existing regional and ethnic fault lines. The absence of robust institutional cohesion and the persistence of clientelistic politics weakened Nigeria's capacity to sustain coherent economic or foreign policy directions in the same period.[9] Economically, the trajectories of both nations diverged even further. Between 1960 and 1980, South Korea transitioned from an impoverished agrarian society to a newly industrialized economy through state-driven industrial policy, export promotion, and close coordination between the bureaucracy and large conglomerates (*chaebol*). This transformation reflected the emergence of a developmental state able to discipline capital, allocate credit, and guide industrial priorities.[10]

Nigeria, by contrast, became heavily dependent on oil following the 1956 discovery at Oloibiri. The resulting influx of oil rents encouraged state capture, corruption, and economic volatility, reinforcing the patronage networks inherited from colonial rule. Unlike South Korea's technocratic governance, Nigeria's political economy evolved around resource extraction rather than productive diversification, constraining its ability to pursue a stable or strategic foreign policy agenda by the late 1970s.[11] These contrasting colonial, political, and economic experiences help explain why, by 1980, South Korea possessed centralized state capacity and a coherent developmental ideology, while Nigeria faced recurrent fragmentation and governance challenges. Korea's earlier independence alone did not determine this divergence; rather, it was how each nation managed the institutional legacies and global pressures of decolonization that shaped their international postures on the eve of formal diplomatic engagement.

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[9] Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*; Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005).

[10] Alice H. Amsden, *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[11] Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, chaps. 7–9.

The pre-1980 political relationship between Nigeria and South Korea unfolded within the broader geopolitical framework of the Cold War, characterized by ideological polarization, African decolonization, and strategic efforts by African states to navigate global divisions while preserving autonomy through non-alignment. Although formal diplomatic ties were not established until February 1980, both nations engaged cautiously and asymmetrically within broader geopolitical structures, with their interactions mediated by multilateral forums, preliminary diplomatic missions, and the wider contest of legitimacy between North and South Korea on the African continent.[12] The "Korean question," revolving around the division of the Korean Peninsula following the Korean War and competing claims of two rival regimes, became a recurring issue in the United Nations General Assembly, particularly during the 1970s.[13] At the 1975 UN session, two competing resolutions captured the deepening divide between Cold War blocs: the Eastern bloc's resolution advocated for dissolution of the United Nations Command and withdrawal of foreign troops by January 1976, while the Western-backed resolution conditioned troop withdrawal on establishing a new armistice agreement. African states were significantly divided, with twenty-six black African countries voting for the Eastern-backed resolution and only eight supporting the Western resolution, highlighting the complex diplomatic balancing acts African nations performed in pursuit of non-alignment and decolonial sovereignty.[14]

Nigeria's foreign policy during the 1960s and 1970s was marked by commitment to non-alignment, African solidarity, and pursuit of an independent global voice, which influenced its cautious approach to both Koreas. Of the 36 black African states in the United Nations by the mid-1970s, nine recognized only South Korea, eleven recognized only North Korea, fourteen maintained relations with both, while remarkably, Nigeria and Ghana stood apart, having formal diplomatic relations with neither Korea. Nigeria frequently voted in favour of Eastern bloc-sponsored resolutions concerning the Korean question, including support for withdrawal of foreign

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[12] Sang-Seek Park, "Africa and Two Koreas: A Study of African Non-Alignment," *African Studies Review* 21, no. 1 (April 1978): p.75.

[13] United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations 1957*, Part I, Section 1, Chapter X, "The Korean Question," pp.87-96.

[14] Park, "Africa and Two Koreas," pp.73-74.

troops, dissolution of UNCURK, and participation of both Koreas in UN discussions regardless of recognition status.[15] This voting behaviour was not an endorsement of Eastern bloc ideology but reflected Nigeria's broader strategy to support decolonization, resist imperialism, and assert African autonomy, illustrating how Cold War-era decisions were shaped less by ideological allegiance and more by pragmatic geopolitical considerations. North Korea capitalized early on Africa's post-independence ideological climate through deliberate diplomatic outreach that blended military training, development aid, educational exchanges, and symbolic projects, most notably through its Mansudae Overseas Projects, a North Korean state-owned monument and construction company that built symbolic national monuments across Africa. Pyongyang promoted *Juche* ideology as a distinct political philosophy separate from Chinese and Soviet frameworks, establishing study groups in newly decolonized African countries during the 1960s and 1970s, with claims that thousands of *Juche* supporters remained in Nigeria as late as 2014.[16]

South Korea's foreign policy toward Africa evolved significantly from initial isolation to strategic engagement. Under the First Republic (1948–1960), Seoul followed rigid anti-communist policies that effectively isolated it from much of Africa, continuing into the 1960s through adherence to the Hallstein Doctrine, which precluded relations with countries recognizing North Korea.[17] South Korea's earliest documented official contact with Nigeria occurred in 1961 when Ambassador Lim Chang-young led a delegation to Nigeria and other African nations from February 18 to March 7 to appeal for Nigeria's support for South Korea's UN membership. Following Park Chung-hee's military coup in May 1961, a second delegation led by Ambassador Baek Seon-yeop visited Nigeria from July 13 to August 31 to explain the new regime and continue soliciting UN support.[18] However, momentum from these visits was undercut by South Korea's

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[15] *Ibid., pp.* 75-79.

[16] Suweon Kim, "Dynamics of Korea-Africa Cultural Engagements," in *South Korea's Engagement with Africa*, ed. Yongkyu Chang (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp.138-139.

[17] Park, "Africa and Two Koreas," pp.76-77.

[18] Hyomin Jung, "Diplomatic Dynamics: Korea and Africa in the Cold War Context," *Asian and African Studies* 33, no. 2 (2024): p.249.

uncompromising application of the Hallstein Doctrine, which proved counterproductive as it effectively conceded diplomatic ground to North Korea. A policy shift occurred under the Third Republic (1961–1971) as Seoul sought ties with Afro-Asian countries, establishing diplomatic relations with 23 African states by 1971, before abandoning the One Korea policy in 1973 to enable broader engagement.[19]

By the late 1970s, several factors converged to create favorable conditions for formal diplomatic relations between Nigeria and South Korea. The gradual thawing of Cold War tensions during détente, South Korea's abandonment of rigid diplomatic policies like the Hallstein Doctrine in 1973, and Nigeria's emergence as a regional superpower following the oil boom created new opportunities for bilateral engagement. South Korea's re-engagement with Africa was shaped by geopolitical necessity to counter North Korea's growing continental influence, adopting a more flexible approach that leveraged its growing economic strength and international presence to build partnerships transcending Cold War dynamics.[20] Nigeria's strategic decision to maintain distance from both Koreas until 1980 reflected its broader foreign policy approach grounded in sovereignty, African unity, and careful navigation of Cold War pressures. These factors culminated in the formal establishment of diplomatic relations between Nigeria and South Korea in February 1980, during the administrations of Nigerian President Shehu Shagari and South Korean President Choi Kyu-hah, representing a pragmatic convergence rather than ideological alignment that reflected South Korea's emergence as an economic actor with growing soft power ambitions and Nigeria's pursuit of diversified global partnerships amid internal fragmentation and shifting geopolitical landscapes.[21]

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[19] Park, "Africa and Two Koreas," p.78; Françoise Nicolas, "Korea in Africa: Between Soft Power and Economic Interests," *Études de l'Ifri*, January 2020, p.9.

[20] Nicolas, "Korea in Africa," p.9.

[21] Wikipedia, s.v. "Nigeria–South Korea relations," accessed April 27, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigeria%E2%80%93South_Korea_relations.

3.2 Institutional Architecture and Diplomatic Infrastructure

The consolidation of Nigerian–South Korean diplomatic relations after 1980 evolved from symbolic exchanges to an increasingly institutionalized framework. This transformation reflected both nations' recognition that durable bilateral engagement required formal mechanisms and procedural continuity beyond the episodic rhythm of state visits. Institutional architecture became the scaffolding through which high-level political commitments were operationalized and sustained across shifting administrations. From the mid-1980s onward, successive agreements, commissions, and administrative arrangements provided structural definition to a relationship that had initially been animated by ideological optimism and summit diplomacy. Yet even as these frameworks multiplied, the asymmetry in institutional capacity between the two states persisted, manifesting in delayed implementation, uneven follow-through, and imbalanced diplomatic infrastructure.

The establishment of the Nigeria–South Korea Joint Commission in July 1985 was the single most consequential institutional milestone in the bilateral relationship.[22] The Commission's creation was ratified during meetings between Nigeria's Minister of External Affairs, Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, and South Korea's Foreign Minister, Won-Kyung Lee and signaled the formalization of regular diplomatic consultation.[23] It provided a standing framework for reviewing political relations, monitoring agreements, and coordinating positions on international issues. In essence, it institutionalized the political dialogue that had been initiated through earlier summit and ministerial visits. The Joint Commission was reportedly intended to *"ensure continuity in political consultation and follow-up,"* emphasizing the desire for stability after years of ad hoc engagement.[24] For South Korea, this move represented a systematic approach to African diplomacy, designed to align bilateral commitments with its broader strategy of institutionalizing relations with key states across the Global South. For Nigeria, however, it revealed both aspiration and constraint; aspiration to formalize its international partnerships, yet constraint in sustaining

[22] "Nigeria, South Korea Begin Trade Talks," *Guardian*, July 25, 1985, p. 5.

[23] "Akinyemi and South Korean Minister Begin Talks," *Guardian*, August 7, 1986, p. 1.

[24] *Ibid.,*

the bureaucratic momentum such structures demanded. Despite the Commission's creation, its subsequent meetings were irregular, reflecting the challenges of maintaining diplomatic infrastructure amid Nigeria's recurring political transitions.

Alongside the Joint Commission, bilateral agreements emerged as critical components of the relationship's institutional fabric. Between 1983 and 1989, a series of accords were negotiated to give formal legal and administrative expression to political commitments. These included the Air Services Agreement, Maritime Transport Agreement, and the Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement, each designed to provide diplomatic cover for sectoral cooperation and to facilitate reciprocal engagement at the ministerial level.[25] In 1983, reports highlighted that both governments had *"agreed to sign an agreement to facilitate bilateral exchanges and technical cooperation,"* marking one of the earliest attempts at formalizing the mechanisms of political coordination.[26] A defense cooperation framework followed, inaugurated through the exchange of military delegations led by General Hwang Young Si (1983) and General Ho-Yong Chung (1985), both visits sanctioned at the highest levels of government.[27] These defense-related engagements, while ostensibly military in nature, were also expressions of institutional diplomacy: they opened lines of communication between ministries, established liaison offices, and codified inter-agency contact between the Nigerian Ministry of Defence and the South Korean Ministry of National Defense. The resulting memoranda of understanding (MOUs) provided a structured basis for periodic consultations, symbolizing an evolution from political goodwill to bureaucratic connectivity. Ambassadorial infrastructure also reflected the progressive institutionalization of relations, albeit unevenly. South Korea established its embassy in Lagos in March 1980, only weeks after the announcement of diplomatic recognition, while Nigeria's delay in opening its

[25] "Nigeria and Korea Agree," *Daily Sketch*, May 18, 1983, p. 4; "Nigeria, South Korea Begin Trade Talks," *Guardian*, July 25, 1985, p. 5.

[26] "Nigeria and Korea Agree," *Daily Sketch*, May 18, 1983, p. 4.

[27] "South Korean Army Chief Meets Bali," *Guardian*, July 19, 1985, p. 16; "Nigerian Defence Minister Calls for Closer Ties with South Korea," *Nigerian Federal Department of Information*, press release no. 1257, Lagos, July 18, 1985.

embassy in Seoul until 1987 epitomized the asymmetrical nature of the relationship.[28] The decision to open the mission after a seven-year gap was described as "long overdue," quoting officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who attributed the delay to Cold War sensitivities and fiscal constraints.[29] The delayed establishment underscored Nigeria's characteristic diplomatic caution during this era, shaped by its desire to maintain equidistance between North and South Korea, but more than that, it hinted at Nigeria's lack of institutional capacity to set up an embassy.[30] The absence of a resident mission in Seoul during this critical formative period created operational limitations: communication depended on periodic correspondence through the Nigerian mission in Tokyo, significantly constraining responsiveness and undermining the institutional balance necessary for effective diplomacy. South Korea's continuous ambassadorial presence in Lagos, from Shin Ki Heum (1980–1982) through Dong-Won Lim (1984) and Chang Hee Roe (1985), ensured continuity of engagement and bureaucratic follow-up.[31] This contrast illustrated how structural asymmetry extended beyond capacity to encompass diplomatic presence itself.

Institutional linkages also expanded laterally, encompassing non-traditional diplomatic actors. From the late 1980s onward, the Korean Embassy in Lagos deepened engagement with Nigerian civil society organizations, think tanks, and policy institutions, most notably the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA).[32] Embassy reports from the mid-1990s indicate that NIIA's research fellows collaborated with Korean diplomats in policy dialogues, which served as informal "think tank diplomacy," reinforcing bilateral political understanding. This model reflected South Korea's broader global strategy of combining formal diplomacy and knowledge-sharing networks to complement state-level engagement. Nigeria's participation in such exchanges, while symbolically significant, remained dependent on external initiative rather than

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[28] "Association Wants Nigerian Embassy in South Korea," *Guardian*, December 6, 1985, p. 3.

[29] "Nigeria to Open Embassy in South Korea," *Daily Times*, April 23, 1987, p. 10.

[30] *Ibid.,*

[31] "Envoy Praises Nigeria," *Daily Times*, February 15, 1986, p. 9.

[32] "General Babangida Wants Increased Economic Co-operation Between Nigeria and South Korea," *Nigerian Federal Ministry of Information and Culture*, press release no. 634, Lagos, April 22, 1987.

institutional continuity from within its foreign policy establishment. By the 2000s, the bilateral relationship had matured into a multi-layered diplomatic infrastructure encompassing parliamentary, regulatory, and subnational elements. Institutional cooperation between the Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation (NDIC) and the Korea Deposit Insurance Corporation (KDIC) exemplified how regulatory bodies were integrated into the bilateral framework, producing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that formalized technical cooperation and governance exchange.[33] Parliamentary and subnational engagements followed, with Nigerian state governments periodically hosting delegations from the Korean Embassy to discuss security coordination and inter-governmental cooperation. These initiatives broadened the relationship's diplomatic base, embedding it within multiple levels of governance. They also reflected the adaptability of South Korea's diplomatic strategy, which combined centralized coordination with decentralized outreach to subnational actors and specialized agencies.

Despite these institutional advances, structural imbalances persisted in the diplomatic infrastructure between both countries. Nigeria's bureaucratic inconsistency and fragmented coordination often contrasted sharply with South Korea's disciplined, hierarchical model of foreign policy administration. The most telling recent example of this asymmetry was Nigeria's conspicuous absence from the Fifth Korea–Africa Forum in 2022, despite being South Korea's largest African trading partner and a key political ally.[34] South Korean officials and media described Nigeria's non-participation as "regrettable," interpreting it as a symptom of institutional disengagement and poor inter-ministerial coordination in Abuja.[35] The absence was widely contrasted with South Korea's comprehensive preparations for the forum, including high-level representation, ministerial working groups, and pre-summit consultations with African embassies. This episode underscored how structural asymmetry in diplomatic infrastructure endured well into the twenty-first century: while South Korea maintained a robust network of diplomatic,

[33] "Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation (NDIC) and Korea Deposit Insurance Corporation (KDIC) Sign Cooperation MOU," *Embassy of the Republic of Korea,* press release, 2015.

[34] "Fifth Korea–Africa Forum: Nigeria Absent from Seoul Dialogue," *Guardian*, October 5, 2022, p. 4.

[35] *Ibid.,*

multilateral, and technical mechanisms, Nigeria's engagement often relied on individual leadership rather than institutional predictability. The 2024 Korea–Africa Summit provided an opportunity for Nigeria to reassert its diplomatic presence within this institutional landscape. The inclusion of Nigerian ministers and the reaffirmation of bilateral frameworks during the summit demonstrated both states' acknowledgment of the need to consolidate institutional coordination. Yet the episode also highlighted the broader theme that defines the history of Nigerian–South Korean relations: the coexistence of impressive institutional architecture with persistent asymmetry in diplomatic commitment. The architecture of bilateral engagement, namely, joint commissions, MOUs, embassy structures, and inter-agency partnerships, all embodied the ambition of parity, while the unevenness of Nigeria's participation exposed the reality of imbalance. Thus, even as both states advanced toward a more complex and multi-actor framework of cooperation by 2025, the underlying tension between institutional form and functional asymmetry remained unresolved, shaping the character of the bilateral relationship as both durable and uneven in its diplomatic infrastructure.

3.3 Nigeria-South Korea Summit Diplomacy

High-level diplomacy has been a central pillar of Nigerian–South Korean political relations since the formal establishment of diplomatic ties in February 1980. From the outset, presidential, ministerial, and ambassadorial visits served as both symbols and instruments of statecraft, transforming a newly established diplomatic connection into a structured political relationship. The first decade following recognition was particularly formative, setting a pattern of reciprocal visits and elite-level exchanges that became the backbone of bilateral diplomacy. These engagements not only affirmed mutual recognition between the two states but also provided formal venues for dialogue, the signing of joint communiqués, and the institutionalization of political trust at the highest levels of leadership. Through these visits, both states sought to project international solidarity, consolidate strategic partnerships, and reaffirm commitment to long-term engagement across changing political administrations.

The earliest major milestone in this regard was the February 1981 visit of Nigeria's Minister of External Affairs, Professor Ishaya Audu, to Seoul—barely a year after the

establishment of relations.[36] As reported by the *New Nigerian*, the visit was undertaken at the invitation of the South Korean government and immediately followed Audu's participation in the Non-Aligned Movement Foreign Ministers' Conference in New Delhi, symbolically situating South Korea within the orbit of Nigeria's Global South diplomacy.[37] This early ministerial exchange demonstrated Seoul's recognition of Nigeria's diplomatic influence in the non-aligned world and Lagos's openness to diversifying partnerships beyond its traditional Western alignments. The visit's political substance extended beyond formal courtesy: Audu invited South Korean firms to participate in constructing Nigeria's new Federal Capital, Abuja, and to engage in projects under the Five-Year National Development Plan.[38] Politically, these overtures illustrated the use of bilateral diplomacy as a mechanism for national modernization, and at the same time, Seoul's eagerness to institutionalize the relationship through direct ministerial dialogue reflected a long-term strategic orientation that would become characteristic of its engagement with Nigeria.

The subsequent courtesy call by Special Envoy Pae-Woo Roh to President Shehu Shagari in December 1981 further reinforced the pattern of proactive diplomacy from Seoul.[39] The envoy's mission, which delivered a personal message from President Chun Doo-hwan, was the diplomatic prelude to what became a landmark event; the first-ever visit of a South Korean head of state to Nigeria in August 1982.[40] President Chun's four-day state visit marked a defining moment in bilateral relations, symbolizing a qualitative shift from symbolic recognition to structured, summit-level diplomacy. His visit was greeted with extensive media coverage emphasizing solidarity, equality, and South–South cooperation.[41] The *New Nigerian* described it as *"setting an example of South–South co-operation,"* underscoring how such high-level visits were interpreted within

[36] "Ishaya to Visit South Korea," *New Nigerian*, February 7, 1981, p. 9.

[37] "Ishaya to Visit South Korea," New Nigerian, February 7, 1981, p. 9.

[38] "Audu Invites South Korean Firms," *New Nigerian*, February 17, 1981, p. 10.

[39] "Courtesy Call from Special Korean Envoy," *Daily Times*, December 8, 1981, p. 10.

[40] "President Chun's Visit Opens New Era for Nigeria–Korea Relationship: Setting an Example of South–South Co-operation," *New Nigerian*, August 19, 1982, p. 1.

[41] "I'm Here to Strengthen Ties, Says President Chun," *National Concord*, August 20, 1982, p. 13.

ideological frameworks of post-colonial partnership and mutual development.[42] Yet beyond the symbolism, the visit had profound political implications: two rounds of summit talks were held with President Shagari, culminating in the signing of an Agreement on Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation and a joint communiqué condemning tyranny and oppression in Southern Africa and Israeli aggression in Lebanon.[43] These outcomes confirmed the use of summit diplomacy not merely as ceremonial exchange but as a platform for articulating shared political positions on global justice and decolonization. By engaging Nigeria at the presidential level, Seoul effectively positioned Lagos as a gateway for its diplomatic expansion into Africa. The subsequent reciprocal engagement by Nigerian officials and parliamentarians, many of whom visited South Korea in the years immediately following, cemented a framework of high-level political familiarity.[44] Through these sustained visits, both states created a cycle of elite-level engagement that continued to define the political rhythm of bilateral relations.

The mid-1980s witnessed continuity and expansion of ministerial and military-level visits that reinforced the summit diplomacy template established in 1982. The visit of South Korea's Chief of Army Staff, General Hwang Young Si, to Nigeria in May 1983 marked the entry of defense diplomacy into the bilateral political agenda.[45] This was followed in 1985 by the visit of General Ho-Yong Chung, who met with Nigeria's Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters, Major-General Tunde Idiagbon, and Minister of Defence, Major-General Domkat Bali.[46] These visits, explicitly described as occurring in the "spirit of South–South cooperation," represented high-level political signaling between two military-led governments that shared ideological commitments to

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[42] "President Chun's Visit Opens New Era for Nigeria–Korea Relationship," *New Nigerian,* August 19, 1982, p. 1.

[43] "Nigeria, South Korea Sign Pact After Talks," *New Nigerian,* August 21, 1982, p. 13; Kunle Jenrola, "Nigeria, South Korea Condemn Tyranny," *Daily Times,* August 23, 1982, p. 40.

[44] "President Chun's Visit Opens New Era for Nigeria–Korea Relationship," *New Nigerian,* August 19, 1982, p. 1.

[45] "Nigeria and Korea Agree," *Daily Sketch,* May 18, 1983, p. 4.

[46] "South Korean Army Chief Meets Bali," *Guardian*, July 19, 1985, p. 16; "Nigerian Defence Minister Calls for Closer Ties with South Korea," *Nigerian Federal Department of Information*, press release no. 1257, Lagos, July 18, 1985.

discipline, order, and state-led modernization.[47] Such exchanges extended beyond military coordination; they were tools of political alignment, projecting mutual recognition and ideological affinity at the top echelons of government. Likewise, ministerial visits such as those involving Rear Admiral Patrick Koshoni (1985) and Foreign Minister Bolaji Akinyemi (1986) maintained momentum in political dialogue. Akinyemi's bilateral talks with Korean Foreign Minister Won-Kyung Lee in August 1986 were particularly significant: they reaffirmed South Korea's anxiety to host a resident Nigerian ambassador in Seoul, emphasized the importance of deepened political cooperation, and included mutual appeals for solidarity on global issues such as apartheid.[48] Such ministerial engagements preserved continuity through successive political transitions and ensured the resilience of diplomatic channels despite Nigeria's internal regime changes.

The late 1980s saw further institutionalization of summit diplomacy, with high-level exchanges translating into formal mechanisms for ongoing engagement. The inauguration of the Nigeria–South Korea Joint Commission in July 1985 provided an enduring framework for regularized ministerial dialogue, enabling structured political consultations and facilitating periodic review of agreements.[49] Ambassadorial continuity complemented these developments. South Korea's successive envoys from Shin Ki Heum (1980) and Dong-Won Lim (1984) to Chang Hee Roe (1985), maintained an unbroken line of diplomatic representation, ensuring that high-level political communication was sustained even during transitions in leadership on both sides. Nigeria's delayed yet eventual establishment of a resident embassy in Seoul in 1987 marked an important milestone, signaling reciprocal commitment to the diplomatic infrastructure required for summit and ministerial coordination.[50] High-level diplomatic engagement between the two countries persisted into the democratic era, exemplified by renewed presidential and ministerial

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[47] "South Korean Army Chief Meets Bali," *Guardian*, July 19, 1985, p. 16.

[48] "Akinyemi and South Korean Minister Begin Talks," Guardian, August 7, 1986, p. 1; James Ogala, "Nigeria Seeks Asian Support," *New Nigerian*, August 7, 1986, pp. 1, 13.

[49] "Nigeria, South Korea Begin Trade Talks," *Guardian*, July 25, 1985, p. 5.

[50] "Association Wants Nigerian Embassy in South Korea," *Guardian*, December 6, 1985, p. 3; "General Babangida Wants Increased Economic Co-operation Between Nigeria and South Korea," *Nigerian Federal Ministry of Information and Culture*, press release no. 634, Lagos, April 22, 1987.

exchanges in the 2000s and 2010s. The reciprocal state visits between President Olusegun Obasanjo and President Roh Moo-hyun in 2006 represented the reactivation of summit diplomacy under civilian governments, reinvigorating the political partnership after years of relative stagnation. Subsequent presidential visits such as President Muhammadu Buhari's official trip to Seoul in 2022,[51] reflected the enduring relevance of high-level summitry as an instrument of bilateral political dialogue. These visits served multiple purposes: reaffirming mutual recognition across different political administrations, facilitating strategic agreements, and providing opportunities for direct communication on regional and global issues. Similarly, the participation of Nigerian and South Korean ministers in the inaugural Korea–Africa Summit of 2024[52] demonstrated the institutional continuity of this tradition. It symbolized how, across four decades, summit diplomacy had become embedded as a defining characteristic of Nigerian–South Korean political relations. Across this forty-five-year period, summit diplomacy and high-level exchanges were not peripheral gestures but constitutive acts of bilateral political construction. They created the personal rapport, procedural norms, and diplomatic protocols that enabled the relationship to survive ideological shifts, regime changes, and structural imbalances. By repeatedly reaffirming political trust through presidential, ministerial, and ambassadorial encounters, both Nigeria and South Korea maintained a durable, though asymmetrical, diplomatic relationship grounded in ceremonial reciprocity and political symbolism. Through these carefully choreographed visits beginning with Audu's 1981 ministerial mission and Chun's 1982 state visit and continuing through to the 2020s, the two nations continually re-enacted their bilateral commitment, embedding summit diplomacy at the heart of Nigerian–South Korean relations.

3.4 Bilateral Relations Expressed in Multilateral Diplomacy

From the inception of formal relations in 1980, Nigerian–South Korean diplomacy has been shaped not only by bilateral initiatives but also by the pursuit of multilateral advantage. Both

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[51] Nigerian Presidency, *"President Buhari Seeks Expanded Trade Relations Beyond Gas Exports to South Korea; Enhanced Security Cooperation,"* press release, October 26, 2022, https://statehouse.gov.ng/news/president-buhari-seeks-expanded-trade-relations-beyond-gas-exports-to-south-korea-enhanced-security-cooperation/.

[52] Seun Adeuyi, "Nigeria to Enhance Diplomatic Relations Through Korea-Africa Summit – Minister," *Daily Trust*, May 21, 2024.

nations understood early that their diplomatic partnership could be leveraged beyond bilateral confines to enhance standing within global institutions. Nigeria's active participation in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), and later the African Union (AU) provided it with a reservoir of diplomatic capital that Seoul sought to access, while South Korea's expanding role in international organizations offered Nigeria a bridge to the dynamic politics of East Asia and global governance structures. This interdependence was not formalized through written treaties but was exercised through consistent reciprocal support in multilateral arenas most notably in the United Nations, NAM ministerial meetings, and later, global summits and forums hosted in Seoul.

Evidence of multilateral coordination appeared as early as 1981, when Nigeria's External Affairs Minister, Professor Ishaya Audu, visited Seoul immediately following the NAM Foreign Ministers' Conference in New Delhi.[53] The timing of this visit underscored South Korea's strategic intent to engage Nigeria as a conduit to the broader non-aligned world, positioning itself as a sympathetic partner to developing nations without formally belonging to the movement. The *New Nigerian* observed that the scheduling of Audu's visit "immediately after" the New Delhi conference was diplomatically significant, as it suggested South Korea's desire "to align itself informally with the priorities of the non-aligned world where Nigeria was emerging as a key voice."[54] For Nigeria, this multilateral signaling reinforced its role as an influential actor within the Global South, while allowing it to extend recognition to an East Asian partner previously marginal to African diplomatic networks. The visit thus served as an early instance of bilateral diplomacy being deployed to facilitate multilateral access and visibility for South Korea.

This strategic pattern reached its most prominent expression during President Chun Doo-hwan's 1982 state visit to Nigeria, which yielded a joint communiqué explicitly addressing international political issues.[55] The communiqué went beyond bilateral matters to include strong

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[53] "Ishaya to Visit South Korea," *New Nigerian*, February 7, 1981, p. 9.

[54] *Ibid.,*

[55] "President Chun's Visit Opens New Era for Nigeria–Korea Relationship: Setting an Example of South–South Co-operation," *New Nigerian,* August 19, 1982, p. 1.

condemnations of oppression in Southern Africa and Israeli aggression in Lebanon, situating both states within a broader global discourse of justice, anti-colonialism, and support for a "new international order."[56] Nigeria's endorsement of South Korea's call for peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula represented a political concession of considerable multilateral value to Seoul.[57] By aligning with Seoul's position on reunification, an issue central to its international identity, Nigeria provided moral and diplomatic support to South Korea's global narrative, counterbalancing the recognition already extended to Pyongyang since 1975. This nuanced balancing act reinforced Nigeria's identity as a non-aligned power capable of mediating between ideological divides, while allowing South Korea to amplify its voice within the UN and NAM systems through Nigerian endorsement.

Throughout the 1980s, the partnership continued to manifest in multilateral forums and global institutions. Seoul's consistent appeals for Nigerian participation in international events ranging from inter-parliamentary meetings to defense cooperation dialogues, were part of a broader strategy to integrate with key African and non-aligned actors. Nigeria, for its part, used its presence in these multilateral spaces to bolster South Korea's legitimacy as a credible developing-state partner. The participation of Nigerian parliamentary delegations at the 70th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) General Conference hosted by Seoul in October 1983 reflected this trend.[58] The *Guardian* described Nigeria's engagement as a reaffirmation of *"close and sincere partnership for South–South cooperation,"* noting how such multilateral events served as political platforms for strengthening bilateral solidarity and for projecting shared commitments to international dialogue.[59] By situating its bilateral partnership within multilateral frameworks, Nigeria elevated its diplomatic reach while simultaneously lending political weight to South Korea's efforts to position itself as a constructive actor within global governance. The exchange of support extended into the latter half of the decade. South Korea's diplomatic envoys repeatedly

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[56] Kunle Jenrola, "Nigeria, South Korea Condemn Tyranny," *Daily Times*, August 23, 1982, p. 40.

[57] *Ibid.,*

[58] "Korea–Nigeria: Close and Sincere Partners for South–South Cooperation," *Guardian,* Lagos, December 1983.

[59] *Ibid.,*

invoked Nigeria's influence in the United Nations and NAM as crucial for advancing Korean interests. In 1986, Korean Ambassador Chang Hee Roe emphasized that Seoul sought *"the friendship and support of Nigeria in international circles like the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement,"* explicitly identifying Nigeria's multilateral stature as an avenue for mutual diplomatic benefit.[60] Similarly, Nigerian Foreign Minister Bolaji Akinyemi's discussions with Korean Foreign Minister Won-Kyung Lee during the same year reaffirmed shared commitments to global justice causes, with Nigeria urging South Korea to use the UN General Assembly as a platform to *"hasten an end to the cancer in South Africa."*[61] This exchange was not merely rhetorical: it reflected a mutual understanding that bilateral solidarity could be translated into coordinated multilateral advocacy. South Korea's lack of formal ties with apartheid South Africa, a policy that had earlier facilitated Nigeria's 1980 recognition of Seoul, continued to be viewed as a moral foundation for cooperation.[62]

By the late 1980s, this dynamic matured into explicit political endorsements within international organizations. Nigeria's decision in 1987 to open an embassy in Seoul coincided with growing Korean efforts to deepen engagement with African states in preparation for multilateral milestones, notably its 1988 admission to the United Nations and the hosting of the Seoul Olympics the same year.[63] Nigerian press reports from April 1987 note that President Ibrahim Babangida, while receiving a South Korean envoy, pledged to strengthen political cooperation and expand Nigeria's presence in Seoul, signaling both bilateral and multilateral significance.[64] Nigeria's support for Seoul's UN membership was an extension of the diplomatic goodwill cultivated through years of summit and ministerial engagement, and South Korea's

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[60] "Envoy Praises Nigeria," *Daily Times,* February 15, 1986, p. 9.

[61] "Akinyemi and South Korean Minister Begin Talks," *Guardian,* August 7, 1986, p. 1; James Ogala, "Nigeria Seeks Asian Support," *New Nigerian,* August 7, 1986, pp. 1, 13.

[62] "Nigeria to Establish Ties with Korea," *Punch,* February 23, 1980, p. 2.

[63] "General Babangida Wants Increased Economic Co-operation between Nigeria and South Korea," *Nigerian Federal Ministry of Information and Culture,* press release no. 634, Lagos, April 22, 1987.

[64] "Nigeria to Open Embassy in South Korea," *Daily Times,* April 23, 1987, p. 10.

acknowledgment of Nigeria's backing reinforced the reciprocal nature of their multilateral relationship.[65] As the Cold War ended and global institutions evolved, the Nigeria–South Korea partnership continued to find expression in new multilateral formats. The two nations aligned on numerous issues in the post-1990s era, including UN Security Council reform and African representation within global governance structures. South Korea, recognizing Nigeria's status as a leading African voice, consistently supported calls for a permanent African seat on the Security Council, while Nigeria lent its backing to Korean initiatives in international fora such as Seoul's bids to host the World Expo (2010, 2030) and its advocacy for Korean candidates to international offices, including Ban Ki-moon's successful 2006 bid for UN Secretary-General. These acts of mutual reinforcement, though not always formalized, functioned as diplomatic currency, sustaining political goodwill and enhancing each nation's international legitimacy.

In the twenty-first century, multilateral platforms continued to serve as extensions of bilateral engagement. Nigeria's participation in the Seoul Nuclear Security Summit (2012),[66] the G-20 outreach processes,[67] and successive Korea–Africa Forums demonstrated the enduring relevance of multilateral diplomacy as a strategic instrument of bilateral statecraft. The 2024 inaugural Korea–Africa Summit represented the culmination of decades of multilateral engagement, providing a stage for renewed high-level dialogue between Nigeria and South Korea within a continental framework. The presence of both Nigerian and Korean delegations at these summits reaffirmed the persistence of political alignment that had been nurtured since the 1980s. For South Korea, such multilateral engagements reinforced its identity as a middle power committed to global cooperation, while for Nigeria, they reaffirmed its role as Africa's diplomatic bridge to East Asia. Over the four and a half decades of their relationship, Nigeria and South Korea have used multilateral diplomacy as a means of magnifying bilateral influence, transforming

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[65] "Nigeria to Open Embassy in South Korea," *Daily Times*, April 23, 1987, p. 10.

[66] "Jonathan Lauds South Korea Nuclear, Investment Strategies," *Guardian*, March 28, 2012, p.64.

[67] Nigerian Presidency, *"President Tinubu Formally Meets with Three Major Counterparts in Economic Development Diplomacy; Advances to Practical Next Steps in Bilateral Relations,"* press release, September 10, 2023, https://statehouse.gov.ng/president-tinubu-formally-meets-with-three-major-counterparts-in-economic-development-diplomacy-advances-to-practical-next-steps-in-bilateral-relations/.

individual acts of statecraft into coordinated performances of global legitimacy. Whether in the corridors of the United Nations, the meeting halls of the Non-Aligned Movement, or the plenary sessions of global summits, their interactions reveal a consistent pattern: bilateral goodwill translated into multilateral endorsement, and multilateral participation reinforcing bilateral trust. This synergy initiated through early ministerial coordination and matured through summit and institutional participation, has ensured that Nigerian–South Korean diplomacy, though asymmetrical in resources and capacity, remains mutually reinforcing within the architecture of contemporary global governance.

3.5 Security Cooperation

Security cooperation and political culture transfer has formed one of the most distinctive dimensions of Nigeria–South Korea diplomatic relations in the period of study. From the early 1980s, both countries recognized that the shared challenges of national defense, regime stability, and enhancing international recognition and acceptance provided fertile ground for political solidarity and strategic collaboration. South Korea's emergence as a disciplined, security-conscious state confronting existential threats on the Korean Peninsula resonated deeply with Nigeria's own internal struggles for stability and military professionalism. Consequently, bilateral security engagements ranging from defense industry discussions to military exchanges and crisis management diplomacy, became integral to the political architecture of the relationship, functioning as both practical cooperation and ideological emulation.

The foundation of this security relationship was laid in the early years of diplomatic recognition. Following the establishment of embassies in Lagos (1980), South Korea sought to extend the relationship into the defense sector as part of its broader outreach to key African states. The first significant step was the 1983 visit to Nigeria by General Hwang Young Si, Chief of Staff of the South Korean Army, who held consultations with senior Nigerian military officials on defense industry collaboration and training exchange.[68] His visit, covered widely in Nigerian media, was described as *"an important development in South–South military cooperation,"* signaling both countries' intention to institutionalize security dialogue within their political

[68] "Nigeria and Korea Agree," *Daily Sketch,* May 18, 1983, p. 4.

relationship.[69] Two years later, in 1985, General Ho-Yong Chung, South Korea's Vice-Minister of National Defense, visited Lagos and met with Major-General Tunde Idiagbon and Defence Minister Domkat Bali.[70] During these meetings, both sides reiterated their desire to strengthen defense industry cooperation and to promote regular staff-level exchanges.[71] Discussions were framed explicitly in the "*spirit of South–South cooperation,"* reflecting the prevailing ideological narrative through which Seoul and Lagos justified their engagement despite divergent strategic realities.[72] These military exchanges marked the beginning of structured defense diplomacy between the two nations. They introduced formal channels of communication between the Nigerian Ministry of Defence and South Korea's Ministry of National Defense, which were subsequently maintained through the Nigeria–South Korea Joint Commission and reinforced by the establishment of resident embassies.

Although the defense cooperation agreements signed during this period were largely non-binding, they symbolized political intent and established the precedent for future collaboration in maritime security, counter-piracy, and peacekeeping training in the Gulf of Guinea region. The architecture of defense cooperation thus evolved from symbolic military visits into a sustained component of diplomatic relations, demonstrating both states' preference for negotiated and institutionalized security engagement over episodic political gestures. By 2025, Nigeria and South Korea continued to cooperate on defense and security matters, including negotiations for new defense industry cooperation MOUs and consultations on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea.[73] These initiatives underscored the long-term trajectory of a relationship that began with symbolic military exchanges and matured into functional security collaboration. At the same time,

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[69] "Nigeria and Korea Agree," *Daily Sketch,* May 18, 1983, p. 4.

[70] "South Korean Army Chief Meets Bali," *Guardian*, July 19, 1985, p. 16; "Nigerian Defence Minister Calls for Closer Ties with South Korea," *Nigerian Federal Department of Information,* press release no. 1257, Lagos, July 18, 1985.

[71] *Ibid.,*

[72] "South Korean Army Chief Meets Bali," *Guardian,* July 19, 1985, p. 16.

[73] Aidoghie Paulinus, "Kim Young-Chae, South Korean Ambassador: How to Solve the Menacing Problem of Banditry," *The Sun,* Abuja, 11th September 2021.

the enduring asymmetry in political culture and institutional sophistication continued to shape the character of their diplomatic interactions. The nexus of security cooperation, crisis diplomacy, and political culture transfer thus represents both the most resilient and the most revealing dimension of Nigerian–South Korean relations: a dynamic interplay between shared authoritarian legacies, mutual strategic utility, and the persistent quest for disciplined modernity in the practice of statecraft.

Parallel to formal defense cooperation, crisis diplomacy emerged as a critical arena for mutual trust-building and political maturity. Nigeria's response to the 1983 Korean Air Lines (KAL) Flight 007 tragedy exemplified its capacity for measured and balanced diplomacy, expressing humanitarian concern without compromising its non-aligned principles amid superpower tensions.[74] In September 1983, when a Soviet fighter jet shot down the civilian airliner en route to Seoul, Nigeria expressed "deep sympathy and solidarity" with South Korea while simultaneously urging restraint and calling for a full international investigation through the United Nations.[75] The Buhari administration's measured response of avoiding direct condemnation of the Soviet Union while extending condolences to Seoul reflected Nigeria's effort to balance its commitments to non-alignment with its emerging bilateral partnership.[76] This episode demonstrated the subtlety of Nigerian crisis diplomacy: it upheld moral solidarity without compromising broader geopolitical alignments. For Seoul, Nigeria's stance carried symbolic weight, showcasing that its African partners could offer principled support during moments of international crisis. Another example of sophisticated Nigerian diplomacy occurred during the Korea National Oil Corporation (KNOC) dispute in the early 2000s. When a contractual disagreement arose between the Korean state oil company and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) over offshore exploration rights, Abuja opted for quiet mediation through "shuttle diplomacy" rather than litigation.[77] The Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in

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[74] "Korean Air Lines Tragedy: Nigeria Sympathizes with Seoul," *New Nigerian*, September 10, 1983, p. 3.

[75] *Ibid.*,

[76] "Nigeria's Cautious Response to KAL 007 Incident," Daily Times, September 12, 1983, p. 5.

[77] "KNOC Dispute Settled Amicably," *Guardian*, April 18, 2003, p. 14.

coordination with the Korean Embassy, facilitated a negotiated settlement that preserved bilateral goodwill and prevented the dispute from escalating into a legal or political standoff.[78] This episode reaffirmed the resilience of diplomatic mechanisms built over decades and demonstrated how established channels of political communication could be mobilized for conflict management. Such crisis diplomacy, emphasizing mediation and restraint, became a hallmark of Nigeria's political engagement with South Korea, mirroring its broader foreign policy philosophy of non-confrontation and negotiated resolution.

Beyond the realm of formal cooperation and crisis management, political culture transfer emerged as an enduring theme of bilateral relations between Nigeria and South Korea. From the mid-1980s onward, South Korea's disciplined developmental state and cohesive political culture increasingly served as an implicit model within Nigerian governance discourse. During the Buhari and Babangida military regimes (1984–1993), South Korea's reputation for bureaucratic efficiency, military professionalism, and anti-corruption campaigns was frequently invoked in official rhetoric. The *Guardian* reported in September 1984 that Korean Ambassador Dong-Won Lim publicly endorsed Nigeria's War Against Indiscipline (WAI) initiative, describing it as *"a reflection of the same spirit that made Korea great."*[79] This endorsement, widely circulated in the Nigerian press, functioned as a symbolic validation of Buhari's domestic governance campaign, validating it within the language of shared moral discipline. In return, Nigerian officials frequently praised South Korea's disciplined governance as evidence that authoritarianism, when guided by developmental intent, could yield national progress.[80] Such reciprocal validation between authoritarian regimes highlighted the intersection of political culture and diplomacy: bilateral relations became a mirror through which each regime sought international validation for its domestic governance philosophy. This exchange persisted into the democratic era. Nigerian political elites and media commentators continued to cite Korean political examples to critique or inspire domestic governance. President Roh Moo-hyun's 2004 suicide amid corruption allegations, for instance, was widely discussed in Nigerian newspapers as a model of political accountability,

[78] "KNOC Dispute Settled Amicably," *Guardian*, April 18, 2003, p. 14.

[79] "Korean Envoy Impressed," *Guardian*, September 11, 1984, p. 3.

[80] *Ibid.,*

contrasting with Nigeria's entrenched impunity.[81] Yet while Nigerian elites admired Korea's disciplined governance, many Koreans remained unaware of Nigeria's political dynamics, revealing a one-sided cultural transmission shaped more by Nigerian aspiration than by Korean initiative. This has persisted well over forty years of Nigeria-Korean relations and was confirmed by the first official visit of the President of the Korea Africa Foundation (KAF), Lyeon Woon-ki, to Nigeria in 2022, when he remarked that, *"Koreans do not have a good perception of Nigeria. Most Koreans believe Nigeria is a difficult, odd place to live."* on the last leg of his Africa mission trip to Ghana, South Africa and Nigeria.[82]

3.6 Ideological Framing

The establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Nigeria and South Korea in 1980 revealed an inherent asymmetry in strategic positioning that would characterize the relationship for decades. From the outset, South Korea demonstrated a calculated approach to engaging Nigeria, viewing the West African nation not merely as a bilateral partner but as a strategic gateway to continental influence and multilateral legitimacy. Korean Ambassador Chang Hee Roe's explicit acknowledgment in 1986 that South Korea valued Nigeria's influence in the United Nations and Non-Aligned Movement underscored Seoul's instrumental view of the relationship, stating that "We would like to have the friendship and support of Nigeria in international circles like the United Nations and Non-Aligned Movement."[83] This strategic positioning was further evidenced by South Korea's persistent solicitation of Nigeria's support for its various international bids, including UN membership in 1988, Ban Ki-moon's candidacy for UN Secretary-General in 2006, and its 2024 Security Council candidacy. Nigeria's consistent provision of such support from backing South Korea's 2010 World Expo bid to supporting Korean Peninsula reunification initiatives, demonstrated how Seoul successfully leveraged Nigeria's diplomatic capital for its own international legitimacy while offering comparatively limited reciprocal benefits.

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[81] "Lesson's from a president's Death," *This Day*, vol.14, no.5161, page 19, June 9, 2009.

[82] Chinelo Chikelu, "Nigeria, South Korea's Trade Volume Hits $1.1bn In Q2 2022," *Leadership*, 2022.

[83] Ochiaka Ugwu, "Korea and Nigeria: Restyling Partnership," *Peoples Daily*, April 22, 2025.

The asymmetrical nature of the relationship was most starkly illustrated in the establishment and maintenance of diplomatic infrastructure, revealing South Korea's proactive engagement contrasted with Nigeria's reactive and often delayed responses. While South Korea established its embassy in Lagos within two months of formal diplomatic recognition in March 1980, Nigeria's reciprocal establishment of a resident embassy in Seoul was delayed for seven years, with President Babangida only announcing the intention to open the mission in 1987.[84] This institutional gap reflected deeper structural imbalances in diplomatic capacity and strategic vision. Even after Nigeria finally established its Seoul embassy, the relationship remained characterized by what could be termed "presence asymmetry," where South Korean diplomatic, cultural, and corporate footprints in Nigeria far exceeded Nigerian institutional presence in Korea. The Korean Embassy's sustained engagement with Nigerian institutions such as the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, including funding the renovation of NIIA's conference chamber in 2022, exemplified Seoul's systematic approach to building institutional relationships that would yield long-term diplomatic dividends.[85] Meanwhile, Nigeria's diplomatic presence in Korea remained largely symbolic, with limited evidence of comparable institutional investments or strategic relationship-building initiatives with Korean think tanks, universities, or policy institutions.

Throughout the four-decade relationship, South Korea consistently demonstrated strategic foresight and diplomatic initiative while Nigeria often adopted reactive postures that limited its ability to shape the bilateral agenda. This pattern was evident from the earliest phases of the relationship, when South Korea made diplomatic overtures to Nigeria in 1961 through Ambassador Lim Chang-young's delegation, seeking Nigeria's support for UN membership, followed by a second mission led by Ambassador Baek Seon-yeop after Park Chung-hee's military coup.[86] Despite these early contacts, Nigeria's foreign policy constraints, particularly its rigid adherence to non-alignment principles and simultaneous engagement with both Koreas, likely prevented it

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[84] "Nigeria to Open Embassy in South Korea," *Daily Times*, April 23, 1987, p.10.

[85] Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Nigeria, *"Amb KIM attended 'Official Opening of the NIIA Ultra-Modern Conference Center,"* November 10, 2022, https://overseas.mofa.go.kr/ng-en/brd/m_9860/view.do?seq=757094&page=1.

[86] Hyomin Jung, "Diplomatic Dynamics: Korea and Africa in the Cold War Context," *Asian and African Studies* vol.33, no. 2 (2024): p.249.

from capitalizing on potential diplomatic opportunities. The asymmetry persisted into later decades, with South Korea initiating most high-level diplomatic engagements, from President Chun Doo-hwan's historic 1982 state visit to the systematic organization of Korea-Africa forums that positioned Seoul as a continental partner. Nigeria's participation in these initiatives, while enthusiastic, remained largely responsive rather than agenda-setting, reflecting a diplomatic culture that prioritized ideological consistency over strategic positioning. Even in areas where Nigeria possessed comparative advantages, such as its leadership role in ECOWAS. AU or its oil wealth, the country often failed to leverage these assets strategically in bilateral negotiations, allowing South Korea to maintain the initiative in defining partnership terms.

South Korea's strategic utilization of Nigeria as a gateway to African markets and institutions represented perhaps the most sophisticated dimension of the asymmetrical relationship, whereby Seoul successfully leveraged Nigeria's continental influence while offering limited reciprocal access to Asian markets or institutions. This dynamic was particularly evident in Korea's approach to multilateral forums, where it consistently sought Nigerian support for its international initiatives while positioning itself as a preferred partner for African engagement. The pattern was established early in the relationship, with South Korea requesting Nigerian backing for various UN positions and international bids, and was institutionalized through initiatives like the Korea-Africa Forum, where Nigeria's participation legitimized Seoul's continental engagement strategy. Ambassador Kim Pankyu's acknowledgment in 2024 that Nigeria was among Korea's "top five African trade partners" while simultaneously positioning Korea as a development model for African nations illustrated this dynamic, where Nigeria's value was measured primarily in terms of its market size and continental influence rather than its potential as an equal partner in global governance.[87] The 2024 Korea-Africa Summit, where South Korea pledged $24 billion in development assistance and trade financing, exemplified this approach, using Nigeria's participation and continental leadership to legitimize Korea's broader Africa strategy while maintaining control over the terms of engagement and resource allocation. Nigeria's response to these initiatives, while generally positive, reflected a reactive diplomatic posture that accepted

[87] Regina Otokpa, "Nigeria Among Korea's Top 5 Trade Partners in Africa – Envoy," *New Telegraph*, May 6, 2024.

Korean framing of the relationship rather than asserting alternative partnership models that might have provided greater reciprocity and mutual benefit.

From the inception of formal diplomatic relations between Nigeria and the Republic of Korea in February 1980, the bilateral relationship was framed ideologically through the language of *South–South cooperation*, mutual respect, and solidarity among developing nations. This framing was politically expedient for both states emerging from complex post-colonial and Cold War environments. Nigeria, under President Shehu Shagari, articulated a foreign policy of "enlightened self-interest" and "positive non-alignment," which sought pragmatic partnerships without ideological entanglement.[88] Within that doctrinal context, the decision to recognize South Korea while maintaining existing relations with North Korea represented a carefully balanced diplomatic posture consistent with Nigeria's policy of *equidistance* - maintaining parallel relations with opposing blocs to preserve autonomy and maximize strategic leverage.[89] For its part, South Korea emphasized its own developmental trajectory as a "fellow developing country," presenting itself not as a donor or industrialized power, but as a peer seeking cooperative exchange.[90] This rhetorical identification with the developing world appealed to Nigeria's Afrocentric and non-aligned worldview, enabling the relationship to emerge on a politically palatable footing that appeared to transcend Cold War binaries.

However, this ideological narrative of equality obscured a structural imbalance that was already apparent in the early 1980s. South Korea's outreach to Nigeria was motivated by concrete strategic objectives: securing stable access to raw materials, diversifying energy imports away from the Middle East, and expanding its diplomatic footprint in Africa to bolster international legitimacy.[91] Nigeria, by contrast, viewed the relationship largely as a symbolic affirmation of its continental leadership and an extension of its non-aligned diplomacy. While South Korea acted

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[88] "Nigeria Establishes Diplomatic Relations with South Korea," *New Nigerian*, February 23, 1980, p. 11.

[89] "Nigeria to Establish Ties with Korea," *Punch*, February 23, 1980, p. 2.

[90] "Ekwueme Welcomes Korean Envoy," *Daily Sketch*, October 15, 1980, p. 9.

[91] "South Korea Ready to Buy Nigeria's Oil," *Daily Star*, October 18, 1980, p. 3.

with decisive diplomatic intent by dispatching its first ambassador, Shin Ki Heum, within months of formal recognition, Nigeria took two years to reciprocate, reflecting a cautious, reactive approach shaped by Cold War sensitivities and bureaucratic inertia.[92] The ideological rhetoric of partnership thus masked a relationship driven more by Seoul's calculated diplomacy than by Lagos's strategic foresight. The ideological narrative was reinforced through high-level political symbolism, notably the 1982 state visit of President Chun Doo-hwan to Nigeria, the first by a Korean head of state to Africa. Nigerian media framed this as a triumph of South–South cooperation, hailing it as an "example of cooperation between two countries on the same level of development."[93] Yet such portrayals exaggerated parity and underplayed Korea's rapidly expanding industrial and diplomatic power. By 1982, South Korea was already a major global exporter of steel, electronics, and shipbuilding technology, while Nigeria remained heavily reliant on crude oil exports. The Nigerian press's insistence on equality thus reflected a deeper political desire to preserve diplomatic dignity within a relationship that was increasingly asymmetrical. President Chun's presentation of Korea's development story rising from a post-war agrarian economy to an industrial power within two decades was not mere rhetoric; it functioned as soft power diplomacy, positioning Korea as a mentor figure for developing states and subtly redefining the ideological frame from solidarity to *emulative partnership*.[94] Nigeria's political elites responded enthusiastically to this narrative, interpreting it as validation of their own developmental aspirations, but in doing so inadvertently reinforced the very hierarchy the rhetoric of South–South cooperation sought to deny.

Throughout the 1980s, this tension between ideological framing and structural asymmetry deepened. South Korea's disciplined, state-driven diplomacy consistently outpaced Nigeria's ad hoc approach. Seoul institutionalized its foreign policy objectives through the establishment of the Nigeria–South Korea Joint Commission (1985), military cooperation agreements (1983, 1985),

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[92] John Araka, "The Ties between Nigeria and Korea: A Visit for Consolidation," *Daily Times,* August 20, 1982, p. 3.

[93] "President Chun's Visit Opens New Era for Nigeria–Korea Relationship: Setting an Example of South–South Co-operation," *New Nigerian,* August 19, 1982, p. 1.

[94] *Ibid.,*

and high-level ministerial exchanges, demonstrating bureaucratic consistency and continuity across political administrations.[95] Nigeria, meanwhile, often approached the relationship through episodic gestures of goodwill such as ministerial visits, symbolic statements of solidarity, and participation in Korea-hosted multilateral forums without developing a coherent strategic framework. This imbalance was evident in the repeated appeals from South Korean officials for Nigeria to establish a permanent embassy in Seoul, appeals that went unfulfilled until 1987.[96] The seven-year delay was diplomatically significant, underscoring Nigeria's reactive posture and highlighting how rhetorical alignment in the language of equality coexisted with operational asymmetry in institutional capacity and follow-through. Nigeria's internal political volatility compounded this imbalance. The successive military regimes of the 1980s, while rhetorically admiring Korea's "discipline" and developmental governance, lacked the institutional coherence to translate admiration into sustained policy learning. General Muhammadu Buhari's 1984 statement that "discipline is the basis of success for any nation" directly linked Nigeria's domestic governance philosophy to Korea's model of disciplined modernization, effectively using the bilateral relationship for ideological affirmation.[97] Ambassador Dong Whon Lim's reciprocal praise for Nigeria's "discipline" reflected a mutual alignment between authoritarian regimes rather than a genuinely symmetrical partnership.[98] While such political affinity reinforced cordiality at the leadership level, it further entrenched asymmetry by framing Korea as a model state and Nigeria as a student. This ideological mirroring thus served domestic political functions in Nigeria but did little to balance the underlying structural disparity in diplomatic initiative and institutional maturity.

By the mid-1990s, the ideological foundation of "South–South cooperation" became increasingly outdated. South Korea's accession to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation

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[95] "Nigeria and Korea Agree," *Daily Sketch*, May 18, 1983, p. 4; "Nigeria, South Korea Begin Trade Talks," *Guardian*, July 25, 1985, p. 5.

[96] "Akinyemi and South Korean Minister Begin Talks," *Guardian*, August 7, 1986, p. 1.

[97] "Korean Envoy Impressed," *Guardian*, September 11, 1984, p. 3.

[98] *Ibid.,*

and Development (OECD) in 1996[99] symbolized its transition from a developing to an advanced industrial economy, marking an aspirational step toward the global North while complicating its identity as a partner of developing nations. In fact, when Korea joined the OECD in 1996, it had already enjoyed more than three decades of outstanding growth. The so-called Miracle on the Han River (Han-gang) had transformed one of the poorest countries in the world at the end of the Korean War into an economy generating a GDP per capita comparable to that of some European countries.*"*[100] Yet the language of solidarity persisted in official communiqués, diplomatic rhetoric, and national media, reflecting the durability of this ideological framing as a tool of diplomatic convenience. In 1991, The 'idea' of establishing diplomatic relations between Nigeria and South Korea, conceived in 1980 and premised on South-South concept, has been a success story, realizing that both are developing countries and as such, in complementary position.[101] Thus, it appeared Nigeria continued to invoke the South–South narrative as a moral and historical bond, while South Korea strategically deployed it to maintain influence in Africa without the obligations of traditional donor–recipient relationships. The asymmetry was now institutionalized: South Korea approached Africa, and Nigeria in particular, through coordinated state and private sector channels, while Nigeria's diplomatic engagement remained fragmented and reactive.

In the post-2000 period, particularly following South Korea's emergence as a middle power and Nigeria's democratic transition in 1999, the ideological framework of South-South cooperation persisted more as a rhetorical symbol than as practical guide to foreign policy. South Korea's strategic diplomacy anchored in targeted state visits, summits, and multilateral engagement continued to project equality while practicing hierarchy. Nigeria, though rhetorically committed to mutual cooperation, often lacked the institutional capacity to leverage the

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[99] The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Korean Focus Areas: Sustaining the Miracle on the Han River*, October 2021, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/korean-focus-areas_f91f3b75-en/sustaining-the-miracle-on-the-han-river_103653fa-en.html.

[100] The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Korean Focus Areas: Sustaining the Miracle on the Han River*.

[101] Femi Ogbontiba, "Nigeria and Korea: A Growing Partnership," *National Concord*, February 18, 1991, p.7.

relationship beyond ceremonial exchanges. This asymmetry was further exposed during the 2022 Fifth Korea–Africa Forum, where Nigeria's absence despite being South Korea's largest African trading partner underscored the misalignment between economic weight and diplomatic participation.[102] By contrast, Seoul's hosting of the inaugural Korea–Africa Summit in 2024, with explicit invitations extended to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, reflected the continuity of Korea's proactive diplomacy and the persistence of Nigeria's reactive engagement posture.[103] The enduring rhetorical frame of *South–South solidarity* thus serves as a diplomatic façade, masking a relationship increasingly defined by structural asymmetry—between an institutionally disciplined, strategically coherent Korea, and a politically fragmented, inconsistently engaged Nigeria.

[102] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, *"Outcome of 5th Korea-Africa Forum,"* press release, March 10, 2022, https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5676/view.do?seq=322014.

[103] "Tinubu Receives Envoys, Canvasses Stronger Partnerships in Manufacturing Sector," *Premium Times,* April 19, 2024.

CHAPTER FOUR

NIGERIA–SOUTH KOREA ECONOMIC RELATIONS FROM 1980 TO 2025

This chapter examines the evolution of Nigerian–South Korean economic relations as a central dimension of their broader bilateral engagement. While the formal establishment of diplomatic ties in 1980 marked a symbolic beginning, the Nigerian Ministry of External Affairs remarked that, *"economic ties between both countries had already been 'growing very fast for over a decade"*[1] prior to 1980. Nigeria and South Korea had developed significant trade and commercial linkages, revealing how economic pragmatism often preceded political institutionalization. Evidence indicates that South Korean construction and engineering firms had already gained a foothold in the Nigerian market before diplomatic recognition. Notably, Daewoo Nigeria Limited, a subsidiary of Daewoo Engineering & Construction (E&C) South Korea, was incorporated in 1978, pioneering complex engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) projects within Nigeria's oil and gas sector.[2] Korean companies have regularly participated in trade shows in Lagos since 1973 and over the years before 1982, thirteen Korean trade missions were recorded to have visited Nigeria to promote business exchanges. Also, seven Korean-Nigerian joint ventures had been inaugurated since 1979 and 1982.[3] This record of extensive economic activities preceding the formal establishment of diplomatic relations between Nigeria and South Korea in 1980 suggests that formal diplomatic relations merely codified an already vibrant and mutually beneficial economic relationship and likely provided the primary catalyst for bilateral cooperation.

This chapter explores how both Nigeria and South Korea structured, negotiated, and sustained their bilateral relationship through evolving patterns of trade, investment, technological

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[1] "Nigeria Establishes Diplomatic Relations with South Korea," *New Nigerian*, February 23, 1980, p.11.

[2] Daewoo Engineering & Construction Nigeria Limited, *History*, Daewoo E&C Nigeria Limited, accessed June 14, 2025, https://www.daewooencnigeria.com/company/history?utm_source.

[3] "President Chun's Visit Opens New Era for Nigeria–Korea Relationship: Setting an Example of South–South Co-operation," *New Nigerian*, August 19, 1982, p. 1.

collaboration, and institutional partnership. It situates the Nigeria–South Korea economic relationship within the broader trajectory of bilateral cooperation, analyzing how resource exchange, infrastructure development, and knowledge transfer were mediated despite asymmetrical capacities and differing developmental trajectories. In doing so, the chapter interrogates the paradox of a partnership rhetorically framed as horizontal and solidaristic but substantively characterized by structural inequalities and dependence on complementary factor endowments. Comprising five interrelated thematic sections, the chapter traces the evolution of Nigerian–South Korean economic relations across four and a half decades from 1980 to 2025. The first section, "Energy Diplomacy," examines how oil, gas, and technology exchanges established the foundational logic of interdependence between Nigeria's resource wealth and South Korea's industrial needs. The second, "Asymmetrical Trade Structures" analyzes the persistence of trade imbalances and the ideological framing that shaped their bilateral relationship. The third section, "Infrastructure Development," investigates how Korean construction and engineering firms came to dominate Nigeria's infrastructure landscape, reshaping its industrial base and urban development agenda. The fourth, "Technology Transfer Aspirations," explores Nigeria's long-standing ambition to emulate Korea's developmental model through structured technology acquisition, capacity building, and industrial policy adaptation. Finally, the fifth section, "Institutional Framework Development," evaluates the gradual maturation of bilateral architecture from ad hoc arrangements to formalized treaties, memoranda, and financial cooperation frameworks that sought to stabilize and expand economic relations. Taken together, these five themes illuminate how Nigerian–South Korean economic relations evolved from pragmatic trade exchanges into an increasingly institutionalized and multidimensional partnership. Yet they also reveal the enduring tension between aspiration and capacity, between the promise of South–South cooperation and the reality of uneven development in the case study of Nigeria–South Korea bilateral relations.

4.1 Energy Diplomacy

From the very inception of formal diplomatic relations in 1980, Nigerian–South Korean economic engagement was anchored in what may be termed *resource–technology complementarity*: a structural interdependence defined by Nigeria's abundance of primary resources and South Korea's rapidly expanding technological and industrial capacity. The logic of

this complementarity was evident from the outset of their bilateral diplomacy, as Korean Ambassador Kee Heum Shin's October 1980 visit to Lagos was explicitly premised on South Korea's policy to diversify its oil sources in the aftermath of the 1970s oil shocks.[4] South Korea, then wholly dependent on imported crude oil, sought to insulate itself from the volatility of the Middle Eastern supply system; Nigeria, conversely, was striving to expand its export markets and channel its oil revenues toward industrialization.[5] Thus, the relationship assumed a pragmatic economic configuration from inception: Nigeria would supply energy resources essential for Korea's industrial growth, while Korea would provide technical expertise, capital equipment, and industrial goods indispensable for Nigeria's infrastructural and technological modernization.[6] During the 1980s, this complementarity matured into a distinct framework of energy diplomacy, with petroleum trade forming the nucleus of bilateral exchange. Nigeria's offer to sell crude oil to Korea was reciprocated by Seoul's willingness to exchange technological know-how and industrial assistance, particularly in sectors aligned with Nigeria's national development plans.[7] The 1982 visit of President Chun Doo Hwan to Nigeria consolidated this arrangement, inaugurating a new era of economic cooperation structured around oil-for-technology diplomacy.[8] Seven joint ventures were established in the early 1980s, spanning construction, steel, polypropylene, and power equipment, reflecting Korea's strategic insertion into Nigeria's industrialization drive.[9] This period also witnessed the training of Nigerian agronomists, fisheries experts, and engineers

[4] "South Korea Ready to Buy Nigeria's Oil," *Daily Star*, October 18, 1980, p. 3.

[5] "Ekwueme Welcomes Korean Envoy," *Daily Sketch*, October 15, 1980, p. 9.

[6] "President Chun's Visit Opens New Era for Nigeria–Korea Relationship: Setting an Example of South–South Co-operation," *New Nigerian*, August 19, 1982, pp. 1–4.

[7] "Audu Invites South Korean Firms," *New Nigerian*, February 17, 1981, p. 10.

[8] Fela Durosomo, "I'm Here to Strengthen Ties – President Chun Doo Hwan," *National Concord*, August 20, 1982, p. 13.

[9] "President Chun's Visit Opens New Era for Nigeria–Korea Relationship," *New Nigerian*, pp. 1–2.

in South Korea, illustrating the integration of human capital development into the wider matrix of economic exchange.[10]

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, the bilateral economic relationship had evolved from a simple exchange of oil for goods and services into more complex forms of reciprocal investment and resource-for-infrastructure agreements. The early 2000s marked a turning point: Nigeria's offshore oil fields, particularly Oil Prospecting Licenses (OPL) 321 and 323, became sites of joint production-sharing contracts between South Korean corporations such as Korea National Oil Corporation (KNOC) and Nigerian companies.[11] These ventures epitomized the maturing of Korea's energy diplomacy in Africa, as Korean capital and technology were increasingly deployed in upstream oil exploration and related infrastructural ventures. The 2006 "resources-for-infrastructure" agreement, often referred to as the $10 billion "railway-for-oil" deal, exemplified this strategic deepening.[12] Under its terms, South Korea committed to constructing critical infrastructure including modern railway lines, in exchange for access to Nigerian oil reserves. This arrangement captured the evolving logic of complementarity: oil-rich Nigeria leveraged its resource endowments to attract infrastructural investment, while energy-dependent Korea utilized its industrial capability to secure long-term resource supplies. The same dynamic extended into the liquefied natural gas (LNG) and offshore engineering sectors, where Korean firms, notably Samsung Heavy Industries and Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering, assumed pivotal roles. By the 2010s, these companies had constructed six of Nigeria's LNG trains[13] and participated in the engineering of the *Egina* Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) unit, the largest of its kind in the world at the time.[14] These ventures underscored Korea's dual role

[10] "President Chun's Visit Opens New Era for Nigeria–Korea Relationship," *New Nigerian*, p.2.

[11] Madu Onuorah, "Nigeria, South Korea sign 68 billion Nigeria pact on oil blocs," *Guardian*, March 10, 2006, p.5.

[12] Chidi Ugwu, "Nigeria, South Korea Seal Deal on Railways," *Daily Champion*, Lagos, November 10, 2006.

[13] Stephen Angbulu, "Tinubu'll Honour South Korea's Invitation in 2024, Says Shettima," *Punch*, Lagos, June 26, 2023.

[14] Françoise Nicolas, *Korea in Africa: Between Soft Power and Economic Interests*, Paris: French Institute of International Relations (Ifri), January 2020, p.24.

as a consumer of energy and a supplier of the industrial technologies necessary for resource extraction and processing. For Nigeria, this partnership provided not only access to technical expertise but also a pathway toward industrial integration, even if asymmetrically structured. The bilateral economic architecture thus rested on a recurring pattern of interdependence with Nigeria providing the raw materials of production, and South Korea furnishing the industrial tools, machinery, and engineering expertise that transformed those materials into globally tradable commodities. This structural arrangement, however, revealed underlying asymmetries. While the rhetoric of South–South cooperation between Nigeria and South Korea emphasized equality and mutual development, the trade data and project terms often favored Korea.

Korean exports to Nigeria, comprising machinery, ship parts, and industrial goods, consistently outpaced Nigerian exports of crude oil and raw materials. Even in the context of large-scale agreements such as the 2006 railway-for-oil project, implementation delays and financing complications underscored the challenges Nigeria faced in converting resource wealth into sustainable industrial advancement. Yet, despite these imbalances, the bilateral relationship maintained strategic significance for both parties. For South Korea, Nigeria represented both a vital supplier of energy and an entry point into African markets; for Nigeria, Korea remained a valuable partner in technology acquisition, infrastructure construction, and industrial modernization. By the 2010s and 2020s, this complementarity had further diversified. Korean investment in renewable energy, gas processing, and heavy engineering in Nigeria signaled a gradual shift toward more sustainable and technologically integrated forms of economic cooperation. Nigeria's participation in Korea–Africa Economic Cooperation (KOAFEC) forums and bilateral economic commissions reflected its enduring interest in leveraging Korean technology for national development.[15] Nevertheless, the foundational economic logic of resource–technology complementarity mediated through energy diplomacy, remained intact. As Nigeria continued to supply the resources fueling Korea's industries, Korea provided the infrastructure and technology that underpinned Nigeria's modernization ambitions. This enduring

[15] Adesina, Akinwumi A. "Opening Keynote Speech by Dr. Akinwumi A. Adesina, President, African Development Bank Group, at the Korea–Africa Economic Cooperation (KOAFEC) Ministerial Conference, Republic of Korea, 13 September 2023." *African Development Bank Group,* September 12, 2023.

configuration illustrates how, over four decades, the bilateral relationship evolved not merely as an exchange of commodities but as a manifestation of economic interdependence in which energy, technology, and infrastructure were reciprocally and strategically intertwined.

4.2 Asymmetrical Trade Structures

From the outset of formal diplomatic engagement in 1980, Nigerian–South Korean economic relations were defined by a structural imbalance that persisted despite rhetorical affirmations of equality and mutual benefit. The bilateral trade pattern revealed an asymmetrical structure wherein the trade relations between both countries was recorded in 1982 as being one sided. Nigeria imported ships, plywood, textile and other products worth over 124 million naira from South Korea in 1980 while her export to the country was a meagre 1,000 naira. Nonetheless, there was a remarkable improvement last year (1981) when the Nigerian imports from South Korea fell to 105 million naira and exports increased to over 1 million naira. In spite of this, the balance-of-trade is seriously unfavourable to Nigeria which sells only crude oil."[16] The relationship's scale changed considerably in the following decades: by the first half of 2011, total bilateral trade volume exceeded $2 billion, rising to approximately $4 billion in 2013 and $4.5 billion in 2014, a figure South Korean officials referenced again in November 2016 while discussing regional trade comparisons.[17] This growth reversed sharply in 2015, when trade volume fell to $1.8 billion, a decline of $2.7 billion which South Korea's Deputy Minister for Multilateral and Global Affairs, Jongmoon Choi, attributed to an outstanding $15.4 million Nigerian loan repayment owed to the Korean Government Economic Development Fund since 2001, for the purchase of railway coaches and locomotive modernization.[18] Later data show trade volumes in the $1.1–$2.4 billion range across 2021 and 2022, with a projected year-end figure of $2.4 billion for 2022 reflecting a 20

[16] John Araka, "The ties between Nigeria and Korea - A Visit for Consolidation," *Daily Times*, August 20, 1982.

[17] Victoria Ojeme, "Trade Volume between South Korea and Nigeria Drops to 1.8bn," *Vanguard* (Lagos), February 22, 2017, 52; Senator Iroegbu, "South Korea Solicits Nigeria's Support against Nuclear Weapons," *This Day* (Lagos), November 19, 2016, 55.

[18] Victoria Ojeme, "Trade Volume between South Korea and Nigeria Drops to 1.8bn," *Vanguard* (Lagos), February 22, 2017, 52.

percent increase.[19] According to data from The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), trade between South Korea and Nigeria in 2023 revealed a significant imbalance. South Korea exported approximately $1.7 billion worth of goods to Nigeria, with refined petroleum accounting for $1.11 billion of that total. In contrast, Nigeria exported around $717 million to South Korea, primarily consisting of petroleum gas valued at $583 million. This results in a trade surplus of about $983 million in favor of South Korea.[20] By 2024, bilateral trade had reached over $2.2 billion, marking a 38.6 percent increase attributed by Korean officials to a strengthening economic partnership.[21]

Table 1: Nigeria – South Korea Bilateral Trade Data From 1980–2025

Year	Nigeria's Exports to Korea	Korea's Exports to Nigeria	Total Trade Volume	Sources
1980	₦1,000	₦124 million	-	John Araka, "The Ties between Nigeria and Korea: A Visit for Consolidation," Daily Times (Lagos), August 20, 1982, 3.
1981	₦1-12 million	₦105 million	-	John Araka, "The Ties between Nigeria and Korea: A Visit for Consolidation," Daily Times (Lagos), August 20, 1982, 3. Ted Anderson, "That Nigeria–South Korea Tie," Weekly Trumpet (Lagos),

[19] "Nigeria, South Korea's Trade Volume Hits $1.1bn in Q2 2022," *Leadership* (Abuja), August 31, 2022; Olawale Ajimotokan, "Korea-Nigeria Bilateral Trade to Hit $2.4bn by End of 2022," *This Day* (Lagos), November 11, 2022.

[20] "South Korea (KOR) and Nigeria (NGA) Trade," *The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC)*, accessed October 15, 2025, https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/kor/partner/nga.

[21] Ochiaka Ugwu, "Korea and Nigeria: Restyling Partnership," Peoples Daily (Abuja), April 22, 2025.

				September 19, 1982, 15.

Table 1 (Continued): Nigeria – South Korea Bilateral Trade Data From 1980–2025

Year	Nigeria's Exports to Korea	Korea's Exports to Nigeria	Total Trade Volume	Sources
1984	Not reported	₦36.36 million	-	"Nigeria, South Korea Begin Trade Talks," Guardian (Lagos), July 25, 1985, 5.
2011 (1st half)	Not disaggregated	Not disaggregated	Over $2 billion	Bola Olajuwon, "South Korea Pledges Support to Nigeria in Achieving MDGs, Others," Guardian (Lagos), November 28, 2012, 9.
2013	Not disaggregated	Not disaggregated	Approx. $4 billion	Victoria Ojeme, "Trade Volume between South Korea and Nigeria Drops to 1.8bn," Vanguard (Lagos), February 22, 2017, 52.
2014	Not disaggregated	Not disaggregated	Approx. $4.5 billion (also cited as $4.46bn in a Nov. 2016 speech)	Victoria Ojeme, "Trade Volume between South Korea and Nigeria Drops to 1.8bn," Vanguard (Lagos), February 22, 2017, 52. Senator Iroegbu, "South Korea Solicits Nigeria's Support against Nuclear Weapons," This Day (Lagos), November 19, 2016, 55.
2015	Not disaggregated	Not disaggregated	$1.8 billion Decline of $2.7bn from 2014, attributed by South Korean	Victoria Ojeme, "Trade Volume between South Korea and Nigeria Drops to 1.8bn," Vanguard

			officials to Nigeria's outstanding $15.4 million loan repayment (owed since 2001) to the Korean Government Economic Development Fund for railway coach purchases and locomotive modernization.	(Lagos), February 22, 2017, 52.

Table 1 (Continued): Nigeria – South Korea Bilateral Trade Data From 1980–2025

Year	Nigeria's Exports to Korea	Korea's Exports to Nigeria	Total Trade Volume	Sources
2021	Not disaggregated	Not disaggregated	Approx. $2 billion (estimate)	"Agba Leads Nigerian Government's Delegation to South Korea for Strategic Dialogues on Bilateral Cooperation," TheConclaveNG, March 30, 2023.
2022 (Q1–Q2)	Not disaggregated	Not disaggregated	$1.1 billion (+20% YoY)	"Nigeria, South Korea's Trade Volume Hits $1.1bn in Q2 2022," Leadership (Abuja), August 31, 2022.
2022 (as of June)	Not disaggregated	Not disaggregated	Over $1.5 billion	Sanjay Kumar, "Nigeria Vows to Partner with Korea for Sustainable Development," Korea Herald

				(Seoul), October 5, 2022.

Table 1 (Continued): Nigeria – South Korea Bilateral Trade Data From 1980–2025

Year	Nigeria's Exports to Korea	Korea's Exports to Nigeria	Total Trade Volume	Sources
2022 (year-end projection)	Not disaggregated	Not disaggregated	Projected $2.4 billion (+20%)	Olawale Ajimotokan, "Korea-Nigeria Bilateral Trade to Hit $2.4bn by End of 2022," This Day (Lagos), November 11, 2022.
2024	Not disaggregated	Not disaggregated	Over $2.2 billion (+38.6% YoY)	Ochiaka Ugwu, "Korea and Nigeria: Restyling Partnership," Peoples Daily (Abuja), April 22, 2025.

Source: Compiled by the researcher

The asymmetrical trade dynamic reflected not only divergent economic structures but also differing levels of industrial sophistication. South Korea's rapid transformation under an export-led, state-coordinated industrialization model stood in stark contrast to Nigeria's oil-dependent and consumption-oriented economy.[22] By the early 1980s, South Korea's manufacturing capacity encompassed heavy industry, shipbuilding, machinery, and electronics, while Nigeria's industrial base remained weak and externally dependent.[23] The composition of trade therefore mirrored these disparities: Korea's exports to Nigeria included machinery, vehicles, electronics, and construction

[22] "President Chun's Visit Opens New Era for Nigeria–Korea Relationship: Setting an Example of South–South Co-operation," *New Nigerian,* August 19, 1982, pp. 1–4.

[23] *Ibid.,*

materials, whereas Nigeria's exports were confined largely to crude petroleum and, to a lesser degree, agricultural produce.[24]

Table 2: Products Traded between Nigeria and South Korea, by Direction

Direction	Product(s)	Year/Period	Source
Korea → Nigeria	Ships	1980	John Araka, "The Ties between Nigeria and Korea: A Visit for Consolidation," *Daily Times* (Lagos), August 20, 1982, 3.
Korea → Nigeria	Plywood, textile	1980	John Araka, "The Ties between Nigeria and Korea: A Visit for Consolidation," *Daily Times* (Lagos), August 20, 1982, 3; Ted Anderson, "That Nigeria–South Korea Tie," *Weekly Trumpet* (Lagos), September 19, 1982, 15.
Korea → Nigeria	Machinery, vehicles, electronics, construction materials	Referenced generally, early 1980s	"Audu Invites South Korean Firms," *New Nigerian*, February 17, 1981, 10.
Korea → Nigeria	Plywood, textile, ceramics, electronic products	1984	"Nigeria, South Korea Begin Trade Talks," *Guardian* (Lagos), July 25, 1985, 5.
Korea → Nigeria	Machinery, autos, electronics	2011 (bulk of trade)	"Nigerian Envoy Slams Korea over Deportation," *This Day* (Lagos), October 4, 2011, 65.
Korea → Nigeria	Mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*, *Scomber australasicus*)	Q4 2023 (NBS data)	Nnaemeka Onyekachi, "South Korea Pledges $24 Billion for Development and Trade Assistance in Nigeria, African Nations," Nairametrics, June 5, 2024.

[24] "Audu Invites South Korean Firms," *New Nigerian*, February 17, 1981, p. 10.

Table 2 (Continued): Products Traded between Nigeria and South Korea, by Direction

Nigeria → Korea	Crude petroleum	Referenced as Nigeria's principal export to Korea	John Araka, "The Ties between Nigeria and Korea: A Visit for Consolidation," *Daily Times* (Lagos), August 20, 1982, 3; "Audu Invites South Korean Firms," *New Nigerian*, February 17, 1981, 10.
Nigeria → Korea	Agricultural produce	Referenced generally, early 1980s	"Audu Invites South Korean Firms," *New Nigerian*, February 17, 1981, 10.
Nigeria → Korea	Unwrought aluminum and alloys	Q4 2023 (NBS data), valued at ₦3,400,420,000	Nnaemeka Onyekachi, "South Korea Pledges $24 Billion for Development and Trade Assistance in Nigeria, African Nations," *Nairametrics*, June 5, 2024.

Source: Compiled by the researcher

This imbalance was acknowledged even in contemporary Nigerian reports, which noted that "*there is vigorous trade between the two countries, albeit… there is an imbalance in favour of the Republic of Korea*."[25] The contradiction between the rhetoric of South–South cooperation and the empirical reality of trade inequality became more pronounced as the relationship deepened. The 1986 *National Concord* article, which described Nigeria and South Korea as a "model of South–South cooperation," epitomized this paradox.[26] While it sought to portray both countries as developmental peers committed to constructing a "new international economic order," it simultaneously acknowledged South Korea's advanced industrial base and Nigeria's dependence on oil exports.[27]

In 1960 South Korean GDP per capita was about the same as in the Congo. The Philippines was considered by many South Korean planners as a nearly unreachable role model. Yet by 1996

[25] "Strengthening the Ties," *Nigerian Observer*, August 25, 1982, p. 3.

[26] "Nigeria–South Korea: A Model of South–South Cooperation," *National Concord*, August 21, 1986, p. 2.

[27] *Ibid.*,

South Korea was the 12th largest economy in the world and had joined the OECD, the first of the Asian 'tigers' to be admitted. An average annual growth rate of GNP of about 10% between 1965 and 1980 laid the foundations for this spectacular success. If we exclude the OPEC and centrally planned economies, South Korea had the fifth highest growth rate of real GNP in the world in the 1960s and the highest in the 1970s and for some of the 1980s. The Fortune list of the top 500 private, non-oil companies in 1986 included 10 from South Korea and only 10 from all other developing countries combined.[28] In contrast, Nigeria's economy was suffering from chronic structural weaknesses with foreign exchange shortages, an overvalued currency, and fiscal dependence on oil revenues, exacerbated by the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). President Ibrahim Babangida's public call on April 22, 1987, for "increased economic cooperation" with South Korea indicates a strategic recalibration within Nigeria's international economic agenda, particularly in response to its domestic structural crisis and the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) under the guidance of the IMF and World Bank.[29] Thus, in light of these stark differences, the *Concord*'s claim that both nations were "co-equals" in the South–South framework thus obscured the widening developmental gap between an industrialized Korea and a resource-dependent Nigeria.[30]

This paradox was further reinforced through trade data and bilateral economic arrangements. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, South Korea's exports to Nigeria consistently outpaced Nigeria's exports, both in volume and in value. Korean companies like Daewoo, Hyundai, and Samsung dominated Nigeria's industrial imports, providing construction equipment, electronics, ships, and petrochemical machinery, while Nigerian exports to Korea remained confined to crude oil.[31] Even as South Korea's global economic status rose (achieving OECD

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[28] John Minns, "Of Miracles and Models: The Rise and Decline of the Developmental State in South Korea," *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 6 (2001): p.1025.

[29] Nigerian Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, *"General Babangida wants increased economic co-operation between Nigeria and South Korea,"* press release No. 634, Lagos, April 22, 1987.

[30] "Nigeria–South Korea: A Model of South–South Cooperation," *National Concord*, August 21, 1986, p. 2.

[31] "Nigeria, South Korea Begin Trade Talks," *Guardian*, July 25, 1985, p. 5.

membership in 1996 and high-income classification by the early 2000s), it continued to frame its engagement with Nigeria within the discourse of "South–South cooperation."[32] This rhetorical posture, though politically expedient, concealed an increasingly North–South character of trade relations. Korea's export-driven model relied on markets such as Nigeria for industrial output absorption, while Nigeria's dependency on oil exports and manufactured imports reinforced its subordinate position within the bilateral economic hierarchy. By the late 1980s, the Nigerian press and government sources began to recognize these contradictions, albeit indirectly. Similarly, the *Daily Times* observed that Korean companies were "internationally competitive" and offered "the best terms" in industrial equipment supply, suggesting a one-directional flow of trade benefits.[33]

The asymmetry extended to project financing: between 1988 and 1989, South Korea extended loans and credits to Nigeria for railway and highway development, effectively recycling trade surpluses back into development finance tied to Korean contractors.[34] Such arrangements, though beneficial in addressing Nigeria's infrastructural deficits, entrenched a pattern of dependency wherein Korean firms financed and executed projects using their own capital and technology, leaving Nigeria with debt obligations and limited domestic value addition. By the 2000s and 2010s, the paradox of South–South cooperation within Nigerian–South Korean relations had become even more evident. South Korea had achieved full industrial maturity, becoming a global leader in shipbuilding, electronics, and heavy engineering, while Nigeria's industrial capacity continued to stagnate. Yet, bilateral cooperation continued to be couched in the language of mutual solidarity and shared developmental experience. This rhetorical continuity belied the material realities of trade: Korea's exports to Nigeria comprising automobiles, industrial

[32] Françoise Nicolas, *Korea in Africa: Between Soft Power and Economic Interests, Études de l'Ifri. Paris: French Institute of International Relations (Ifri), January 2020, pp.12-26.*

[33] "Envoy optimistic of better trade ties with South Korea," *Guardian,* 29 November 1986, p.5.

[34] "Nigeria, Korea Sign Loan Pact," *Nigerian Statesman,* December 10, 1988, p. 1; "Nigeria, South Korea Sign 70m Naira Pact," *Daily Champion,* January 8, 1989, p. 3.

machinery, and electronics, expanded steadily, while Nigerian exports remained overwhelmingly petroleum-based.[35]

4.3 Infrastructure Development

The construction and infrastructure sector has been one of the most visible and enduring dimensions of Nigerian–South Korean economic cooperation. From the early years of diplomatic engagement, Korean engineering and construction firms demonstrated a strong presence in Nigeria's developmental landscape, particularly within energy, transportation, and industrial infrastructure. Although South Korean companies such as Daewoo Nigeria Limited had established operations in the country prior to 1980, their activities expanded substantially following the formalization of diplomatic relations in February of that year.[36] Daewoo Engineering and Construction Nigeria Limited, incorporated in 1978, played a pioneering role in executing oil and gas projects, symbolizing the broader Korean commitment to infrastructural development in Nigeria.[37] This early presence created a technical and institutional foundation that subsequent decades of bilateral engagement would consolidate into a dominant structural feature of the relationship. The 1982 state visit of President Chun Doo Hwan to Nigeria brought the infrastructure partnership into sharper focus. The visit underscored the centrality of construction, industrial manufacturing, and technology transfer to the bilateral economic agenda. Reports indicated that by 1982, no fewer than seven joint Korean–Nigerian ventures were operational across sectors such as galvanized steel manufacturing, heavy-duty transformer production, and construction materials.[38] In addition, South Korean firms were already engaged in the development of large-scale infrastructural projects, including a US$180 million hotel and housing complex, hospital and engineering college constructions, and rural waterworks schemes aligned with

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[35] Françoise Nicolas, *Korea in Africa: Between Soft Power and Economic Interests*, p.26

[36] "Nigeria Establishes Diplomatic Relations with South Korea," *New Nigerian,* February 23, 1980, p. 11.

[37] Daewoo Engineering & Construction Nigeria Limited, *History, Daewoo E&C Nigeria Limited*, accessed June 14, 2025, https://www.daewooencnigeria.com/company/history.

[38] "President Chun's Visit Opens New Era for Nigeria–Korea Relationship: Setting an Example of South–South Co-operation," *New Nigerian,* August 19, 1982, pp. 1–4.

Nigeria's Fourth National Development Plan (1981–1985).[39] These early projects not only demonstrated the growing confidence of Korean firms in the Nigerian market but also reflected the complementarity between Korea's expertise in construction engineering and Nigeria's demand for rapid infrastructural expansion. Korean companies were lauded for their efficiency and cost competitiveness, operating round-the-clock shifts and offering lower bids than Western contractors, thereby positioning themselves as credible partners for Nigeria's ambitious development programs.[40]

By the mid-1980s, the institutional infrastructure of cooperation deepened through bilateral mechanisms such as the Nigeria–South Korea Joint Commission. The 1985 trade talks and related government communiqués revealed that Korean firms had become entrenched participants in Nigeria's construction and industrial supply markets, providing machinery, materials, and technical expertise for multiple projects. Nevertheless, these engagements were not without complications. As of 1985, the Nigerian government payment arrears to Korean exporters had reportedly reached approximately ₦34 million,[41] highlighting that these financial irregularities became symptomatic of a broader structural tension between Nigeria's expansive infrastructural ambitions and its limited institutional and fiscal capacity to sustain them. The late 1980s witnessed a renewed phase of infrastructural engagement framed around concessional financing and project-tied loans. In 1988, Nigeria secured a US$10 million concessional loan from South Korea for railway rehabilitation, with a twenty-year repayment plan and a five-year grace period.[42] While heralded as a milestone in bilateral financial cooperation, the so-called "railway loan" quickly became a source of controversy due to questions about the adequacy of its terms and the absence of transparent implementation mechanisms.[43] This arrangement prefigured later infrastructure-for-

[39] "President Chun's Visit Opens New Era for Nigeria–Korea Relationship: Setting an Example of South–South Co-operation," *New Nigerian*, p.2.

[40] John Araka, "The Ties Between Nigeria and Korea: A Visit for Consolidation," *Daily Times*, August 20, 1982.

[41] "Nigeria, South Korea Begin Trade Talks," *Guardian*, July 25, 1985, p. 5.

[42] "Nigeria, Korea Sign Loan Pact," *Nigerian Statesman*, December 10, 1988, p. 1.

[43] "53 Million Naira South Korean Loan for NRC," *New Nigerian*, December 10, 1988, p. 16.

resource models, wherein Korean firms would undertake major infrastructural works in Nigeria in exchange for access to energy resources or other concessions. In 1989, Korean firms, notably Samsung and Daewoo, were awarded major contracts in Nigeria's transport and energy sectors, including the supply of thirty-six passenger railway coaches valued at ₦70 million and the financing of the Warri–Benin dual carriageway project through a ₦38.7 million loan facility.[44] These contracts exemplified Korea's strategic use of development finance as an instrument for market consolidation, ensuring that Korean contractors benefited directly from the funds they provided.

Through the 1990s and 2000s, South Korea's construction sector deepened its entrenchment in Nigeria, increasingly linked to the oil and gas industries. By this period, Korean firms had transitioned from medium-scale contractors to primary developers of critical national infrastructure. Daewoo, Hyundai, and Samsung Heavy Industries became key actors in Nigeria's industrial and energy infrastructure, constructing refineries, pipelines, and power generation plants.[45] The 2000s, in particular, marked a dramatic intensification of Korean participation: by 2020, cumulative construction contracts awarded to South Korean firms in Nigeria were estimated at approximately US$15 billion, making Nigeria Korea's largest construction market in sub-Saharan Africa.[46] Among the most emblematic of these large-scale arrangements was the 2006 "railway-for-oil" agreement, valued at US$10 billion, under which Korean firms pledged to modernize 1,500 kilometers of Nigeria's railway network in exchange for equity participation in designated offshore oil fields.[47] This deal encapsulated the evolving structure of the bilateral economic relationship—linking resource access to infrastructural delivery, while simultaneously

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[44] "Nigeria, South Korea Sign 70m Naira Pact," *Daily Champion,* January 8, 1989, p. 3; "Nigeria Signs 38.7m Loan Agreement with Daewoo Corporation of Korea," *Nigerian Federal Ministry of Information*, Press Release No. 13, January 1989.

[45] Olawale Ajimotokan, "Kim Young Chae: Korea–Nigeria Bilateral Trade to Hit $2.4bn by End of 2022," *This Day,* Abuja, November 11, 2022.

[46] Sanjay Kumar, "Nigeria Vows to Partner with Korea for Sustainable Development," *The Korea Herald,* Seoul, October 5, 2022.

[47] Chidi Ugwu, "Nigeria, South Korea Seal Deal on Railways," *Daily Champion*, Lagos, November 10, 2006.

reinforcing Korea's comparative advantage in engineering and technology. However, as with earlier projects, implementation challenges persisted, a major constraint of which was unresolved legal conflicts and credibility gaps in Nigeria's investment regime. These failures underscored the recurring disconnect between the scale of bilateral agreements and the institutional capacity required for their fulfillment. The most prominent example of this was the ongoing dispute between Nigeria and the Korea National Oil Corporation (KNOC) over oil prospecting licenses OPL 321 and 323. Originally awarded in 2005 and later revoked for failure to meet key commitments including the construction of a 1,200 km gas pipeline, the case exemplified the vulnerability of Nigeria's legal-investment frameworks.[48] Although KNOC secured a favorable lower court ruling, Nigeria's persistent appeal and eventual pivot to out-of-court diplomacy during the 2012 Seoul summit illustrated the country's ambivalence toward investor contracts that were perceived as exploitative. The involvement of Oando CEO Wale Tinubu in mediating the settlement highlighted a pragmatic recalibration aimed at preserving investor confidence while reclaiming state control over resource agreements. The episode revealed structural contradictions between Nigeria's political economy of resource nationalism and Korea's expectations of regulatory stability and legal finality. Moreover, the delay in resolution deterred further Korean downstream investments in refineries and petrochemical plants, suggesting that legal ambiguity and enforcement deficits significantly undermine investor sentiment. In response to these tensions, both nations sought new avenues for cooperation.

The Nigeria–South Korea Investment Forum held alongside the 2012 summit marked a strategic shift toward diversified, sectoral investment engagement. Foreign Minister Olugbenga Ashiru's identification of sectors like agriculture, telecoms, mining, and energy reflected a deliberate pivot from extractive focus to broader economic planning.[49] Korean firms such as SK E&C and KHNPCO expressed interest in power and petrochemical sectors, aligning with Korea's outward investment trends in emerging markets. However, persistent investor hesitancy expressed

[48] Oghogho Obayuwana, "Nigeria, South Korea Consider Diplomacy in Resolving Oil Blocs' Dispute," *Guardian*, April 2, 2012, p.15.

[49] *Ibid.,*

in concerns about "elongated wait-and-see" periods underscored ongoing skepticism regarding Nigeria's business climate and institutional capacity to absorb FDI efficiently.

Korean firms also diversified into other construction-related sectors, including power generation, gas distribution, and maritime engineering. Between 2005 and 2020, Korean engineering companies participated in proposals for power plant construction totaling a combined capacity of 2,250 MW, the development of a 1,200-kilometer gas pipeline network,[50] and the establishment of a US$300 million ultramodern shipyard at Apapa Port,[51] designed to serve Nigeria's growing offshore oil and gas industry. Samsung Heavy Industries' participation in the construction of Nigeria's *Egina* Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) unit[52] further demonstrated Korea's technological depth and long-term engagement in Nigeria's industrial infrastructure. However, the dominance of Korean firms in Nigeria's infrastructure sector has also reflected the asymmetrical nature of the bilateral relationship. Despite the volume of Korean-led construction projects, Nigeria's domestic industrial participation and technological absorption remained limited. Korean companies often operated as turnkey contractors, repatriating profits and employing limited local subcontractors, thereby perpetuating dependency on foreign expertise.[53]

Recurrent financing challenges such as delayed government payments, foreign exchange shortages, and unfulfilled loan obligations further complicated project sustainability. The 1985 arrears crisis[54] and the 1988 railway loan controversy[55] serve as enduring examples of these systemic constraints. By 2025, the infrastructural cooperation between Nigeria and South Korea stands as both a testament to the longevity of their economic partnership and a reflection of its

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[50] Michael Faloseyi, "FG, Korean firms sign MoU on energy," Punch, July 27, 2005, p.19.

[51] Olawale Ajimotokan, "Kim Young Chae: Korea–Nigeria Bilateral Trade to Hit $2.4bn by End of 2022," *This Day*, Abuja, November 11, 2022.

[52] Françoise Nicolas, *Korea in Africa: Between Soft Power and Economic Interests*, French Institute of International Relations (Ifri), Paris, January 2020, p.24.

[53] *Ibid.*,

[54] "Nigeria, South Korea Begin Trade Talks," *Guardian*, July 25, 1985, p. 5.

[55] "*53 Million Naira South Korean Loan for NRC*," *New Nigerian*, December 10, 1988, p. 16.

structural asymmetries. While Korean firms have contributed substantially to Nigeria's physical development by modernizing transport networks, building energy infrastructure, and constructing maritime facilities, the pattern has remained one of unequal exchange. Nigeria has served as a resource and contract environment, while South Korea has functioned as the technological and financial principal. The construction sector thus encapsulates the broader trajectory of the Nigerian–South Korean economic relationship: one of enduring interdependence, marked by impressive infrastructural output but persistent disparities in capability, ownership, and developmental outcomes.

4.4 Technology Transfer Aspirations

A central motif in Nigerian–South Korean economic relations since 1980 has been Nigeria's sustained aspiration to emulate and internalize elements of Korea's developmental and technological success. From the earliest stages of engagement, Nigerian policymakers consistently articulated technology transfer and industrial learning as core objectives of bilateral cooperation with South Korea. This aspiration reflected an awareness of South Korea's remarkable transformation from a war-torn agrarian economy in the 1950s to a global manufacturing powerhouse by the 1980s, driven by state-led industrialization, export orientation, and robust investment in research and development.[56] Nigeria's quest to replicate these developmental outcomes through structured cooperation with Korea became a recurrent feature of the bilateral agenda, particularly in the spheres of industrial policy, human capital development, and institutional capacity building. The institutional foundation for technological cooperation was laid in the early 1980s during the initial years of diplomatic engagement. President Chun Doo Hwan's 1982 state visit to Nigeria was emblematic of this phase, yielding multiple agreements on technical cooperation and the training of Nigerian specialists in Korean institutions.[57] By the end of 1982, a total of twenty-nine Nigerian experts had received training in Korea under the auspices of bilateral

[56] John Minns, "Of Miracles and Models: The Rise and Decline of the Developmental State in South Korea," *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 6 (2001): p.1025.

[57] "President Chun's Visit Opens New Era for Nigeria–Korea Relationship: Setting an Example of South–South Co-operation," *New Nigerian,* August 19, 1982, pp. 1–4.

exchange programs focusing on agriculture, fisheries, and industrial technology.[58] The emphasis on agricultural modernization drew heavily on Korea's successful experience in mechanized rice production, irrigation systems, and cooperative farming structures, reflecting an attempt to adapt Korean models to Nigeria's development context.[59] This approach later evolved into more comprehensive frameworks of knowledge sharing inspired by Korea's *Saemaul Undong* (New Village Movement), which combined rural modernization with community-based development strategies.[60]

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Nigeria continued to seek structured technology transfer mechanisms through joint ventures and industrial partnerships.[61] The 1985 trade talks between Nigeria and South Korea revealed a shared interest in deepening industrial collaboration; however, the Nigerian side expressed concern over the limited depth of domestic participation in such ventures.[62] During this period, the Minister of Communications publicly emphasized that Nigerian engineers must assume leadership roles in collaborative projects, insisting that joint ventures move beyond the establishment of mere assembly plants to the local manufacture of telecommunications and industrial equipment.[63] This policy stance reflected Nigeria's growing awareness of the risks of technological dependency and the need to build internal absorptive capacity. Yet, despite such policy rhetoric, implementation lagged behind. Structural factors including inadequate research infrastructure, inconsistent industrial policy, and capital constraints hindered the effective internalization of Korean technologies within Nigeria's domestic production system. By the early 2000s, Korea's growing profile as a global development partner provided Nigeria with renewed opportunities for technical collaboration. The establishment of the Korea International

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[58] *Ibid.,*

[59] "Audu Invites South Korean Firms," *New Nigerian*, February 17, 1981, p. 10.

[60] "President Chun's Visit Opens New Era for Nigeria–Korea Relationship," *New Nigerian*, p.2.

[61] John Araka, "The Ties between Nigeria and Korea: A Visit for Consolidation," *Daily Times*, August 20, 1982.

[62] "Nigeria, South Korea Begin Trade Talks," *Guardian*, July 25, 1985, p. 5.

[63] "Korean firms to produce communication equipment in Nigeria," *Guardian*, July 10, 1985, p.16.

Cooperation Agency (KOICA) Country Office in Abuja in 2008 institutionalized a more coordinated approach to development assistance, emphasizing technology transfer, education, and capacity building.[64] Through KOICA, hundreds of Nigerian government officials participated in specialized training programs across diverse fields, including information and communications technology (ICT), agricultural mechanization, energy policy, and public administration.[65] Between 1980 and 2022, over 2,500 Nigerian officials have reportedly benefited from such capacity-building initiatives, marking one of the most extensive human resource development programs in Nigeria's bilateral partnerships with East Asian economies.[66]

A landmark example of this cooperation was the 2014 KOICA-supported *Nigeria e-Government Master Plan*.[67] The project, designed in partnership with the Ministry of Communication Technology, sought to replicate elements of South Korea's globally recognized digital governance infrastructure. The plan provided a comprehensive framework for integrating ICT into Nigeria's public administration, emphasizing transparency, service delivery efficiency, and inter-agency connectivity. The initiative demonstrated Korea's capacity to leverage its technological expertise in governance reform while also responding to Nigeria's ambition to modernize its bureaucratic processes. Yet, as with earlier technology transfer efforts, the challenge lay in adaptation rather than adoption. Despite Korea's provision of technical assistance and training, weak institutional frameworks, insufficient ICT infrastructure, and inconsistent policy follow-through constrained the program's full realization.[68] Parallel to official cooperation, Nigerian academics and policymakers increasingly turned to the Korean development experience as an analytical model for industrial learning. Korea's trajectory has been examined as a potential

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[64] "Agba leads Nigerian government's delegation to South Korea for strategic dialogues on bilateral cooperation," *The Conclave*, March 30, 2023.

[65] Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), *Country Partnership Strategy: Federal Republic of Nigeria 2015–2020*, (KOICA: Seoul, 2015), pp.4–7.

[66] Olawale Ajimotokan, "Kim Young Chae: Korea–Nigeria Bilateral Trade to Hit $2.4bn by End of 2022," *This Day*, Abuja, November 11, 2022.

[67] Oluranti Jonathan, Charles K. Ayo, and Sanjay Misra, *A Comparative Study of E-Government Successful Implementation Between Nigeria and Republic of Korea*, Ogun State, 2014, p.17.

[68] *Ibid.,*

blueprint for Nigeria's industrial transformation.[69] Their analyses highlighted key features of the Korean model: strong state capacity, targeted export promotion, substantial investment in education and R&D, and infrastructure-driven industrialization, as lessons applicable to Nigeria. These studies underscored that while Korea's development success was anchored in disciplined institutional governance and coherent industrial policy, Nigeria's experience was marked by policy inconsistency, infrastructural decay, and overreliance on natural resources.[70] Thus, even within the intellectual discourse, the gap between aspiration and absorption was evident. Despite these limitations, the technological partnership between the two countries remained dynamic and adaptive. In the energy sector, Korean firms introduced advanced engineering systems through projects such as the *Egina* Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) unit and LNG infrastructure development, which indirectly contributed to skill acquisition among Nigerian engineers and technicians.[71] Similarly, agricultural cooperation under the KOAFEC and KOICA frameworks fostered knowledge exchange in mechanized farming, aquaculture, and irrigation management.[72] Yet, Nigeria's capacity to translate these knowledge exchanges into sustained technological innovation was undermined by structural weaknesses most notably in the areas of vocational training, industrial research funding, and private sector participation.

By 2025, Nigeria's pursuit of technology transfer within its economic partnership with South Korea encapsulates a broader paradox of postcolonial development: the coexistence of high aspirations and limited absorptive capacity. While Korea provided consistent support through training, technical assistance, and model-driven cooperation frameworks, Nigeria's institutional environment often constrained meaningful technology internalization. The relationship, therefore,

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[69] Yaaba, B., "Learning from Korea's Industrial Transformation," *Nigerian Journal of Economic Studies*, 2011, 19(2): pp.56–73; Agbaje, A., "Lessons from East Asia: Industrial Policy and Governance," *Journal of Development Policy Studies*, 2011, 9(1): pp.22–44; Ogbonna, C., & Uma, K., "Korea's Developmental State and Lessons for Nigeria," *African Review of Economics and Finance*, 2017, 9(2): 101–120.

[70] *Ibid.,*

[71] Ochiaka Ugwu, "Korea and Nigeria: Restyling partnership," *Peoples Daily*, April 22, 2025.

[72] Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development (SCDDD), *Seminar on Nigeria-Korea Relations*, Abuja, May, 2024.

demonstrates both the potential and the limitations of technological collaboration. Korea's developmental state model offered Nigeria a vision of industrial possibility, but the persistent gap between structural ambition and operational execution ensured that technology transfer remained more rhetorical than transformative. In this sense, the technological dimension of Nigerian–South Korean economic relations reflects the enduring tension between learning ambitions *and* learning capacity, a pattern that has defined the relationship from 1980 through 2025.

4.5 Institutional Framework Development

The evolution of institutional frameworks governing Nigerian–South Korean economic relations between 1980 and 2025 reflects a progressive shift from informal, project-based interactions to structured mechanisms designed to promote sustained investment, trade, and development cooperation. From the onset of diplomatic recognition in 1980, both nations recognized the necessity of building durable institutional architectures capable of translating political goodwill into tangible economic outcomes. The initial phase of institutionalization was marked by the establishment of diplomatic missions with South Korea inaugurating its embassy in Lagos in 1980,[73] while Nigeria's mission in Seoul was delayed until 1987.[74] This asymmetrical establishment underscored the pragmatic sequencing of engagement: Korea prioritized economic representation in resource-rich Nigeria, whereas Nigeria's institutional presence in Seoul materialized only after bilateral trade and investment had become more substantial. The early 1980s also witnessed the formalization of cooperation through bilateral agreements and joint commissions. The 1982 state visit of President Chun Doo Hwan to Nigeria produced one of the first formal frameworks for economic collaboration, embodied in the "Agreement on Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation," which provided for a joint commission to oversee implementation. This joint commission became the central institutional mechanism for

[73] "Nigeria Establishes Diplomatic Relations with South Korea," *New Nigerian*, February 23, 1980, p. 11.

[74] "General Babangida wants increased economic co-operation between Nigeria and South Korea," *Nigerian Federal Ministry of Information and Culture*, Lagos, Press release no. 634, 22 April 1987.

coordinating bilateral activities across sectors such as trade, energy, and industrial development.[75] Subsequent years saw the proliferation of specific sectoral agreements particularly in maritime transport, aviation, and industrial training, intended to facilitate trade logistics and business mobility. Between 1985 and 1986, negotiations were initiated for a maritime shipping agreement to streamline freight operations and reduce logistical costs for bilateral commerce, although procedural delays postponed its ratification.[76] Similarly, an air services agreement was negotiated to enhance cargo and passenger connectivity, reflecting a growing awareness that infrastructure and institutional linkages were prerequisites for deeper economic integration.[77]

By the late 1980s, institutional collaboration had extended into financial and development assistance mechanisms. Korean loans and credit facilities to Nigeria during this period, such as the ₦53 million concessional loan for railway rehabilitation[78] and the ₦70 million credit for passenger coach procurement,[79] were accompanied by institutional memoranda stipulating repayment and technical oversight arrangements. However, these early frameworks often suffered from weak monitoring and enforcement capacity. Nigeria's default on a US$15.4 million loan related to railway infrastructure since 2001[80] revealed the fragility of institutional accountability, leading to diplomatic strain and temporary suspension of disbursements. These challenges underscored the broader governance limitations that would continue to affect implementation of bilateral financial agreements in subsequent decades. The 2000s marked a critical phase of institutional deepening characterized by the proliferation of sophisticated legal and fiscal instruments aimed at investment facilitation. The 2006 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Energy and Minerals

[75] "President Chun's Visit Opens New Era for Nigeria–Korea Relationship: Setting an Example of South–South Co-operation," *New Nigerian*, August 19, 1982, pp. 1–4.

[76] "Nigeria, South Korea Sign Pact," *Daily Times*, 18th August, 1989, p.5.

[77] "Draft Bilateral Air Service Agreement between Nigeria and Korea at advanced stage," *Nigeria Federal Department of Information*, Lagos, Press Release No. 987, 29 May 1985.

[78] "53 Million Naira South Korean Loan for NRC," *New Nigerian*, December 10, 1988, p. 16.

[79] "Nigeria, South Korea sign 70m Naira pact," *Daily Champion*, 1/8/1989, p.3.

[80] Victoria Ojeme, "Trade volume between South Korea and Nigeria drops to 1.8bn," *Vanguard Newspaper*, February 22, 2017, p. 52.

Development, valued at approximately US$6 billion, exemplified this evolution.[81] The agreement sought to formalize cooperation in exploration, energy production, and resource-linked infrastructure, while also laying the groundwork for a future Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (IPPA) and labour mobility framework.[82] This period also witnessed increasing policy convergence on investment governance, with both countries pursuing mechanisms to minimize investor risk. The protracted negotiation of the Avoidance of Double Taxation Agreement (ADTA) introduced to the Nigerian legislature in 2016, finally passed in 2025 and awaiting executive assent was emblematic of the growing legal sophistication of the bilateral framework.[83] Though delayed in implementation, the ADTA symbolized a mutual commitment to aligning fiscal regimes and ensuring predictability in cross-border investment.

Complementary to these tax and investment reforms was the establishment of the Trade and Investment Promotion Framework (TIPF), an MOU designed to address non-tariff barriers, streamline customs procedures, and improve Nigeria's investment climate.[84] As of 2025, negotiations on the TIPF MOU were ongoing, with both parties expressing confidence in its potential to establish a "new chapter" in bilateral economic relations. The TIPF alongside the institutionalization of development cooperation under the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), has shaped the bilateral relationship into one characterized by multidimensional cooperation rather than transactional exchange. KOICA's establishment of a country office in Abuja in 2008 provided a formal platform for project coordination, grant management, and technical assistance delivery.[85] Through this mechanism, Korea financed capacity-building projects in ICT, agriculture, education, and governance, with clear reporting and evaluation

[81] "Nigeria, Korea in 792 billion naira energy, minerals development pact," *Guardian*, 9 June 2006, pp. 13, 20.

[82] Bola Olajuwon, "South Korea pledges support to Nigeria in achieving MDGs, others," *Guardian*, 28 November 2012, p.9.

[83] Ochiaka Ugwu, "Korea and Nigeria: Restyling partnership," *Peoples Daily*, April 22, 2025.

[84] Oluchi Okwuego, "Korea Reaffirms Commitment to Stronger Ties with Nigeria," *News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)*, March 13, 2025.

[85] "Agba leads Nigerian government's delegation to South Korea for strategic dialogues on bilateral cooperation," *The Conclave*, March 30, 2023.

structures aligned with Korea's global development cooperation model.[86] Further institutional innovation emerged in the late 2010s with the expansion of Korea's Africa-focused institutional ecosystem. The creation of the *Korea–Africa Foundation* in 2018[87] and the consolidation of the *Korea–Africa Economic Cooperation (KOAFEC) Trust Fund* through the Export–Import Bank of Korea[88] provided Nigeria and other African partners with new instruments for concessional lending, policy dialogue, and knowledge exchange. These frameworks significantly enhanced Korea's capacity to coordinate development finance with trade and investment policy, enabling more coherent engagement with African economies. Within this framework, Nigeria benefited from KOAFEC-funded initiatives in energy policy reform, SME support, and capacity development in customs modernization.

Financial and institutional cooperation continued to expand into the 2020s. In 2019, the *Nigerian Deposit Insurance Corporation* (NDIC) and the *Korea Deposit Insurance Corporation* (KDIC) signed a memorandum of understanding on financial sector collaboration, focused on risk management, regulatory harmonization, and capacity building.[89] This MoU was complemented by the 2024 African Development Bank (AfDB)–Korea Customs Service Agreement on trade facilitation, which sought to enhance transparency and digitalization in customs administration

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[86] "Agba leads Nigerian government's delegation to South Korea for strategic dialogues on bilateral cooperation," The Conclave, March 30, 2023.

[87] Françoise Nicolas, *Korea in Africa: Between Soft Power and Economic Interests*, Études de l'Ifri. Paris: French Institute of International Relations (Ifri), January 2020, p.12.

[88] African Development Bank, *Making a Future Together: Inspiration from the Miracle on the Han River*, Press Release, June 7, 2024, https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/making-future-together-inspiration-miracle-han-river-71685; African Development Bank, *Adesina to Korean Investors: Africa Is the Leading Market Frontier with Huge Untapped Potential*, Press Release, September 14, 2023, https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/adesina-korean-investors-africa-leading-market-frontier-huge-untapped-potential-64319; African Development Bank, *7th KOAFEC Ministerial Conference: President Adesina's Interview with Korean Broadcasting System (KBS)*, Multimedia Report, September 15, 2023, https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/multimedia/video/7th-koafec-ministerial-conference-president-adesinas-interview-korean-broadcasting-system-kbs-64353.

[89] Mohammed Kudu Ibrahim, *NDIC Signs MOU with the Korea Deposit Insurance Corporation*, Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation (NDIC), press release, August 20, 2019.

across Africa, with Nigeria as one of its pilot states.[90] These agreements illustrate the sustained institutional deepening of the bilateral relationship, reflecting Korea's transition from a transactional trade partner to a comprehensive development and investment collaborator. Yet, despite this proliferation of formal frameworks, implementation challenges remained a persistent constraint. The history of bilateral cooperation reveals that institutionalization alone could not mitigate underlying governance weaknesses. Issues such as the disputes over oil block contracts and recurring issues of delayed loan repayments, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and procedural noncompliance continued to undermine investor confidence. These limitations highlighted a critical paradox of institutional development: while Nigeria and Korea had constructed an elaborate legal and administrative architecture for cooperation, the effectiveness of these frameworks depended on the very governance capacities they were meant to strengthen.

By 2025, Nigerian–South Korean economic relations were supported by one of the most extensive institutional architectures between any African and East Asian partners. From joint commissions and investment promotion frameworks to tax treaties and financial cooperation MoUs, the bilateral relationship reflected significant institutional maturity. Nevertheless, the persistence of implementation deficits, policy discontinuity, and regulatory issues tempered the developmental impact of these instruments. The institutional evolution of the partnership thus underscores both the progress achieved and the challenges that remain. Korea's institutional consistency and technocratic governance provided a model of predictability, while Nigeria's intermittent administrative fragility constrained the realization of shared economic ambitions. The story of Nigerian–South Korean institutional cooperation is therefore one of structured expansion tempered by systemic asymmetries a partnership marked by robust design but uneven execution.

[90] African Development Bank Group, *African Development Bank and Korea Customs Service Sign Aide Memoire to Boost Trade Facilitation in Africa*, Press Release, July 3, 2024, https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/african-development-bank-and-korea-customs-service-sign-aide-memoire-boost-trade-facilitation-africa-72364.

CHAPTER FIVE

NIGERIA-SOUTH KOREA SOCIO-CULTURAL RELATIONS FROM 1980 TO 2025

This chapter examines the social and cultural dynamics of Nigerian–South Korean relations as a critical site for understanding how bilateral relations evolve beyond formal diplomacy. While traditionally anchored in political economy and development cooperation, the Nigeria–South Korea partnership has also included more diffuse and people-centered forms of engagement. These interactions, which include religious and sport exchanges, diasporic encounters, media flows, educational partnerships, and institutional linkages, reveal how bilateral relations between non-Western states increasingly depend on "soft power" infrastructures and sociocultural interdependencies.[1] This chapter responds to scholarly calls to broaden the scope of bilateral studies beyond state-to-state negotiations, emphasizing how cultural flows and human mobility increasingly structure the everyday grammar of international engagement.[2]

Comprising five thematic sections, the chapter maps the texture and trajectory of Nigeria–South Korea sociocultural relations. The first section explores "Shared values with religion," highlighting how this sphere offers mutually intelligible moral vocabularies and convivial meeting points. The second section turns to "Interactions on Sports" to reveal areas of mutual interest that has led to a history of sports diplomacy. The third section deals with "Shared values with food" and explores the culinary diplomacy (also known as gastrodiplomacy) components of Nigeria-South Korea bilateral relations. The fourth section addresses "Media in Nigeria-South Korea relations," focusing on the role of South Korea's global cultural exports particularly the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) and the emerging representation of Nigerian culture in Korean digital and popular spaces. These interactions expose both aspirational affinities and persistent asymmetries in how each nation is imagined in the eyes of the other. The fifth section investigates "Education in Nigeria-South Korea relations" as a tool of state soft power and a conduit for cultural translation,

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[1] Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

[2] Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

showcasing the significance of the Global Korea Scholarship (GKS), diaspora student networks, and institutional collaborations. The sixth section engages with the theme of "Migration," tracing the lived experiences of Nigerian migrants in South Korea, Korean migrants in Nigeria, biracial families, second-generation youth, and returnees. The final section evaluates the "Institutional frameworks of social and cultural exchange" such as bilateral MOUs, state-sponsored youth camps, and institutions like the Korean Cultural Centre Nigeria (KCCN), that scaffold and formalize these relations.

Taken together, these five sections argue that the bilateral relationship between Nigeria and South Korea is increasingly being shaped by the sociocultural rather than the solely geopolitical. Through cultural exchange and interpersonal connections, bilateralism becomes lived and contested, not merely negotiated. These engagements generate new forms of familiarity and solidarity, while also exposing enduring tensions around race and representation. Thus, the Nigeria–South Korea case offers a valuable perspective on how bilateral relations between a rising Asian middle power and an African frontier state can serve as both a mirror and a critique of global cultural flows in the postcolonial age.

5.1 Shared Values with Religion

Religion has played a significant role in shaping the sociocultural interfaces between Nigeria and South Korea. While diplomatic ties were formally established in 1980, prior social and religious engagements particularly through Christian missionary activities, paved the way for deeper bilateral connections. One of the most substantial early linkages was Korean missionary activity in Nigeria. In 1979, Korean missionaries began arriving in West Africa, with Nigeria hosting the largest number (nineteen missionaries) among all countries in the region at that time.[3] These missionaries were not only evangelists but also agents of social and community development. Reverends Kang Sung Sam and Lee Neung Sung, for instance, initiated wide-ranging projects in education, public health, and infrastructure. Reverend Kang's ECWA Billiri Bible College, founded in Bauchi, became a hub for theological education, producing pastoral

[3] Cephas N. Omenyo and Choi Dongsoo, "Korean Missionary Enterprise in West Africa 1979–1999: A Preliminary Study," *Exchange* vol.29, no.3 (2000): pp.213–229.

leaders and expanding over time with a theological library of more than 10,000 volumes.[4] The college's pursuit of accreditation from the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA) exemplifies the long-term vision of Korean missionaries in shaping Nigeria's religious landscape. Furthermore, Reverend Kang also responded to a water shortage crisis in Billiri by securing the support of Korean construction company Daewoo, which drilled a 120-meter well to serve both the college and the local community.[5] Reverend Lee's literacy classes in Hausa and English also reveal how Korean missionaries adapted to local contexts, incorporating indigenous languages into their programs. These engagements highlight the multifaceted nature of missionary presence: religious propagation intertwined with social welfare and education. Korean missionaries often embedded themselves deeply in communities, exemplifying a model of cultural translation and hybridity.[6] Nigerian receptivity to these influences was far from passive. Local believers adapted and localized Korean religious expressions, leading to the formation of indigenous evangelical groups and educational frameworks influenced by Korean theological models.

From a broader religious perspective, Christianity emerges as the primary shared religious identity between Nigeria and South Korea. While Korea remains religiously pluralistic - with Buddhism, Christianity, and increasing secularism among the population[7] - Christianity, despite being professed by only about 31% of South Koreans,[8] has had disproportionate influence culturally and globally. South Korea is home to Yoido Full Gospel Church, the world's largest single church congregation.[9] The church has drawn visits from major Nigerian Pentecostal leaders,

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[4] Cephas N. Omenyo and Choi Dongsoo, "Korean Missionary Enterprise in West Africa 1979–1999: A Preliminary Study," pp.218–219.

[5] *Ibid.,* p.220.

[6] *Ibid.,* 213–229.

[7] "Historical and Modern Religions of Korea," *Asia Society*, accessed July 25, 2025, https://asiasociety.org/education/historical-and-modern-religions-korea.

[8] This is according to a 2023 Religious Awareness Survey on the status of religious population and religious activities in South Korea, https://hrcopinion.co.kr/en/archives/28464.

[9] Yoido Full Gospel Church https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoido_Full_Gospel_Church

including Archbishop Benson Idahosa, Pastor Enoch Adeboye, and Bishop David Oyedepo, who were not only inspired by Korean church growth strategies but integrated these learnings into their ministries back in Nigeria.[10] Archbishop Idahosa, for instance, was said to have adopted the "cell system" model of pastoral care from Pastor Yonggi Cho's church structure, revolutionizing discipleship and church expansion in Nigeria.[11] This was also recorded to be the case for Pastor Enoch Adeboye.[12] This cross-pollination of religious strategies and values affirms Christianity as a medium of transnational cultural exchange, with Nigerian and Korean Pentecostalism shaping each other.

Although over 51% of Koreans identify as having no religion as of 2023, the enduring presence of Protestantism (20%) and Catholicism (11%)[13] has allowed for vibrant expressions of global Christian worship, such as Nigerian gospel music, to find receptive audiences in Korea. One of the most striking indicators of Nigeria's religious and cultural influence on South Korea is the widespread adoption of Nigerian gospel music in Korean churches, with Sinach's song Way Maker serving as a notable example. Originally written and performed by Nigerian gospel artist Sinach (Osinachi Kalu Okoro Egbu), the song has not only become a global Christian anthem but has also been covered by multiple South Korean worship teams, gaining substantial traction online. These Korean renditions – some sung in English and some translated into Korean and performed

[10] E.A. Adeboye travelled to the Yoido Full Gospel Church of David Yonggi Cho in South Korea, among other places, where he incorporated ideas and practices (such as the house cell system) to grow the church and transform it internally and externally. https://www.facebook.com/Churchgist.org/posts/how-adeboyes-disobedience-built-a-global-brandpart-2-disobedience-to-particular-/1959427757534419/

[11] This insight was obtained from an interview with Bishop Wale Ajayi, a senior pastor within Church of God Mission International who possesses institutional knowledge of the ministry's historical engagements, including Idahosa's exposure to South Korean Pentecostal practices. Source: Bishop Wale Ajayi, senior pastor, Church of God Mission International, The Historic Miracle Centre, interview by author, January 2023; also see archival records from Church of God Mission International.

[12] ChurchGist, "How Adeboye's Disobedience Built a Global Brand, Part 2: Disobedience to Particular Orders," Facebook post, January 29, 2018.

[13] This is according to a 2023 Religious Awareness Survey on the status of religious population and religious activities in South Korea https://hrcopinion.co.kr/en/archives/28464.

with local contextualization – have amassed over 11 million views on YouTube, and these 11 million combined views were from just five Korean worship group renditions of *Way Maker* on YouTube that were reviewed in this study, demonstrating the song's deep resonance across South Korean Christian communities as well as cultural and linguistic boundaries. Notable covers include LEVISTANCE's 2019,[14] 2020,[15] and 2021[16] performances, Yeram Worship's socially distanced version during the COVID-19 pandemic,[17] and Agapao Worship's official Korean translation.[18] This reception is not merely an example of global Christian music circulation; it symbolizes the spiritual and emotional connections formed between Nigerian and Korean Christian believers through a shared faith. It might also testify to Nigeria's growing soft power within global Pentecostal and evangelical Christianity, where musical expressions of worship have become vital instruments of cross-cultural influence and theological unity. In the context of Nigerian–South Korean relations, such moments of religious convergence reflect how non-state actors and cultural products like gospel music can deepen mutual understanding and foster a sense of global Christian fellowship.

The role of religion in everyday Korean society exhibits notable parallels with Nigeria's own religiously infused sociocultural landscape. As Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma, a Nigerian researcher and former resident of South Korea, observed, Korea's foundational Buddhist values continue to

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[14] LEVISTANCE, *"Way Maker – Leeland (Cover by LEVISTANCE),"* YouTube video, 5:14, posted December 2, 2019, accessed in July 2025, https://youtu.be/meyv-Ditehc?si=jwhOMcf_-hQo1cUo.

[15] LEVISTANCE, *"'WAY MAKER' (길을 만드시는 주) (COVER),"* YouTube video, 6:38, posted April 3, 2020, accessed in July 2025, https://youtu.be/diPpQHybOUU?si=7qmm-if-1uwpO_CK.

[16] LEVISTANCE, *"Waymaker (Live),"* YouTube video, 7:24, posted April 1, 2021, accessed in July 2025, https://youtu.be/iidVJ-6oxz4?si=0NPO94gZ3NBBoSeL.

[17] Yeram Worship, *"WAY MAKER | SOUTH KOREA | Put on a Mask and Distanced | Korean Romanization,"* YouTube video, 5:56, posted August 13, 2020, accessed in July 2025, https://youtu.be/QSdlAz1Togo?si=35Mvdy_87FvloR11.

[18] AGAPAO Worship, *"[AGAPAO Worship] 길을 만드시는 분 Way Maker (한국어 공식번안),"* YouTube video, 5:37, posted August 30, 2020, accessed in July 2025, https://youtu.be/VxRZDqbDoMk?si=io_bagchJjLxFFYH.

inform contemporary life – shaping not only food preparation but also family structure, fashion, and moral philosophy.[19] Buddhist teachings on proportional eating, for instance, underpin Korean dietary norms by emphasizing moderation as a spiritual discipline: overeating is interpreted as a form of greed and, by extension, a spiritual offense. This ethic, comparable to Islamic and Judaic dietary laws, manifests in how meals are portioned, plated, and consumed. Dr. Nwakanma noted that these religiously driven food practices often achieve what secular public health campaigns struggle to accomplish: behavioral compliance rooted not in scientific reasoning but in reverence for divine instruction. Such religious influence also extends to traditional Korean attire; the hanbok, he explained, reflects Buddhist principles of modesty and ritual cleanliness, similar to Islamic dress codes in Nigeria that prohibit garments from trailing the ground in order to avoid symbolic impurity.

Beyond Buddhism, Christianity particularly in its Catholic and Pentecostal expressions plays a counterbalancing role in South Korea's increasingly secularized society. Dr. Nwakanma highlighted how these religious communities uphold pro-life values and resist liberal abortion norms, often in direct opposition to state policies that permit teenage abortions with minimal parental oversight. Catholic teachings against contraception and abortion, combined with Pentecostal emphasis on children as divine blessings, create a triadic moral framework (alongside Buddhism) that disrupts the Western liberal paradigm.[20] He further underscored the theological weight religion holds across both societies, noting that in Korea, as in Nigeria, belief systems often govern everyday practices not merely out of tradition but out of perceived moral obligation to a deity. This shared anchoring in faith-based behavioral codes, whether dietary, familial, or ethical, enhances mutual cultural intelligibility between Koreans and Nigerians, reinforcing the idea that religion continues to serve as a powerful moral and social regulator in both contexts.

This is further strengthened by the observations of Annie Favour, a Nigerian graduate student in Korea under the Global Korea Scholarship. As she observed, beyond formal religious

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[19] Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma, Nigerian scholar and Brain Korea Scholar, postdoctoral fellow at Kumoh National Institute of Technology, South Korea, interview by author, Zoom, December 1, 2024.

[20] *Ibid.,*

practices of religions like Buddhism and Christianity, the Korean society is also deeply shaped by Confucianism[21] and Confucian principles, which influence hierarchical relationships, communication styles, and social etiquette. According to her, Koreans rarely address one another by name, especially in professional or familial contexts. Instead, honorifics like "professor," "doctor," or "teacher" are commonly used to reflect status and respect – an echo of Confucian values surrounding social harmony and order.[22] This mirrors practices in Nigeria, where elders and authority figures are typically addressed with respectful titles such as "sir" or "ma," revealing a shared cultural emphasis on deference and honor rooted in distinct moral traditions. Such parallels underscore how deeply embedded ethical systems, whether Confucian Buddhism, Islam or Judeo-Christian, continue to shape interpersonal behavior and societal expectations in both Korea and Nigeria. The experience of Nigerian Christians in Korea further illustrates the depth of religious intersection. Annie Favour, a Nigerian graduate student in Korea under the Global Korea Scholarship, recounts how churches in Korea served as not just spiritual spaces but also community hubs for international students. She attended a local Baptist or Methodist church in Busan, where language barriers posed challenges, but youth-centered programs helped ease integration. Later, she deliberately chose an international church in Suwon, which offered English-language services and fostered intercultural fellowship.[23] This phenomenon underscores the adaptability and resilience of faith communities in diaspora contexts, where religion serves as a social anchor and a cultural bridge. Nigerian Christians in Korea navigate linguistic, doctrinal, and social differences while seeking spiritual community, much as Korean missionaries once did in Nigeria. This mutual search for spiritual rootedness reveals the enduring role of religion in facilitating cross-cultural empathy, social belonging, and transnational solidarity. In conclusion, religion has been a foundational vector for Nigerian–Korean social and cultural relations, both historically and in contemporary interactions. From missionary initiatives and church diplomacy to the everyday

[21] Confucianism was a key historical religion in Korea, https://asiasociety.org/education/historical-and-modern-religions-korea#:~:text=Historically%2C%20Koreans%20lived%20under%20the,spiritual%20landscape%20of%20the%20people.

[22] Annie Favour, Nigerian Global Korea Scholarship (GKS-G) awardee and master's student at Ajou University, South Korea, interview by author, Zoom, April 5, 2024.

[23] *Ibid.,*

religious life of diasporic communities, faith-based engagements reflect deep interconnections. These engagements illuminate how religious identities, practices, and institutions transcend national boundaries, fostering mutual respect, influence, and collaboration between two culturally distinct yet spiritually resonant nations.

5.2 Interactions in Sports

Sports have increasingly served as a vital channel for social and cultural exchange between Nigeria and South Korea, evolving from symbolic diplomatic engagements to meaningful forms of grassroots and elite interaction. As two nations with vibrant youth populations and strong sports cultures, their bilateral ties in sports reflect both strategic interests and spontaneous people-to-people connections. One of the earliest formal sports encounters between the two countries occurred in 1983, when Nigeria's national football team hosted South Korea for an international friendly match in Lagos. The match, held at the National Stadium, marked the beginning of what would become sporadic but symbolic football-based engagement over subsequent decades. Later encounters included South Korea's 3–1 win over Nigeria at the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, a match that sealed South Korea's qualification into the knockout stage for the second time in its World Cup history. On the youth level, the nations faced off during the 2013 FIFA U-20 World Cup in Turkey, where Nigeria defeated South Korea 1–0 in the group stage, underscoring the competitive parity and growing familiarity between the two sides in global football settings.[24] Women's football has also featured in this cross-national sporting narrative. Notably, Nigeria's Super Falcons drew 0–0 with South Korea's women's team in a 2004 friendly held in Suwon, highlighting growing attention to gender-inclusive sporting diplomacy. In 2019, the Super Falcons defeated South Korea 2–0 in the group stage of the FIFA Women's World Cup in France, another testament to the increasing frequency and visibility of Nigerian–South Korean encounters on the global sports stage.[25]

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[24] Rec.Sport.Soccer Statistics Foundation, "Nigeria - South Korea Matches," RSSSF, accessed July 28, 2025, https://www.rsssf.org/tablesn/nig-kor-intres.html.

[25] FIFA, "FIFA Women's World Cup France 2019™: Nigeria vs Korea Republic," FIFA, June 12, 2019, https://www.fifa.com/womensworldcup/matches/match/300438238/#match-summary.

Beyond football, taekwondo has emerged as a particularly dynamic vector for cultural diplomacy between the two nations. Rooted in Korean martial traditions, taekwondo has become a hallmark of South Korea's soft power strategy, particularly through the activities of the Korean Cultural Centres across Africa. The Korean Cultural Centre in Nigeria, based in Abuja, has offered regular taekwondo training as part of its broader mission to disseminate Korean culture. In 2018, 41 Nigerian athletes graduated from a taekwondo course sponsored by the Centre.[26] In fact, Nigeria now boasts approximately 300,000 taekwondo practitioners, including 15,000 belt-holders, and has seen Olympic-level success with Chika Chukwumerije's bronze medal in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The Nigerian government has formally designated taekwondo as one of its five strategic sports alongside football, boxing, wrestling, and athletics.[27] These efforts are mirrored by South Korea's own policy of sports diplomacy, whereby taekwondo promotion is strategically deployed to enhance international image and bilateral goodwill. In 2017, the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted the first World Taekwondo Championship "Ambassador's Cup" at Kukkiwon in Seoul, with 52 athletes from 25 countries participating, including African nations. The Korean government declared its commitment to expanding cultural diplomacy by offering more opportunities for foreign taekwondo practitioners to train in Korea and engage in cultural immersion.[28] This kind of sporting success not only boosts the sport's prestige but also elevates the perception of Korean soft power initiatives in Africa.

An especially emblematic figure in contemporary Nigerian–South Korean sports relations is Joel-Jin Nwamadi, a young Korean national of Nigerian-Korean descent, who has recently risen as a prominent sprinter.[29] Born in 2006 to a Nigerian father and a Korean mother, Nwamadi competes for South Korea in international athletics, symbolizing the growing transnational identities that sports can reflect. His personal best in the 100m stands at 10.30 seconds, a Korean

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[26] Kim Suweon, "Dynamics of Korea-Africa Cultural Engagements," in South Korea's Engagement with Africa: A History of the Relationship in Multiple Aspects, ed. Yongkyu Chang (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp.143–144.

[27] *Ibid., p.144.*

[28] Kim Suweon, "Dynamics of Korea-Africa Cultural Engagements," p.143.

[29] World Athletics, "Joel-Jin Nwamadi," WorldAthletics.org, accessed July 28, 2025, https://worldathletics.org/athletes/korea/joel-jin-nwamadi-15029892.

high school record, and he was a silver medalist at the Asian U20 Championships. In August 2024, he qualified for the semifinals of the men's 100m event at the World Athletics U20 Championships in Lima, Peru, and contributed to a new Korean U20 record in the 4x100m relay with a time of 39.71 seconds, helping South Korea reach the finals.[30] His achievements have been widely covered by both Korean and Nigerian media, reinforcing how diasporic athletes serve as bridges between cultural spheres and national imaginaries. Taken together, sports have developed into a multifaceted platform for advancing Nigerian–South Korean relations—at once elite and grassroots, strategic and symbolic. Football and taekwondo dominate in terms of participation and visibility, while athletics, as exemplified by Joel-Jin Nwamadi, opens new possibilities for cross-cultural representation and belonging. South Korea's investment in sports as cultural diplomacy, particularly through taekwondo, has not only complemented its economic and technological engagements in Africa but also forged durable social linkages with Nigeria's youthful, sports-loving population.

5.3 Shared Values with Food

Food is a fundamental medium through which cultures express identity, memory, and community, and it plays a significant role in shaping the contours of Nigerian–South Korean social and cultural relations. As a powerful symbol of national identity and everyday life, cuisine not only reflects the available resources and traditional preferences of a people but also acts as a bridge for cultural understanding and exchange. In the context of Nigeria and South Korea, food has emerged as a potent point of interaction, negotiation, and mutual appreciation. A recurring theme in interviews with Nigerians residing in South Korea reveals that while the cuisines of both nations are distinct in their core ingredients and techniques, they share remarkable similarities in flavor profiles, particularly in their appreciation of spicy foods. Favour Annie, a Nigerian graduate student at Ajou University, South Korea and recipient of the 2021 Global Korea Scholarship (GKS), notes that pork is ubiquitously available in South Korean cuisine, often appearing even in snacks, a stark contrast to Nigerian dietary habits where pork consumption is far less prevalent and

[30] Making of Champs, "Joel-Jin Nwamadi Flies in 4x100m Relay," Instagram, August 30, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/p/C_Tcgg9sqdG/.

is often limited by religious or cultural taboos.[31] She observes that while pork is the most accessible meat in Korea, beef remains a staple and affordable protein in Nigeria. This contrast highlights how national food cultures are shaped by geography, economic priorities, and historical food availability.

Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma, a Nigerian researcher and former resident of South Korea, emphasizes the religious dimension of food choices. In Nigeria, Muslim dietary laws prohibit the consumption of pork due to Islamic teachings that view the pig as unclean. However, in South Korea, pork consumption is normalized and even revered, in part due to historical circumstances: after the Korean War, pork and rice were foundational to post-war recovery diets.[32] The prominence of pork in Korea is also attributable to its affordability, making it a dietary staple across socioeconomic classes. Dr. Nwakanma suggests that the advanced state of food hygiene and processing in South Korea challenges the assumptions that many Nigerians might hold about pork, particularly those rooted in religious or cultural beliefs. Thus, food becomes a site where worldviews are re-evaluated through intercultural exposure. This culinary divergence also reinforces economic dynamics: while pork is the cheapest and most common meat in South Korea, beef holds that position in Nigeria. Chicken, which lies in the mid-tier of affordability in both contexts, often becomes the compromise protein. Interestingly, Dr. Nwakanma notes that purchasing fully prepared chicken in South Korea is cheaper than preparing it from scratch—a testament to the efficiency and consumer-centric nature of Korea's food industry. The influence of Korean corporate culture on food practices is also visible in Nigeria, particularly through the presence of *chaebol* (large family-owned business conglomerates). Companies such as Daewoo, long established in Port Harcourt, often replicate South Korean culinary customs within their Nigerian operations. Korean employees and Nigerian staff in these firms reportedly eat Korean meals served in authentic Korean dishware, effectively transporting aspects of Korean food culture

[31] Annie Favour, Nigerian Global Korea Scholarship (GKS-G) awardee and master's student at Ajou University, South Korea, interview by author, Zoom, April 5, 2024.

[32] Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma, Nigerian scholar and Brain Korea Scholar, postdoctoral fellow at Kumoh National Institute of Technology, South Korea, interview by author, Zoom, December 1, 2024.

into Nigerian spaces.[33] The presence of Korean restaurants in cities like Abuja further indicates a growing Korean cultural footprint in Nigeria, one that is simultaneously commercial and gastronomic.

Conversely, the Nigerian food diaspora is becoming more visible in South Korea. Nigerian entrepreneurs have established restaurants that cater not only to fellow Nigerians but also to curious Koreans and other foreigners. According to Mr. Inametti Akpan of KOTRA (the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency), these businesses provide comfort and familiarity to the Nigerian community in Korea while simultaneously introducing Korean society to the richness of West African cuisine.[34] This dynamic exemplifies how food operates as a cultural export and tool of soft diplomacy. The social media space has also become a fertile ground for cultural exchange via food. A noteworthy example is the viral success of a Korean YouTuber who prepared a variety of Nigerian dishes including *egusi* soup, *Ìyàn* (pounded yam), *suya*, *jollof rice*, and *akara* (bean fritters) and presented them to her Korean parents.[35] Her meticulous approach, including preparing *yaji* (suya spice) from scratch and pounding yam by hand, earned her widespread admiration from the Nigerian online community. Thousands of Nigerians praised the authenticity of her efforts and the accuracy of her culinary execution, often with humorous and affectionate remarks that symbolically adopted her into Nigerian culture. Such instances underscore how food, mediated through digital platforms, becomes a vehicle for cultural respect, appreciation, and even emotional connection across borders.

Two Korean sisters (the Chimichonga Sisters') *mukbang* videos featuring Nigerian cuisine such egusi soup, fufu, jollof rice, pepper soup, and more, has sparked enthusiastic engagement

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[33] Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma, Nigerian scholar and Brain Korea Scholar, postdoctoral fellow at Kumoh National Institute of Technology, South Korea, interview by author, Zoom, December 1, 2024.

[34] Mr. Inametti Akpan, Marketing Manager, Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) Commercial Section, Embassy of the Republic of Korea, Lagos, interview by author, 2024.

[35] Korean YouTuber video: "Cooking for My Korean Parents' First Nigerian Food Experience," YouTube, accessed in February 2025, https://youtu.be/eQhFMSihMWQ?si=8DtVrjOZdAAnm7Fy.

from Nigerian viewers, blending admiration with humorous corrections of food pairings.[36] These food-centered videos became informal forums for cultural exchange, revealing mutual respect and curiosity. Their visit to a Nigerian restaurant in Seoul further highlights diasporic presence and culinary diplomacy in fostering shared identity.[37] In a later episode, their expressed cravings for Nigerian food reflect emotional ties formed through taste, while Nigerian commenters humorously call for their "nationalization".[38] Moreover, stories of bicultural individuals like Mosh Oshindele, a Nigerian-Korean man raised in both countries, highlight the ways in which food mediates identity and belonging. Initially resistant to Nigerian cuisine after moving from South Korea, Oshindele gradually embraced it, beginning with simpler dishes like beans and plantain and eventually exploring more complex staples such as *jollof rice* and *pounded yam*. He remarks on the similar preference for spicy flavors among both Koreans and Nigerians, offering a sensory thread that connects the two food cultures.[39] These shared sensibilities serve as points of convergence that ease cultural adaptation and mutual appreciation. In conclusion, food acts as both a marker of cultural specificity and a platform for cross-cultural dialogue between Nigeria and South Korea. Through personal narratives, commercial practices, and digital media, Nigerians and Koreans alike are engaging in a vibrant exchange that underscores shared values, challenges cultural assumptions, and builds bridges of understanding. As such, culinary practices form a significant and dynamic dimension of Nigerian–South Korean social and cultural relations.

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[36] *KOREAN SISTERS TRY NIGERIAN FOOD FOR THE FIRST TIME | FUFU, EGUSI, JOLLOF RICE MUKBANG*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/-29dWwOBmpo?si=_iGdtZsvwF9R2GUw; *KOREAN SISTERS TRY NIGERIAN FOOD PT. 2*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/2-SzlWcAyyE?si=0MWzQDAjm834zLZI.

[37] Chimichonga Sisters, *NIGERIAN FOOD IN KOREA?!*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/_rjp_Av4wMk?si=Rzq1AZrSiBGm3s0N.

[38] Chimichonga Sisters, *We reeeaally wanted Nigerian food*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/yvzA4hPedp8?si=uHRLAJVvSdnoXpOQ.

[39] Mosh Oshindele, Korean resident in Nigeria with lived experience of Korean–Nigerian relations, interview by author, Zoom, February 23, 2024.

5.4 Media in Nigerian–South Korean Relations

In Nigerian–South Korean relations, digital and social media serve as critical platforms for shaping cultural narratives. While state diplomacy remains relevant, much of the intercultural connection is driven by Nigerian youth engaging with Korean pop culture. The global spread of *Hallyu* (Korean Wave) has sparked widespread interest in Nigeria, particularly among conservative audiences drawn to the perceived moral and aesthetic restraint of Korean dramas and K-pop. Nneka Nnanna's account illustrates this alignment: she was attracted to K-dramas due to their modest content, in contrast to Western media, which she felt often conflicted with her values and religious beliefs.[40] Her evolving engagement with Korean media led to self-directed Korean language learning, exemplifying how media can function as a soft power tool for cultural and linguistic immersion. Her journey underscores a grassroots model of cultural diplomacy, where informal learning and digital connectivity empower young Nigerians to become cultural mediators. Importantly, this is not a one-way process. Mosh Oshindele notes a growing interest among some Koreans in Nigerian culture, including learning Yoruba and participating in Afrobeats communities.[41] However, Favour Annie, a Nigerian student in Korea, highlights the asymmetry: while Koreans are celebrated in Nigeria, Nigerians often remain invisible or misunderstood in Korea due to limited exposure and residual racial biases.[42] These disparities reflect broader issues of representation, shaped by the dominance of South Korean media and the underrepresentation of Nigerian narratives. Institutions like the Korean Cultural Centre Nigeria (KCCN) and KOTRA aim to bridge this gap through language and cultural programs. Still, as Oshindele observes, their impact is limited by Nigeria's infrastructural and reputational constraints.[43]

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[40] Nneka Nnanna, Korean Business Development Officer, Interpreter, and Language Instructor, Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), Lagos, interview by author, February 2024.

[41] Mosh Oshindele, Korean resident in Nigeria with lived experience of Korean–Nigerian relations, interview by author, Zoom, February 23, 2024.

[42] Annie Favour, Nigerian Global Korea Scholarship (GKS-G) awardee and master's student at Ajou University, South Korea, interview by author, Zoom, April 5, 2024.

[43] Oshindele, interview, February 23, 2024.

The issue of media imbalance is further explored by Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma, who critiques the perception gap between both societies. He recounts how even educated Koreans remain uninformed about Nigeria. This invisibility is reinforced by negative portrayals of Nigeria in Korean media, particularly through YouTube videos depicting Boko Haram violence. While Korean media circulates widely in Nigeria, Nollywood has little presence in South Korea, perpetuating a representational imbalance as the lack of Nigerian media in Korea limits cultural understanding. Afro pop offers potential as a cultural bridge, but its global success can also flatten African identity into an entertainment commodity, detached from context. Physical and symbolic spaces like Itaewon in Seoul, home to "Biafra Street" and an Eze Ndi Igbo, offer counterpoints to invisibility, signaling diasporic rootedness and cultural assertion. Projects like Dr. Cosmas's Toastmasters initiative, *Naija*, highlight grassroots diplomacy by Nigerian individuals seeking to amplify their cultural contributions. Biracial Nigerian–Korean figures, particularly athletes and influencers, further complicate visibility. While their prominence disrupts monoracial norms, Dr. Cosmas warns that public acceptance often depends on depoliticization and the generalization of their identities as "Black" or "African" rather than specifically Nigerian.[44] Despite these complexities, Korean pop culture has fostered a thriving subculture among Nigerian youth, particularly women. As Kim Suweon notes, digital platforms, not TV, are the primary medium for engaging with Korean content in Africa[45] aligning with findings from the Korea Foundation's Hallyu Trends Survey.[46] Nigerian fans are not passive consumers but active participants, translating, creating, and mentoring within transnational networks, turning fandom into education, enterprise, and cultural exchange.

The rise of figures like Adora Precious Ayodela, who parlayed her love for K-pop into a suite of enterprises, from Korean language teaching to retail of Korean products, illustrates the

[44] Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma, Nigerian scholar and Brain Korea Scholar, postdoctoral fellow at Kumoh National Institute of Technology, South Korea, interview by author, Zoom, December 1, 2024.

[45] Kim Suweon, "Dynamics of Korea-Africa Cultural Engagements," in *South Korea's Engagement with Africa: A History of the Relationship in Multiple Aspects*, ed. Yongkyu Chang (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp.133–158.

[46] Korea Foundation, *2017 Global Hallyu Trends Survey Report* (Seoul: Korea Foundation, 2017.

microeconomic impact of Korean cultural consumption in Nigeria.[47] Her case aligns with Henry Jenkins' concept of *participatory culture*, where fans become producers of cultural meaning.[48] The grassroots growth of K-culture events in cities like Ibadan and Lagos further reflects how Nigerian fans localize Korean media through informal institutions. Despite infrastructural and linguistic hurdles noted by Kim Suweon,[49] Nigeria's legacy of informal media circulation, exemplified by Alaba market[50] facilitates broad access to Korean dramas and music beyond elite circles. Prior exposure to Bollywood, Chinese martial arts, and Japanese anime also primes Nigerian audiences for Korean content. Korean dramas resonate affectively with Nigerian viewers, particularly women, who are drawn to their emotional range and the vulnerability of male characters.[51] This dynamic reconfigures gender ideals, introducing new models of masculinity and emotional expression.[52] Viral fandoms, such as Lee Min-Ho's birthday trend on Nigerian Twitter, illustrate how fandom becomes a performative and aspirational practice. Yet, engagement remains gendered and somewhat niche, constrained by language barriers and skepticism toward Korean aesthetics.[53]

Nonetheless, increasing participation evident in contests, language apps, and K-cooking tutorials, suggests a long-term cultural embedding, mirroring earlier waves of Bollywood fandom. State-backed initiatives like those of the Korean Cultural Centre in Nigeria (KCCN) further embed Korean culture into local contexts through scholarships and cultural exchanges.[54] These dynamics

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[47] Faith Oshoko, "How di Love of Korean Drama Dey Change Lives for Nigeria," *BBC News Pidgin*, September 3, 2022.

[48] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2006.

[49] Kim Suweon, "Dynamics of Korea-Africa Cultural Engagements," pp.147–48.

[50] Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), pp.163–190.

[51] Ayomide Tayo, "The Korean Wave On Nigeria's Shores," *The Naija Way*, August 8, 2020.

[52] Eva Illouz, *Why We Love: The Emotional Economy of Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

[53] Kim Suweon, "Dynamics of Korea-Africa Cultural Engagements," pp.147–48.

[54] Korean Cultural Centre in Nigeria (KCCN), "Cultural Program Archives," accessed July 2025.

illustrate how Nigerian fans don't merely adopt Korean values but remix them into locally relevant forms, turning K-culture into a tool for both identity formation and economic empowerment. This is particularly salient among Nigerian women, as seen in Shalom Esene's documentation of how casual viewing evolves into professional and social transformation. Women like Esther Nneka Nnanna, Felicia Ajibade, and Adora Ayodela have parlayed their interest into professions such as teaching, interpreting, and digital content creation. Ajibade, for instance, teaches Korean and runs popular social media platforms, monetizing her cultural fluency.[55] Their transition from fans to entrepreneurs echoes Jenkins' idea of participatory culture,[56] highlighting the blending of identity, labor, and media. Streaming platforms like Netflix have democratized access to Korean content. Nigeria ranked fifth in global K-drama viewership in 2022.[57] Korean marts like Ayodela's Hallyumart.ng show how Korean culture is spilling into commercial urban spaces.[58]

Still, challenges remain. Lack of local Korean-language materials and social stigmas limit broader legitimacy for such cultural work.[59] This underscores how African engagement with Asian media often encounters racialized and gendered gatekeeping. Yet what emerges powerfully is a desire for self-betterment through Korean ideals of discipline, politeness, and aesthetic sensibility. Viral encounters such as Ajibade's Korean conversation with a Korean on OmeTV[60] represent a form of global self-positioning, in which fans seek cultural validation and mobility. These acts reveal how digital platforms enable the convergence of virtual intimacy and real-world transformation. BBC Pidgin and creators like Jerry of *K Explorer* provide further insight into how Hallyu influences Nigerian linguistic habits, aspirations, and identity formation. The emotional appeal of Korean male characters contrasts with Nigerian masculinities, shaping romantic ideals

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[55] Shalom Esene, "How K-Drama Has Transcended Mere Fandom for Nigerian Women," *OkayAfrica*, April 19, 2024.

[56] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture.*

[57] Shalom Esene, "How K-Drama Has Transcended Mere Fandom for Nigerian Women."

[58] Hallyumart.ng, Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/hallyumart.ng.

[59] Shalom Esene, "How K-Drama Has Transcended Mere Fandom for Nigerian Women."

[60] eri_ajibade, "The best interaction ever!! 한국어 말하기 연습," YouTube video, 5:37, accessed on June 2024, https://youtu.be/RxxLwg0Il84?si=PAJi8hzQyNlCkv9p.

among young women.[61] Nigerian Fans use Korean expressions like *"Oppa!!! Saranghae!!!"* as part of a local fan vernacular, suggesting a hybridized semiotics. This cultural affinity is reinforced by shared values such as respect and food pride, e.g., *Kimchi* and *Jollof* rice. At an institutional level, Korea's soft power is evident in the Korean Cultural Center's integration of Nigerian symbols into Korean events.[62] The trajectory of Jerry, a Nigerian man who went from being a recipient of the Korean Government global scholarship to being a popular social influencer in Korea is a significant case study in understanding the dynamics of Nigeria-South Korea social and cultural relations.[63] His content, spanning interviews and local guides, serves as both entertainment and informal diplomacy. Jerry's fluency in Korean and media success show how Korean culture enables personal transformation and professional opportunity for Nigerian youth.[64] His story illustrates how aspirational identification with Korean culture can serve as a springboard into global networks of recognition and legitimacy.

A growing number of reaction videos on YouTube highlight how Nigerian media and cultural content are reshaping perceptions in South Korea. In one example, South Korean YouTubers respond to four music videos by Nigerian Afro-pop artist Ayra Starr, praising her versatility, visuals, and global appeal, while expressing surprise at the polish and cultural depth of her work.[65] These spontaneous digital encounters foster cross-cultural appreciation and soft power exchange via platforms like YouTube. Similar sentiments emerge in a video where Koreans react to TikToks showcasing Africa's beauty. Initial surprise gives way to admiration as viewers confront and challenge outdated stereotypes about poverty and underdevelopment, revealing the

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[61] "K-pop: How Korean culture [Kpop/Kdrama] don dey influence Nigerians," *BBC Pidgin*, accessed in February, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/world-55883883.

[62] Korean Cultural Centre in Nigeria (KCCN), "Cultural Program Archives," accessed in July 2025.

[63] Jerry, "I Came Here Knowing Zero Korean*"* | K Explorer Jerry from Nigeria, *Talk To Me In Korean*, https://youtu.be/n3S0xuONURU?si=T6bd6GqhxglJP-XN.

[64] Jerry, *K Explorer*, accessed July 31, 2025, https://kxplorer.com/seoullocalguide.

[65] Asopo, *Korean artists react to Ayra Starr's music videos, the rising Afro-pop sensation*, YouTube, accessed August 1, 2025, https://youtu.be/ayhxux1Bbl4?si=FuIJKnjBIHUxmPdp.

role of short-form content in reshaping global narratives.[66] Korean viewers also respond enthusiastically to TikToks of Nigerian weddings, marveling at the vibrant aesthetics, dual ceremonies, and celebratory rituals like money spraying. The contrasts with Korean wedding traditions led to broader reflections on emotional expressiveness and cultural richness.[67] In another reaction video to "Being a Black Girl in Asia" TikToks, Koreans express empathy and critique social behaviors like microaggressions and exoticization. These interactions open space for cultural self-reflection and underscore the racial and cultural challenges Black women face across Asia, including Nigerians.[68] A tournament-style video ranking Nigerian female celebrities further showcases informal cultural diplomacy, with South Korean participants reacting to Nigerian beauty, fame, and identity. Though light-hearted, the video underscores how digital platforms shape perceptions beyond official narratives.[69] Reaction videos to Rema's hit *Calm Down* (both with Selena Gomez and the original) demonstrate Afrobeats' global traction, especially among Korean artists and fans. The genre's rhythm, language, and energy resonate broadly, encouraging Korean audiences to explore more Nigerian music and deepening transnational musical exchange.[70] The release of *My Sunshine* (2024), the first Nigerian–Korean film, reveals the challenges of hybrid cultural production. Directed by Abdulrasheed Bello and starring Nigerian skit-maker Kemi Ikuseedun, the film blends Nollywood and K-drama tropes but received mixed reviews. While Korean and Asian audiences appreciated the homage to K-culture, African viewers criticized the film's weak plot, awkward Korean dialogue, and lack of cultural coherence. Despite

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[66] Awesome World, *Koreans react to "How Beautiful Africa Is" TikToks..!*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/uSyqegAYNC8?si=KJh9C-AZd2DcUA3y.

[67] Awesome World, *Koreans react to "Amazing African Wedding" TikToks..!*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/xCz3pKgN_qM?si=QgEXVJdbStSfUDT9.

[68] Awesome World, *Koreans react to "Being a Black girl in Asia" TikToks!*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/qsB-2IGM-ms?si=8--FHDW1yyUEI9HV.

[69] *Koreans React to 8 Nigerian Women Celebrities [Choice Tournament] / Hoontamin*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/668D_maizeQ?si=MO7TWzbTeHaY3iM9.

[70] JUST REACTS, *Rema, Selena Gomez - Calm Down [K-pop Artist Reaction]*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/WVtklkKZIro?si=8C-o9BnTl6o39-sy; JUST REACTS, *Rema - Calm Down (Official Music Video) [K-pop Artist Reaction]*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/ITmNmXOKcyM?si=-QstUGMSyBjf6omR.

its flaws, the film exemplifies both the allure of Korean media and the ambition of Nigerian creators to engage in cross-cultural storytelling.[71]

5.5 Education in Nigerian–South Korean Relations

Education plays a pivotal role in Nigerian–South Korean relations, serving as both a cultural interface and a soft power tool. South Korea, through programs like the Global Korea Scholarship (GKS) and region-specific schemes such as the Gyeongsangbuk-do scholarship (K-GKS), advances its influence by offering immersive academic experiences to Nigerian students.[72] These initiatives not only promote knowledge exchange but also subtly project Korean societal values. For instance, Favour Annie, a Nigerian GKS recipient, described Korean education as rigorous, competitive, and reflective of a societal meritocracy rooted in institutional prestige and performance, particularly in elite "SKY" universities.[73] While Nigeria shares the value of educational transformation, its system faces infrastructural and systemic challenges. In contrast to Korea's pressure-driven model, Nigeria's educational aspiration often lacks the institutional mechanisms for consistent delivery. Thus, education becomes a mirror of national ideology—discipline and competitiveness in Korea; aspiration amid constraint in Nigeria. These exchanges reveal South Korea's deliberate soft power strategy, echoing Nye's concept of influence through attraction rather than coercion.[74] Educational programs like GKS and KOICA not only build goodwill but also embed Korean cultural values in foreign participants, aligning with broader East Asian strategies such as China's Confucius Institutes or Japan's JET Programme.

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[71] Confidence Cletus, "Movie Review: *My Sunshine: First-ever Korean-Nigerian Movie Flops*," *Premium Times*, October 9, 2024; "*People's Reaction to the First Ever Nigerian Korean Movie!*" YouTube video, 11:52, posted by "NaijaKoreanTV," accessed in June 2024, https://youtu.be/Vh44oNy5Hlk?si=xENVHrISpUUKDyt9.

[72] Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma, Nigerian scholar and Brain Korea Scholar, postdoctoral fellow at Kumoh National Institute of Technology, South Korea, interview by author, Zoom, December 1, 2024.

[73] Favour Annie, Nigerian Global Korea Scholarship (GKS-G) awardee and master's student at Ajou University, South Korea, interview by author, Zoom, April 5, 2024.

[74] . Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

However, this diplomacy is asymmetrical. Nigerian students face limited GKS quotas and minimal reciprocal opportunities for Koreans in Nigeria.[75] The expectation to assimilate without reciprocal cultural exchange reflects postcolonial patterns of uneven knowledge flows. Moreover, South Korea's demographic crisis has intertwined educational diplomacy with population policy, using programs like K-GKS to attract and retain foreign talent in underpopulated regions. Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma, a Nigerian academic, highlights how foreign students become demographic assets, expected to integrate and help stabilize aging communities.[76] Yet, this process also reveals a societal identity crisis—between Confucian traditionalism and modern globalism. Education, in this context, is both a source of social mobility and a contributor to youth stress, low birth rates, and familial disruption.[77] In contrast, Nigeria's educational underdevelopment hampers economic transformation but retains more flexible family structures. Racialization and marginalization further complicate the Nigerian student experience in Korea. Many are channeled into lesser-resourced institutions or excluded from elite academic spaces, particularly in STEM fields. This raises critical questions about the meritocratic claims of global education and the deeper cultural hierarchies at play.

Recent academic and technological collaborations between Nigeria and South Korea mark a shift toward strategic, reciprocal partnerships. Spearheaded by diasporic actors like Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma, these efforts focus on co-producing knowledge, building infrastructure, and fostering academic mobility. A 2024 MOU between Nigerian and South Korean universities embodies this shift, including plans for a joint research repository supported by the Korea Computer Society and Nigeria Computer Society.[78] Other partnerships blend tech innovation with education. For instance, the 2022 alliance between MetaMonkeyAI (USA), NSLab Co. Ltd (South Korea), and

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[75] Favour Annie, Nigerian Global Korea Scholarship (GKS-G) awardee and master's student at Ajou University, South Korea, interview by author, Zoom, April 5, 2024.

[76] Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma, Nigerian scholar and Brain Korea Scholar, postdoctoral fellow at Kumoh National Institute of Technology, South Korea, interview by author, Zoom, December 1, 2024.

[77] Michael J. Seth, *Education Fever: Society, Politics, and the Pursuit of Schooling in South Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), pp.21–22.

[78] Nwakanma, interview, December 1, 2024.

the Imo State government aims to implement Blockchain solutions for digital tourism, with NSLab awarding scholarships for IT studies in Korea.[79] Similarly, NSLab's collaboration with Nigerian real estate firm Polly Nwoke and Co. links academic engagement to industry, exemplified by a keynote at the 2024 Estate Surveyors Conference featuring scholars from Kumoh National Institute of Technology (KIT).[80] The MOU between KIT and FUTO extends these collaborations, focusing on research training and institutional development. The creation of a Nigerian chapter of the Korean Institute of Communication and Information Sciences (KICS), chaired by Dr. Stanley Okolie, integrates Korean academic infrastructure into Nigeria's system.[81] Through this initiative, South Korea strengthens its "brain share" diplomacy, offering Nigerian scholars access to fellowships and research networks while promoting its own academic standards.[82]

The December 2024 International ICT Conference in Owerri, attended by Dr. Cosmas, reinforced these links. His cross-continental affiliations with KIT and West Virginia University enabled knowledge diffusion back to Nigeria. His sponsorship of Nigerian attendees represents a grassroots model of academic redistribution, countering institutional inertia. Dr. Cosmas emphasizes that Korea's academic–industrial synergy, where companies fund PhD research and absorb resulting IP, contrasts sharply with Nigeria's fragmented models. For example, while the Union Bank-sponsored academic chair at FUTO remains underutilized, Shell's partnership with FUTO's Petroleum Engineering department demonstrates how sustained corporate engagement

[79] "MetaMonkey AI, NSLab Set to Deploy Pure Wallet Blockchain Solution, Metaverse Platform in Nigeria," *This Day*, November 9, 2022.

[80] "54th Annual Conference Proceedings," Nigerian Institution of Estate Surveyors and Valuers, April 2024.

[81] Korean Institute of Communications and Information Sciences, "KICS Global Newsletter," Vol. 6, No. 1, accessed in June 2024), https://www.kics.or.kr/html/?pmode=BBBS0000300136&page=1&smode=view&seq=4301.

[82] Dr. Stanley Adiele Okolie, Facebook post, accessed in April 2024, https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=7106339829488324&id=100003371336470&mibextid=oFDknk.

can foster productive research ecosystems.[83] The missing element in Nigeria is not willingness but structural coherence in aligning academia with national development goals. Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma's reflections highlight the stark contrasts between Nigerian and South Korean educational systems. South Korea's model aligns education with industrial practice and national development, emphasizing streamlined academic progression (BSc to PhD), compulsory military service, early English acquisition, and global exposure, often via U.S.-based training with subsequent reintegration into Korea's tech-driven economy (e.g., Samsung, LG). Returning professionals later transition into academia, bringing real-world expertise that enriches pedagogy and policy. By contrast, Nigeria's sequential academic system (BSc–MSc–PhD) often lacks industry relevance. Dr. Nwakanma's unique background in private sector roles (ABB, First Bank) shaped his insistence that students articulate the economic and social impact of their final-year projects. His controversial supervision of Ajah Excel's project on social media monetization, initially rejected by the department, eventually yielded a viable business, demonstrating that market-oriented innovation can emerge when tradition is challenged.[84]

A core critique concerns Nigerian academia's limited support for entrepreneurship. Final-year seminars still focus on job-seeking rather than job creation. Skills acquisition lacks the necessary business framework (e.g., branding, tax registration). In contrast, his wife's culinary venture, structured with formal business systems, illustrates how basic skills can evolve into sustainable livelihoods with proper scaffolding. Korea's *chaebols* like Samsung and LG exemplify how corporate power can drive national innovation. These conglomerates fund research and train talent, unlike Nigeria, where tycoons like Dangote are often mistrusted and underutilized in developmental roles. Dr. Nwakanma argues that multiple "greedy" Dangotes could diversify and stimulate Nigeria's industrial base. Korea's digital sovereignty evident in homegrown platforms like Naver and Kakao also reflects a strategic techno-nationalism. Government policies protect domestic platforms, keeping capital and data within national borders. Nigeria, though a massive content generator on platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, lacks ownership or influence in

[83] Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma, Nigerian scholar and Brain Korea Scholar, postdoctoral fellow at Kumoh National Institute of Technology, South Korea, interview by author, Zoom, December 1, 2024.

[84] *Ibid.,*

digital infrastructure, leading to innovation consumption without contribution. This systemic gap fuels talent migration, as Nigerian students often view studying abroad as a permanent escape, unlike their Korean counterparts who return to contribute. However, Dr. Nwakanma promotes a reimagined form of "return" through diasporic engagement. Virtual mentoring and transnational collaboration allow for systemic input without physical relocation, opening new pathways for institutional reform and policy innovation.[85] Dr. Nwakanma's insights deepen the comparative analysis of Nigeria, South Korea, and the U.S., particularly around education, taxation, and public accountability. He notes that in the U.S., scholarships are indirectly funded by taxpayers, reflecting a public trust in governance. Nigeria's weak tax culture—rooted in mistrust and mismanagement—undermines similar possibilities. South Korea's disciplined bureaucracy and strong civic infrastructure enable taxation to support education as a national priority. In Nigeria, however, widespread informality, porous borders, and poor income tracking obstruct strategic planning. As seen in the case of Nigerian digital entrepreneurs earning abroad, wealth and labor often remain invisible to state systems, complicating economic policy and educational funding. In contrast, South Korea's Confucian-informed ethos sees academic success as a civic contribution.[86] Nigerian students are thus drawn to Korean institutions not just for skills, but for systems that appear more meritocratic and aligned with modern ideals.[87]

The Nigeria–South Korea educational relationship increasingly includes immersive programs beyond the university system. The Nigerian Students' Association at Kyungpook National University (NSA-KNU), founded in 2018, has grown to over forty members and co-authored more than 100 journal articles. It serves academic, social, and informational functions, supporting pre-arrival students and reshaping perceptions of African academic engagement.[88]

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[85] Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma, Nigerian scholar and Brain Korea Scholar, postdoctoral fellow at Kumoh National Institute of Technology, South Korea, interview by author, Zoom, December 1, 2024.

[86] Michael J. Seth, *Education Fever: Society, Politics, and the Pursuit of Schooling in South Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), pp.21–22.

[87] Nwakanma, interview, December 1, 2024.

[88] Nigerian Students' Association of Kyungpook National University, "Welcome Address," NSA-KNU Official Website, https://www.nsaknu.com/.

Youth camps co-hosted by the Korea-Africa Foundation and Korean Cultural Centre Nigeria (KCCN) expose Nigerian students particularly in STEM, to Korean culture, industry, and entrepreneurship. These curated experiences, including visits to firms like Samsung and Solpia (makers of X-Pression hair), connect Nigerian aspirations with Korean industrial ethics.[89] The emphasis on UN Sustainable Development Goals further positions education as a tool for global citizenship. The performative aspects of these camps such as diplomatic hosting, symbolic gifts, and promotional videos for Busan Expo 2030 embed participants in a narrative of shared modernity and transnational belonging. Students often respond with admiration and ambition, internalizing Korean development ideals.[90] Gendered dimensions also emerge, especially in exposing young women to industries like hair extensions, revealing how cultural diplomacy intersects with labor and aesthetics. Institutional projects like the Nigeria-Korea Model School reinforce this trend. Combining Korean pedagogy with Nigerian contexts, it exemplifies long-term investment in bilateral educational reform.[91] These initiatives shift Korea's role from a cultural partner to a structural stakeholder in Nigerian education. Together, these exchanges reveal how education has become a strategic tool in Nigeria–South Korea relations. They show how both nations are reimagining development, identity, and cooperation through a complex matrix of academic, economic, and cultural ties.

5.6 Migration

Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma, a Nigerian academic and former resident of South Korea, provides a firsthand account of emerging Nigerian–South Korean migration dynamics. His insights reveal how Korea's demographic crisis, particularly aging and low birth rates, has spurred targeted regional responses like the K-GKS program in Gyeongsangbuk-do. This initiative, distinct from

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[89] Korean Cultural Centre Nigeria, "KCCN & Korea-Africa Foundation Hosts 6-day Youth-Camp for Marist College Students," KCCN Official Website, November 9, 2021, https://ngr.korean-culture.org/en/298/board/247/read/111930.

[90] John Okeke, "How South Korea, Nigeria Deepen Ties Through Co-Sponsored Youth Camp," *The Authority*, November 1, 2023, https://authorityngr.com/2023/11/01/how-south-korea-nigeria-deepen-ties-through-co-sponsored-youth-camp/.

[91] KOICA Nigeria, "The official visit of the Korean Ambassador to Nigeria to the Nigeria Korea Model School," Instagram, July 24, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/koica_ng/p/C9zKOeVtUMh/?img_index=3.

national programs like the GKS or Brain Korea 21, recruits young foreigners, including Nigerians, for study and localized labor, binding them to the province for three years in exchange for residency benefits. Such policies echo regional strategies seen in Canada and Singapore and reflect South Korea's demographic renewal efforts, including interracial family formation. As Dr. Nwakanma notes, Nigerian men in the program may marry Korean women and remain permanently, contributing to population growth and cultural integration. However, he underscores the asymmetry in adaptation: Nigerians are expected to learn Korean and integrate, while Koreans in Nigeria remain largely detached from local language or culture. Informal support networks among Nigerian professionals in Korea also emerge as critical. Nwakanma's example of helping a fellow Nigerian gain employment via affiliations like IEEE exemplifies diasporic solidarity or "diaspora brokerage," often compensating for the lack of institutional support. His own migration trajectory from Nigeria to Korea to the U.S. illustrates a common pattern of cascading migration, where a Nigerian passport seems to offers limited leverage, but a U.S. passport expands global mobility.[92]

He also discusses the precarious nature of temporary contracts in Korea and how U.S. residency offers greater internal mobility and security. The structural barriers for African migrants especially those without elite passports, remain significant. Still, Nigerians increasingly recognize both Korean vulnerabilities (mental health crisis, anti-natalism) and their own opportunities, using migration not only for economic gain but for global positioning. Dr. Nwakanma's narrative highlights a sharp contrast between structured Korean academic migration and the fragmented paths of Nigerian migrants. While Korean students follow a state-supported pipeline through U.S. institutions and return to leadership roles in national industries, Nigerians often face systemic disconnection from their home country, lacking institutional incentives for return. Diaspora, in this context, becomes a platform for epistemic and infrastructural circulation. Through mentorship and digital networks, Nigerians abroad like Dr. Nwakanma are enabling entry points for others, bypassing formal state mechanisms. This makes diaspora not just a demographic fact, but a dynamic system of knowledge and opportunity. Korean institutions are beginning to recognize this

[92] Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma, Nigerian scholar and Brain Korea Scholar, postdoctoral fellow at Kumoh National Institute of Technology, South Korea, interview by author, Zoom, December 1, 2024.

value with some professors actively recruiting Nigerian scholars and thus, reversing older patterns of "brain drain" into "brain circulation." Yet Nwakanma also speaks to irregular migration and legal precarity faced by undocumented Nigerians in Korea and the UK. These realities reflect the unequal access to networks and strategic knowledge that divide elite from subaltern migrants.[93]

Significantly, Nwakanma challenges the widespread devaluation of Nigerian education. Many globally successful Nigerians, including his mentees, were trained in institutions back home. His call for epistemological recalibration urges Nigerians to recognize the global worth of their local skills and credentials, resisting internalized hierarchies of knowledge. Mentorship and virtual networks, as he shows, act as a parallel infrastructure enabling mobility and solidarity across continents. Belonging is now shaped not by geography, but by shared aspirations and digital connectivity. In terms of settlement patterns, Dr. Nwakanma notes ethnic clustering among Nigerians in Korea: Yorubas in Daegu, Igbos in Seoul and Gumi. This mirrors global diaspora trends where co-ethnic communities anchor future migration. These clusters, however, affect perception, leading, for instance, to an association of Islam with Nigerian identity in regions dominated by Yoruba Muslims. Such limited exposure feeds into what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie terms the "danger of a single story", a monolithic understanding based on skewed representation.[94] In a largely homogenous society like Korea, this reinforces cultural misunderstandings and complicates Nigeria's image abroad. Class divides within the diaspora between low-skilled laborers and high-skilled professionals further shape intra-diasporic dynamics.

Cultural misunderstanding persists. For example, the symbolic presence of "Biafra Street" in Itaewon and titles like Eze Ndi Igbo reflect Igbo cultural entrenchment, but also coexist with systemic exclusions like racism faced by biracial Nigerian–Korean children, even those representing Korea in sports. Popular culture emerges as a potential tool for counter-narrative. Dr. Nwakanma highlights Nollywood and Afropop as instruments of soft power that can reframe

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[93] Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma, Nigerian scholar and Brain Korea Scholar, postdoctoral fellow at Kumoh National Institute of Technology, South Korea, interview by author, Zoom, December 1, 2024.

[94] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," TED Talk, July 2009, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.

Nigerian identity abroad. Similarly, Nigerian-Korean influencers and intercultural marriages demonstrate emerging mutual engagements, but these are shaped by power asymmetries and enduring stereotypes, like Korea's perception of Nigeria as a site of illness, as seen in cautionary reactions to a Korean woman contracting malaria in Nigeria. In summary, Dr. Nwakanma's experiences illustrate how Nigerian–South Korean migration is not merely economic but deeply cultural, psychological, and political. From grassroots diaspora leadership to media representation and interracial kinship, Nigerian actors are redefining their global place—not only in state narratives but in the everyday work of building alternative futures.[95]

The migration and diaspora dynamics between Nigeria and South Korea reflect intersecting concerns of immigration policy, economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and the treatment of foreign nationals. The deportation episodes of 2003 and 2011 serve as key markers of bilateral tension, highlighting contradictions between official policies and lived migrant experiences. In 2003, Nigeria deported four South Koreans for immigration violations, citing national security concerns and a new regulatory regime under the Combined Expatriates and Resident Permit (CERPAC) system.[96] This incident reflected a nationalist stance on immigration control, one mirrored later by South Korea's own restrictive policies toward African migrants, particularly Nigerians. In 2011, South Korea deported over thirty Nigerians, including long-term residents and those with Korean spouses, citing administrative irregularities linked to identity documentation. Nigerian Ambassador Desmond Akawor denounced the move as unjust and counterproductive to bilateral cooperation.[97] Many deportees had entered South Korea via agents who altered their names, rendering them noncompliant despite stable lives. These expulsions revealed inconsistencies in South Korea's dual posture: while courting African partnerships economically, it remained culturally exclusive in practice.

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[95] Dr. Cosmas Nwakanma, Nigerian scholar and Brain Korea Scholar, postdoctoral fellow at Kumoh National Institute of Technology, South Korea, interview by author, Zoom, December 1, 2024.

[96] "FG Orders Deportation of 4 South Koreans from Nigeria," *The Daily Champion*, May 14, 2003, p.11.

[97] "Nigerian Envoy Slams Korea over Deportation," *This Day,* October 4, 2011, p.65.

More recent diplomatic efforts, such as the March 2023 visit by Nigerian Minister Clem Ikanade Agba to South Korea, sought to recalibrate relations through engagements with KOICA and the Korea-Africa Foundation.[98] However, Agba's condolence visit to a family who lost four children in a fire in Ansan Danwon underscored the everyday vulnerabilities faced by Nigerians in Korea, often invisible in formal diplomacy. Despite official focus on trade and technical cooperation, grassroots cultural engagement through language, social media, and business has emerged as a more dynamic and people-led form of diplomacy. Inametti Akpan of KOTRA Lagos notes that Nigerian bilingual entrepreneurs are increasingly facilitating Korean-Nigerian exchanges, many of whom are self-taught Korean speakers. This phenomenon exemplifies "bottom-up globalization," where everyday interactions shape cross-cultural ties beyond state channels. The proliferation of Korean-themed shops and events in cities like Ibadan and Nigerian-run restaurants in Korea signals localized expressions of this transnational exchange. Yet, Nigerian businesses remain undocumented in Korea, an asymmetry requiring attention from both the Nigerian embassy and diaspora organizations.[99]

Interviews with Nigerians in Korea, such as scholarship recipient Favour Annie, shed light on racialized experiences and adaptive strategies. Annie describes being doubly marginalized, first as a foreigner and then as a Black African, and reflects on how language acquisition enabled her to navigate exclusionary social contexts.[100] Her story underscores how cultural immersion and linguistic fluency function as soft resistance, offering dignity and agency in racially homogenous societies. These narratives unfold within broader structural dynamics. The deportation events highlight policy volatility, while people-to-people exchanges point to resilience and mutual cultural curiosity. This complexity also emerges in the experiences of individuals of mixed heritage. Mosh Oshindele, a Nigerian-Korean man raised in Nigeria, embodies the hybridized

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[98] "Agba Leads Nigerian Government's Delegation to South Korea for Strategic Dialogues on Bilateral Cooperation," *The Conclave*, March 30, 2023.

[99] Mr. Inametti Akpan, Marketing Manager, Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) Commercial Section, Embassy of the Republic of Korea, Lagos, interview by author, 2024.

[100] Favour Annie, Nigerian Global Korea Scholarship (GKS-G) awardee and master's student at Ajou University, South Korea, interview by author, Zoom, April 5, 2024.

identities shaped by transnational mobility. Arriving without knowledge of English, he was homeschooled and re-socialized through his grandmother's Yoruba teachings.[101] His story illustrates the linguistic and cultural adjustments demanded of transnational children.

However, Oshindele's integration into Nigerian society was not without challenges. He faced racialized slurs such as "Chinko" and "Oyinbo pepper," reflecting persistent East Asian stereotypes in Nigeria. These experiences illustrate a tendency to admire yet other Koreans at the same time. To navigate social dynamics and protect his economic opportunities, Oshindele skillfully code-switched between Yoruba and Pidgin. He also noticed cultural similarities between Korea and Yoruba society, particularly shared values of respect and culinary preferences. At the same time, he observed differences in thinking styles: older Koreans were more willing to admit when they did not know something, unlike older Nigerians. Oshindele described Korea as being "50 years ahead," reflecting a common Nigerian perspective of seeing Korea as a model of progress. Institutional factors reinforce this asymmetry.[102] While Korean organizations such as the Korean Cultural Centre in Nigeria (KCCN) and KOTRA actively promote Korean culture, there are few Nigerian initiatives in Korea due to infrastructural and policy limitations. This one-sided cultural exchange strengthens the perception of Korea as the more advanced and influential partner.

Oshindele also recounts his mother's traumatic experience with crime in Nigeria, which has discouraged her return. Such insecurity deters deeper engagement from Korean nationals, many of whom remain confined to enclaves around worksites and businesses, an observation that was also noted by Nneka Nnanna, from her experiences with Korean nationals in Nigeria. However, in her observation, the seclusion of Korean nationals from integrating into the Nigerian societal landscape is due to a reticence on their part due to other challenges besides insecurity.[103] These practical barriers to integration persist despite strong economic ties. Korea's engagement

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[101] Mosh Oshindele, Korean resident in Nigeria with lived experience of Korean–Nigerian relations, interview by author, Zoom, February 23, 2024.

[102] *Ibid.*,

[103] Nneka Nnanna, Korean Business Development Officer, Interpreter, and Language Instructor, Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), Lagos, interview by author, February 2024.

with Nigerian Afrobeats and Nigeria's interest in Korean drama and pop reveal affective transnational exchanges that transcend language, what can be termed a "transcultural affective economy." These mutual cultural investments signal emerging Afro-Asian solidarities, albeit ones not yet matched by institutional infrastructure. Ultimately, Oshindele's narrative, alongside those of Annie and other diaspora figures, offers critical insight into how identity, legality, and aspiration interact in shaping Nigerian–Korean relations. These experiences underscore the necessity of looking beyond formal diplomacy to understand the fluid, negotiated, and often precarious nature of Global South–South migration and belonging.

The rising visibility of Nigerian-Korean mixed-race individuals in South Korea's public sphere provides a powerful lens through which to examine migration, diaspora identity, and racial belonging in a society historically steeped in ethnic homogeneity. The Nigerian presence in Korea through means of education, religion, marriage, and economic migration has catalyzed new cultural opportunities. Notably, the emergence of Nigerian-Korean celebrities such as Han Hyun Min, Bae Yu Jin, Jenny Park, and Joel-Jin Nwamadi underscores both the disruption and partial assimilation of Blackness within South Korea's evolving racial imaginary. Han Hyun Min, often called Korea's first Black fashion model, exemplifies these tensions. His childhood experiences of bullying and exclusion in the modeling industry expose the racial hierarchies embedded in Korean beauty standards, where Eurocentric features are prized. Despite this, Han's rise, walking over 30 shows at Seoul Fashion Week, signals a cautious shift in public perception. Han's advocacy for mixed-race children reflects an aspirational diasporic ethic, yet his treatment as an "exception" also reveals the limits of multicultural inclusion. The derogatory term *tuigi* (투이기), likening mixed-race children to crossbreeds, demonstrates persistent othering within national discourse.[104]

Bae Yu Jin's modeling and acting career offers a gendered counterpart to Han's story. Her mother's initial skepticism—questioning whether a "half-Black girl" could succeed in Korea—echoes bell hooks's concept of the "colonization of imagination," where racial inferiority is internalized by the marginalized.[105] Bae's growing prominence reflects a generational pushback

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[104] Ayodele Oluwagbemi, "Fathered by a Nigerian, South Korea's First Black Model Faces Widespread Racism," *Punch*, July 11, 2017.

[105] Wikipedia, Bae Yujin, retrieved on August 5, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bae_Yujin.

against invisibility, as young Afro-Koreans increasingly assert their presence in the public sphere. Joel-Jin Nwamadi bridges entertainment and athletics. As a record-breaking sprinter representing South Korea, he embodies both national pride and racialized ambivalence.[106] His early acting role in *Descendants of the Sun*, a popular Korean drama series where his character was nicknamed "Blackey," provoked international criticism and revealed enduring stereotypes in Korean media.[107] These portrayals invite scrutiny of Korea's racial politics in a global media context, where representations once confined to domestic narratives are now internationally visible. Jenny Park, a rising teen model and actress, adds another layer. Her commercial success with brands like Aveeno and Calvin Klein reflects a growing market for diversity.[108] However, this "diversity" is often aestheticized and depoliticized. Jenny's curated image promotes racial difference as aspirational, while obscuring the everyday challenges she and others like her face in a largely monoethnic society. Collectively, these figures, children of Nigerian fathers and Korean mothers, signal a gradual transformation in South Korea's symbolic and demographic landscape. Yet their prominence should not be mistaken for systemic change. Their visibility coexists with structural inequalities faced by African migrants, including legal precarity and social exclusion. These mixed-race celebrities thus operate as both cultural ambassadors and contested figures—extending the boundaries of Koreanness while remaining exceptionalized.

These complexities are further illuminated by the testimony of Esther Nneka Nnanna, a Lagos-based Korean language interpreter. Her journey from self-taught language learner to professional translator embodies the grassroots, media-facilitated nature of Nigerian–Korean cultural relations. Her initial attraction to Korean culture stemmed from the modesty portrayed in K-dramas, which aligned with her own values. For Nneka, Korean culture felt not only aspirational but familiar, particularly in its emphasis on respect, industriousness, and communalism, traits she

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[106] "Joel-Jin Nwamadi, Nigerian-Korean Athlete Representing Korea," *Making of Champs*, accessed on August 30, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/p/C_Tcgg9sqdG/.

[107] MyDramaList, "Descendants of the Sun EP 5… calling the black kid 'Blackey'???," *MyDramaList*, accessed July 28, 2025, https://mydramalist.com/discussions/recommendation-forum/25421.

[108] Adeola Ash, *Korea's Most Famous Half Black Teen Model? Jenny Park, Nigerian-Korean Viral Star 박제니/ NGKR*, https://youtu.be/DNjsta0rwHQ?si=pdnY8jW2x81ZgKFK.

sees mirrored in her experience of Igbo culture. This perception disrupts conventional notions of cultural difference that often shape state-sponsored diplomacy. Nneka's critiques of institutions like the Korean Cultural Center Nigeria (KCCN) are sharp. While KCCN promotes Korean culture in Nigeria, it lacks reciprocal engagement with Nigerian culture. The absence of a Nigerian equivalent in South Korea further entrenches asymmetries in cultural exchange, placing the burden of translation and diplomacy on individuals like Nneka. Her experience of being excluded from Korean English-teaching programs due to Korea not recognizing Nigeria as an English-speaking country, reveals institutional blind spots and reinforces epistemic inequality. Language, in this context, becomes more than communication; it is a form of belonging and access. Nneka's linguistic skills allow her to mediate business transactions and facilitate cross-cultural understanding, positioning her as an informal cultural diplomat. Yet her path also highlights the gendered and emotional dimensions of these engagements, with many Nigerian women entering Korean cultural spaces through fandom and personal identification. Nneka notes that Korean expatriates in Nigeria remain largely isolated from the local population, reducing opportunities for everyday cultural exchange. By contrast, Nigerians in Korea are far more integrated into public life. This imbalance limits mutual understanding and reproduces hierarchical encounters. Her observation that many Nigerians unknowingly violate Korean honorific norms and thereby offend Koreans, is a subtle but powerful reminder of how micro-level misunderstandings can inhibit deeper connections.[109]

Still, Nneka outlines pathways for more equitable exchange. She suggests that companies like Solpia Nigeria Ltd could support intercultural events through corporate social responsibility initiatives, while individuals like herself could facilitate grassroots meetups and language exchanges. She also calls for expanded Korean scholarships for Nigerians and decentralization of the KCCN to better represent Nigeria's diverse regions. Her proposals challenge Korea to move from symbolic cultural outreach toward more accessible and reciprocal engagement.[110] In sum, Nneka's narrative, alongside the rise of Nigerian-Korean celebrities, illustrates the uneven terrain

[109] Nneka Nnanna, Korean Business Development Officer, Interpreter, and Language Instructor, Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), Lagos, interview by author, February 2024.

[110] *Ibid.*

of Nigerian–South Korean cultural relations. Institutional inertia and representational gaps remain, but individual actors through language, media, and grassroots diplomacy, are actively reshaping the narrative. As these transnational identities continue to evolve, they highlight how migration and belonging in the digital age are increasingly shaped not only by borders, but by cultural desire, symbolic exchange, and personal agency.

5.7 Institutional Frameworks of Social and Cultural Exchange

Following the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1980, Nigeria and South Korea began embedding social and cultural exchange within institutional frameworks that aligned with diplomatic and developmental goals. President Chun Doo Hwan's 1982 state visit to Nigeria marked a key milestone, framing both nations as postcolonial, developmental states committed to South-South cooperation. Official narratives highlighted shared experiences of colonialism, national rebuilding, and regional ambition, framing collaboration as a mutual pathway to modernity.[111] A bilateral agreement signed in Lagos in August 1982 formalized cooperation in science, technology, and education, framed not as technical sectors alone, but as tools for social transformation inspired by Korea's Saemaul Undong movement.[112] Technical training programs, including the training of 29 Nigerian experts in agronomy and fisheries in Korea (1981–1982), fostered early people-to-people exchanges. These built a foundation for cross-cultural familiarity, exposing Nigerian professionals to Korean institutional cultures and developmental ideologies.[113]

Korean corporate activity like the 1978 establishment of Daewoo Nigeria Ltd. and its $180 million Sokoto housing project in 1982, embedded Korean personnel into Nigerian contexts, fostering daily intercultural contact.[114] The 1982 joint commission agreement institutionalized such cooperation, incorporating cultural exchange, study tours, and seminars, laying the groundwork for enduring cultural diplomacy. Symbolic gestures, including Chun's wreath-laying

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[111] "President Chun's Visit Opens New Era for Nigeria-Korea Relationship: Setting an Example of South-South Cooperation," *New Nigerian,* August 19, 1982, pp.1–4.

[112] "Nigeria, South Korea Sign Pact," *National Concord,* August 21, 1982, p.11.

[113] "President Chun's Visit Opens New Era for Nigeria-Korea Relationship," *New Nigerian*.

[114] Daewoo Engineering & Construction Nigeria, "Company History," accessed June 3, 2025, https://www.daewooencnigeria.com/company/history?utm_source=.

in Lagos and his visits to museums and farms, enhanced this narrative of mutual respect and shared aspiration.[115] By 1983, multidimensional cooperation was well underway. A *Guardian* article called the relationship a "milestone" in South-South diplomacy, blending Korea's developmental success with Nigeria's human and natural resource strengths.[116] Bilateral exchanges expanded beyond elites, involving parliamentarians, youth, women, and business leaders - 70 businessmen, 34 youth, and 35 women leaders visited Korea in one year - signaling a move toward pluralized diplomacy and structured social interaction. Decentralized diplomacy also emerged. The 1983 establishment of Lobi Bank of Nigeria Ltd., a joint venture between Benue State and Korea Exchange Bank, illustrates subnational collaboration driven by shared economic and social objectives.[117]

By 1986, the Lagos talks between Foreign Ministers Akinyemi and Won-Kyung Lee reflected a deepening relationship now focused on maritime, cultural, and technical cooperation, with site visits to Nigerian heritage institutions reinforcing symbolic diplomacy.[118] This institutional foundation led to Nigeria's later involvement in pan-African initiatives like KOAFEC. At its 5th Ministerial Conference in 2016, AfDB President Akinwumi Adesina celebrated Korea's model of development but also noted its "great human cost"—introducing a critical lens on one-size-fits-all development templates.[119] Recent initiatives via the Korea-Africa Foundation (KAF), such as the Korea-Nigeria Youth Camp and KAF Supporters programs, continue this legacy with

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[115] Fela Durosomo, "I'm Here to Strengthen Ties—President Chun Doo Hwan," *National Concord*, August 20, 1982, p.13.

[116] "Korea-Nigeria: Close and Sincere Partners for South-South Cooperation," *Guardian*, December 1983.

[117] *Ibid.*

[118] "Korean Minister in Lagos," *Daily Times*, August 6, 1986; "Nigeria and Korea Hold Bilateral Talks," *Federal Ministry of Information and Culture*, Press Release No. 1277, August 6, 1986.

[119] Akinwumi Adesina, "Opening Remarks at the 5th KOAFEC Ministerial Conference," *African Development Bank*, accessed on October 24, 2016, https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/opening-remarks-delivered-by-president-akinwumi-adesina-at-5th-korea-africa-forum-for-economic-cooperation-seoul-korea-october-24-2016-16258.

greater formalization, emphasizing entrepreneurship, cultural immersion, and digital literacy.[120] The Korean Cultural Centre Nigeria (KCCN), the first in Africa, functions as a hub for exchanges like Hanbok wearing and traditional art, while regular ministerial visits reinforce policy-level engagement, addressing sectors like energy, education, and investment.[121] KAF's strategy includes working with African diasporic youth in Korea to reshape Korean public perceptions of Nigeria, recognizing negative stereotypes as barriers to investment. Ambassador Lyeo Woon-Ki's 2022 visit to Nigeria reaffirmed KAF's aim to reframe Nigeria as a vibrant and capable partner.[122] However, KAF's limited role in tertiary education diplomacy points to an institutional gap, suggesting the need for collaboration with ministries of education to build sustainable academic partnerships.

Nigeria's image in South Korean diplomacy is increasingly shaped by grassroots initiatives aimed at building goodwill. A key example is the provision of free cataract surgeries by Vision Care, a Korean NGO supported by Daewoo Engineering and Construction, and implemented at Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH). These missions reaching over 1,700 Nigerians since 2015, reflect South Korea's development-oriented humanitarian diplomacy. They embed Korean actors in Nigerian communities beyond commerce, reinforcing trust while aligning CSR with state objectives, exemplifying para-diplomatic engagement. The visibility of Korean diplomats and medical personnel during such missions helps localize Korean engagement. With support from LASUTH leadership and the Lagos State Government, these health missions are integrated into Nigeria's domestic governance and align with the "T.H.E.M.E.S." agenda, especially in healthcare.[123]

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[120] Korea-Africa Foundation, "Korea-Nigeria Youth Camp," *Korea-Africa Foundation (KAF) News*, 2021–2023, https://www.k-af.or.kr/eng/load.asp?idx=6722.

[121] "Nigeria, Korea Mull Partnership To Address Energy Crisis," *The Fact Daily*, August 30, 2022.

[122] "We're working to change negative perception of Nigeria in Korea – KAF president," *Daily Trust*, September 4, 2022.

[123] Ngozi Egenuka, "South Korea strengthens partnership with Nigeria, provides free eye surgery to indigent persons," *The Guardian*, September 27, 2022, p.22.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Lyeo's meetings with Nigerian ministers and private actors like NACCIMA and Proforce Ltd. demonstrate a strategic diplomacy that blends soft and hard power. South Korea's support for the Korea-Nigeria Model School in Abuja publicly funded but locally managed, adds permanence to this relationship. The school's facilities and alignment with the FCT administration showcase Korea's investment in human capital and public diplomacy.[124] Yet, structural asymmetries remain. Trade is heavily imbalanced in Korea's favor, despite KAF leadership claiming parity, an assertion not supported by data (see Chapter 4 on Nigeria-South Korea economic relations). This imbalance raises questions about whether social and cultural diplomacy alone can redress deeper economic disparities. Nonetheless, initiatives such as medical outreach, the model school, and cultural programs signify a growing, institutionalized infrastructure of Nigeria–Korea engagement.

At the state level, KOICA plays a pivotal role, operating as Korea's main agent for ODA and technical diplomacy. Its training programs for Nigerian MDAs promote administrative efficiency and knowledge transfer, embedding Korean development logic into Nigerian public institutions.[125] This reflects Korea's broader aid model: co-development through shared expertise. Cultural diplomacy is similarly strategic. The 2023 Korea National Day in Abuja brought together Nigerian elites and showcased Korean brands like LG, Hyundai, and Samsung, blending cultural display with commercial intent. The Korean Cultural Center in Nigeria (KCCN) builds familiarity through exhibitions, language classes, and arts programs. In 2023, events co-hosted with Nike Art Gallery and UBA exemplified collaborative public-private diplomacy.[126] These efforts are part of Korea's wider African strategy, as seen in preparations for the 2024 Korea–Africa Summit. Ambassador Chae's framing of Africa as a strategic market and manufacturing hub reflects this

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[124] Kevin Lee and Yuccee Uwah, "KAF President Lyeo stresses on deepening Korea-Nigeria trade and economic cooperation," *The Korea Post,* September 28, 2022.

[125] Olude Omolade, "Nigeria, Korea Will Exchange Knowledge for Economic Growth, Says Budget Minister," *National Planning Commission of Nigeria*, accessed on September 13, 2023, https://nationalplanning.gov.ng/nigeria-korea-will-exchange-knowledge-for-economic-growth-says-budget-minister/.

[126] Yuccee Uwah, "Korean Arts, Culture, Cuisines, Exhibitions Were Held in Nigeria," *The Korea Post*, accessed on January 18, 2024, http://www.koreapost.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=40962.

pivot, with Nigeria a focal point due to its demographic and economic weight.[127] Korea's expanding ODA focus on education, climate adaptation, and agriculture illustrates a shift to "comprehensive partnership" that is both pragmatic and symbolic.

This layered diplomacy is sustained through institutional mechanisms like KOICA's training, KCCN's cultural programming, and high-level engagements, which together create a durable framework for relations. Culture is thus not peripheral but central to how mutual interests are negotiated. Recent partnerships underscore this shift. The 2024 AfriLabs–KAF MOU marks a pivot toward innovation-led, youth-focused diplomacy, placing Nigerian hubs at the center of a transnational innovation network.[128] The collaboration moves beyond aid to co-creation, in line with Korea's developmental ethos, with KAF acting as a civil society-diplomatic bridge. Youth diplomacy has expanded through KAF's Supporters program. Nigerian and Kenyan students participated in the 2024 Korea–Africa Summit, producing media content and leading cultural exchanges.[129] These initiatives reposition African youth as co-creators of diplomatic narratives, not passive recipients. This aligns with broader trends in horizontal, media-driven public diplomacy.

Institutional backing for such exchanges is evident. The Friends of Korea event in Abuja gathered KOICA alumni, K-wave creators, and cultural scholars, reaffirming Korea's long-term cultural investment.[130] Ambassador Kim Pankyu emphasized mutual understanding and cultural affinity as central pillars. Cultural diplomacy also manifests in infrastructural terms. The Korea-Nigeria Information Access Center and KOICA's $23 million digital capacity projects demonstrate

[127] Yuccee Uwah, "Korean Arts, Culture, Cuisines, Exhibitions Were Held in Nigeria."

[128] "AfriLabs and Korea-Africa Foundation Establish Strategic Partnership to Propel Innovation and Economic Prosperity Across Both Regions," *AfriLabs*, June 3, 2024, https://www.afrilabs.com/.

[129] Volga Serin Suleymanoglu, "Korea-Africa Foundation Supporters Help at Inaugural Summit," *Korea.net*, June 25, 2024, https://www.korea.net/.

[130] Nsikak Ekere, "Embassy in Nigeria Hosts 'Friends of Korea' Event in Abuja," *Korea.net*, December 28, 2024, https://www.korea.net/.

a calculated approach linking soft power with development outcomes.[131] Nigeria's role as ECOWAS chair and Africa's largest nation makes it central to Seoul's Africa policy. Corporate actors amplify these efforts. Firms like LG and Samsung support CSR projects (e.g., solar panels, boreholes), while companies like Solpia Nigeria reflect Korean cultural products' integration into local markets.[132] These efforts build cultural-economic interdependence. Institutional convergence is furthered by agreements such as the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement and the anticipated Trade and Investment Promotion Framework (TIPF). These frameworks support the operational link between culture, economy, and diplomacy, easing transnational cooperation across sectors.^8 In sum, Nigeria–South Korea social and cultural relations are anchored in a growing matrix of state and civil society linkages. From youth exchanges to innovation partnerships, and from cultural events to development aid, a multidimensional diplomacy is emerging. This model is relational, future-facing, and deeply institutionalized, grounded in shared infrastructure, mutual visibility, and co-constructed narratives.

[131] Ochiaka Ugwu, "Korea and Nigeria: Restyling Partnership," *Peoples Daily*, April 22, 2025.

[132] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the evolution and dynamics of Nigeria-South Korea bilateral relations from 1980 to the present, employing a multi-dimensional analytical framework that encompasses political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions. Through systematic historical investigation and theoretically grounded analysis, the research has illuminated the complex trajectory of this understudied yet significant partnership between two major middle powers from the Global South. The findings reveal a relationship characterized by remarkable endurance and adaptive capacity, yet simultaneously marked by persistent structural asymmetries that have fundamentally shaped the modalities and outcomes of bilateral engagement across more than four decades.

The political dimension of Nigeria-South Korea relations, as demonstrated in Chapter Three, reveals how bilateralism has functioned simultaneously as an instrument of foreign policy and a reflection of national character. From the formal establishment of diplomatic ties in February 1980 through successive administrations in both states, the relationship has been sustained through high-level political engagement, institutional frameworks, and convergent diplomatic interests. The analysis demonstrates that both nations approached the partnership with distinct yet complementary motivations: Nigeria sought to expand its global diplomatic reach and consolidate its leadership credentials within the post-colonial international order, while South Korea aimed to diversify its strategic alliances beyond the immediate East Asian theatre and secure access to vital energy resources. The institutional architecture that emerged including the Nigeria-South Korea Joint Commission established in 1985, successive bilateral agreements, and permanent diplomatic missions, provided structural scaffolding for political dialogue that transcended regime changes and ideological shifts. Nevertheless, the trajectory of political cooperation reveals persistent asymmetries in diplomatic capacity and strategic initiative. South Korea's proactive, systematically coordinated approach to bilateral engagement consistently outpaced Nigeria's more reactive and episodic posture, exemplified by the seven-year delay in establishing Nigeria's resident embassy in Seoul and the conspicuous absence from the 2022 Korea-Africa Forum despite Nigeria's status as South Korea's largest African trading partner.

The economic analysis presented in Chapter Four underscores how resource-technology complementarity has constituted the foundational logic of bilateral interdependence. Nigeria's abundant petroleum resources and South Korea's industrial and technological capabilities created a structurally determined pattern of exchange that has persisted and evolved since 1980. The study reveals how this complementarity matured from simple commodity trade into complex arrangements including joint ventures in oil and gas exploration, resources-for-infrastructure agreements such as the 2006 railway-for-oil deal, and substantial Korean participation in Nigeria's LNG and offshore engineering sectors. Korean construction and engineering firms, notably Daewoo, Hyundai, and Samsung Heavy Industries, have executed projects valued at approximately $15 billion, making Nigeria Korea's largest construction market in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet this impressive economic activity has occurred within a framework of pronounced asymmetry. Trade statistics consistently reveal substantial imbalances favoring South Korea, with Korean exports comprising manufactured goods, machinery, and refined petroleum products while Nigerian exports remain overwhelmingly confined to crude oil and raw materials. This structural pattern, wherein Nigeria provides primary resources while Korea supplies industrial technology and expertise, has perpetuated a dependent relationship that contradicts the rhetorical framing of South-South cooperation as partnership among equals. The analysis demonstrates that despite Nigeria's persistent aspirations for technology transfer and industrial learning, the actual absorption of Korean technological capabilities has been constrained by institutional weaknesses, policy discontinuity, and the inherent limitations of turnkey contracting arrangements that repatriate profits and expertise while leaving limited domestic value addition.

The socio-cultural dimension examined in Chapter Five reveals perhaps the most dynamic and transformative arena of bilateral engagement. The study demonstrates how religious, educational, media, and migratory flows have created increasingly dense networks of people-to-people connection that complement and sometimes transcend formal state diplomacy. Korean missionary activity in Nigeria since 1979, the proliferation of Pentecostal exchanges between Yoido Full Gospel Church and Nigerian religious leaders, and the remarkable adoption of Nigerian gospel music, notably Sinach's "Way Maker", within Korean worship communities illustrate how faith-based engagement has fostered deep cultural resonance. The Korean Wave (Hallyu) has generated substantial grassroots interest among Nigerian youth, particularly women, who have transformed fandom into professional opportunities in language instruction, translation, and

cultural entrepreneurship. Educational exchanges through the Global Korea Scholarship and KOICA training programs have created a growing diaspora of Nigerian alumni in Korea, while Korean corporate presence in Nigeria has established communities of Korean expatriates whose culinary and social practices have become embedded in Nigerian urban spaces. However, the analysis also reveals significant asymmetries in cultural visibility and representation. Korean cultural institutions, notably the Korean Cultural Centre Nigeria (KCCN), maintain active programming in Nigeria, while Nigerian cultural presence in Korea remains minimal and largely dependent on individual initiative rather than institutional support. The experiences of Nigerian migrants in Korea, including documented instances of racialized exclusion and the 2011 deportation crisis, underscore how cultural diplomacy and lived realities of cross-border mobility frequently diverge.

Synthesizing these findings, this study contributes several important insights to the broader literature on bilateralism and South-South cooperation. First, the Nigeria-South Korea case demonstrates that bilateral relationships between asymmetrically endowed partners in the Global South can achieve remarkable durability and institutional complexity while nevertheless perpetuating structural dependencies that resemble traditional North-South dynamics. The persistent invocation of South-South solidarity rhetoric, even as South Korea achieved OECD membership and high-income status, reveals how ideological framing can obscure material inequalities and postpone critical examination of partnership terms. Second, the research illuminates how bilateralism operates as a layered phenomenon encompassing state-to-state diplomacy, corporate engagement, and grassroots cultural flows, with each layer exhibiting distinct logics and asymmetries that do not necessarily align. The impressive institutional architecture of official cooperation has coexisted with implementation deficits and capacity gaps that constrain developmental impact. Third, the study reveals how middle powers utilize bilateral partnerships to advance multilateral objectives, with both Nigeria and South Korea strategically deploying their relationship to enhance standing within international organizations and global forums. The theoretical implications of this research extend beyond the specific case to inform broader understanding of bilateralism as a modality of international relations. The findings support the proposition that bilateral and multilateral approaches are not mutually exclusive but can operate in complementary fashion, with bilateral partnerships frequently serving as building blocks or precursors to more ambitious collective undertakings. However, the Nigeria-South Korea

experience also suggests that bilateralism's inherent flexibility and confidentiality can enable asymmetrical power relations to persist with limited external scrutiny, particularly when partnerships are framed within solidaristic discourses that discourage critical evaluation. The study underscores the importance of examining not merely the formal institutional structures of bilateral cooperation but also the informal networks, cultural flows, and implementation practices that determine actual outcomes.

For policy practitioners in both Nigeria and South Korea, this research offers several actionable insights. First, Nigerian policymakers must recognize that durable bilateral partnerships require sustained institutional commitment and strategic initiative rather than reactive engagement; the delayed establishment of diplomatic infrastructure and intermittent participation in multilateral forums such as the 2022 Korea-Africa Forum have consistently disadvantaged Nigerian interests, and a standing institutional mechanism, such as a dedicated Korea desk within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, would help insulate diplomatic follow-through from the episodic attention that has characterized Nigeria's posture to date. South Korean policymakers, for their part, should recognize that Nigeria's diplomatic unevenness has been met with a degree of institutional complacency on Seoul's side as well; Nigeria's continued absence from key forums was neither flagged nor actively remedied through reciprocal outreach, suggesting that South Korea's own diplomatic apparatus has treated the relationship as secure by default rather than one requiring active cultivation commensurate with Nigeria's stated status as Korea's largest African trading partner.

Second, on the economic front, the persistence of trade imbalances and limited technology absorption points to shortcomings on both sides of the table. Nigerian negotiators have not fully capitalized on the leverage their resource endowments provide; agreements such as the 2006 railway-for-oil deal demonstrate that resource-for-infrastructure arrangements can be structured to extract more than revenue, and future agreements of this kind should be negotiated with binding, rather than aspirational, local-content and technology-transfer provisions. South Korean policymakers and firms, meanwhile, bear equal responsibility for the structural pattern this study identifies: the continued reliance on turnkey contracting and resource extraction, however commercially efficient for Korean firms in the short term, undermines the legitimacy of South-South cooperation rhetoric that Seoul itself has invoked, and sustainable partnership will require

Korean policymakers to actively incentivize, rather than merely tolerate, genuine capacity-building and joint-venture participation that enables Nigerian industrial upgrading. The anticipated Trade and Investment Promotion Framework and the existing Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement offer institutional vehicles through which both governments could codify these obligations as mutual commitments rather than one-sided concessions.

Third, the socio-cultural asymmetries identified in this study also implicate both governments rather than Nigeria alone. Nigerian policymakers could address the absence of a Nigerian cultural institution in Korea, comparable to the Korean Cultural Centre Nigeria, by establishing a dedicated cultural office or exchange programme in Seoul that leverages Afrobeats and Nollywood as instruments of reciprocal soft power. South Korean policymakers, however, carry direct responsibility for the documented instances of racialized exclusion and the 2011 deportation crisis affecting Nigerian migrants; these episodes indicate that Korean immigration and labour institutions have not kept pace with the depth of grassroots engagement their own soft-power initiatives have encouraged, and redress will require Seoul to extend concrete protections, potentially anchored through KOICA alumni networks and consular channels, rather than leaving migrant welfare to informal goodwill. These recommendations point toward a shared conclusion: the durability of Nigeria-South Korea relations should not be mistaken for their equity, and correcting that imbalance is a responsibility that falls on policymakers in Abuja and Seoul in roughly equal measure.

The limitations acknowledged in this study, particularly the scarcity of scholarly materials specifically addressing Nigeria-South Korea relations, language barriers affecting Korean source materials, and constraints on fieldwork and elite interviews, suggest avenues for future research. As this bilateral relationship continues to evolve within an increasingly multipolar international order, sustained scholarly attention to its political economy, cultural dynamics, and developmental outcomes will be essential for understanding how middle powers from different world regions negotiate cooperation amid structural inequality. The Nigeria-South Korea partnership, enduring yet uneven, cooperative yet asymmetrical, exemplifies both the possibilities and limitations of South-South diplomacy in an era of global transformation. In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that Nigeria-South Korea relations represent a significant yet under-theorized case of bilateral engagement between asymmetrically endowed middle powers. The relationship's four-decade trajectory reveals how bilateralism can function as an adaptive, multi-layered framework

for international cooperation that generates substantial mutual benefits while simultaneously perpetuating structural dependencies that complicate solidaristic aspirations. As both nations navigate the challenges and opportunities of twenty-first century global politics, the analytical framework and empirical findings presented herein provide foundation for informed policy-making and continued scholarly investigation of this important bilateral partnership.

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Favour, Annie.	Global Korea Scholarship for Graduate Degrees (GKS-G) Awardee and master's student, Ajou University, Suwon,	Academia	25	Zoom	April 5, 2024.

	Gyeonggi-do, South Korea				
Nnakanma, Cosmas.	Brain Korea Scholar and post-doctoral fellow, Kumoh National Institute of Technology, Gumi, North Gyeongsang Province, South Korea	Academia	45	Zoom	December 1, 2024.
Nnanna, Nneka.	Korean Business Development Officer, Interpreter, and Language Instructor	Trade and Business Development Professional / Language Specialist	28	Lagos	February 15, 2024
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