

Friend or Would-be Coloniser? A Constructivist Appraisal of Zambia–China Relations in the Light of Anti-Chinese Sentiments in Zambia

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Abstract

Recent occasional attacks on Chinese entrepreneurs in Zambia, supposedly on grounds that they are expropriating socio-economic opportunities for Zambians, deserve a fresh interrogation of Zambia–China relations. Labour-related tensions between Chinese employers and their Zambian employees have also ignited violence between the two parties. Opportunistic Zambian politicians have used these tensions to sponsor the narrative that China in general has malevolent designs over Zambia. Due to increasing external debt and general economic difficulties during the tenure of Zambia’s Patriotic Front (PF) government, from 2011 to 2021, desperate Zambians took their frustration out on the increasing numbers of Chinese entrepreneurs who are considered harbingers of Zambia’s external debt crisis and usurpers of Zambia’s sovereignty. Using constructivism as the theoretical framework, the research found that Zambia–China relations are no longer driven by ethical moorings that were typical of the colonial and Cold War eras. Secondly, that China’s identity in Zambia has assumed an ominous dimension with the increasing number of Chinese migrants whose conduct is at variance with the image that the Chinese government strives to present. Third, that the ineffective governance of the PF leadership threatened to force the country to default on the debt it owes to China and this could have led to China limiting the room for manoeuvre on the part of the Zambian government, thereby justifying the arguments of those who opine that China aims to take over Africa even though ineffective African governments are culpable.

Keywords: *China, identity, interest, constructivism, Zambia*

1. Introduction

The ensuing article will look at the norms, ideas, identities and interests that have shaped Zambia–China relations for the last 56 years. The article will take a tacitly normative perspective by exposing the upside as well as the downside of Zambia–China relations. It will also make a departure from the liberalist and rationalist inclinations of analyzing relations among nations from the level of state actors. The article has noted the growing influence of the opinion of non-state actors on Zambia–China relations. This opinion has claimed the attention of state actors from both Zambia and China. Thus, it is imperative to note that monopoly or dominance of state-actor opinion on Zambia–China relations has somewhat eroded. In addition, the article will also demonstrate the difference, in identity, between China as a state, and Chinese, as non-state actors whose number in Zambia has been steadily increasing. Unpacking these nuances will set the research apart from a generalized analysis of China’s identity and its likely effect on Zambia.

Firstly, the article places Zambia–China relations in a broader context, by looking at how frustration with Western actors has inadvertently driven Africa into China’s orbit. The second section will look at the recent history of Zambia–China relations. The third part begins a pointed focus on Zambia–China relations, and how the glorious history that the two countries share was increasingly fading away mainly due to the inability of the PF-led Zambian government to manage its resources. Rather than blame China as a marauding would-be coloniser as other literature tends to do, the current study will put the responsibility of the current skewed Zambia–China relationship on the previous Zambian government. The fourth section will look at China’s involvement in Zambia through state-owned enterprises, citing mostly major projects that they are undertaking. The section will also reveal the content and flow of imports and exports between the two countries since the early 1990s and how that impacts on the nature of Sino–Zambian relations. The article will not concentrate on China’s investment in Zambia’s mining sector as dominant emphasis in that sector has limited the study of other areas such as track two diplomacy that involves non-state actors from the two countries, whose point of interaction is outside the mining sector. The fifth section is dedicated to analyzing the impact of Chinese migrants in Zambia on China’s identity among Zambians. The sixth section will then interpret the texture of Zambian–China relations arguing from a constructivist perspective which looks at the importance of identity in any relationship.

2. Understanding Zambia’s/Africa’s Relationship with China

The discourse on Zambia–Chinese relations could be inserted in the wider African relations with the East. It is a relationship in which African countries

turn to the East to achieve the ever elusive economic and infrastructural development in the continent. Previous efforts by African countries to achieve this have taken the form of borrowing from the World Bank and IMF controlled by the West (Ismi, 2004; Omotola and Saliu, 2009). The problem with this previous effort is that instead of helping in the development of African countries, the contrary was the case. For example, through the World Bank and the IMF Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), African countries were “forced to open their economies to Western penetration and increase exports of primary goods to wealthy nations...[which] multiplied profits for Western multinational corporations while subjecting Third World countries to horrendous levels of poverty...and economic decline” (Ismi, 2004: 5). The 2016 UNCTAD report also affirms that SAPs have had a devastating impact on the African continent resulting in slower economic growth, increased poverty and lower incomes. Moreover, SAPs led to increased debt burden on Africa and hence “has, for decades, remained a recurrent and discordant note in the discourse on the crisis and contradictions of Africa’s development” (Omotola and Saliu, 2009: 87). The request by many African countries for debt cancellations has been the subject of global political economy discourse. Considering these circumstances, it is easy to understand why African countries sought alternatives towards enabling their economic development.

Also, political interference from the West and Europe in the African countries receiving their aid, did not help matters and was quite stifling for some of the borrowing African countries. The UNCTAD report (2016: 8) states that America’s predominance in the World Bank and IMF has ensured that the so-called global institutions are used as instruments of America’s foreign economic–political policies. These foreign policies have resulted in the interference of America in the socio-politics of the countries receiving aid. This has compelled some African countries to surrender their internal affairs to be scrutinised by America and other global economic super powers; they have to dance to the tune of the donor country with regards to political, economic and even social demands. For example, the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative of the World Bank and IMF signifies the form of interference of the West on African countries in debt; the initiative requires that borrowing and indebted countries have a record of good governance and able to show that they are committed to the battle against corruption (Omotola and Saliu, 2009).

Considering the above failures of the Western and European economic super powers in Africa, the East (especially China) and its economic and developmental promises, provides an alternative to Africa’s aspiration for socio-economic growth and development. Ogunrotifa (2011: 235) asserts that “the shift of Africa’s attention from the West to the East especially China in the 21st Century is not unconnected to the absurdities of unequal relations and

domination by Western countries in the pre and post Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) period.” As an alternative, China’s aid presents many advantages for needy African countries; for example, China’s aid goes with the understanding of debt cancellation and change of due date for repayment of loans, as part of China’s development assistance to certain countries (Chilufya, 2010). Also, China’s non-interference policy has been embraced with alacrity in Africa. Summarily, it will seem that China has exploited the dissatisfaction of Africa’s leaders on the problematic economic and foreign policy models from the World Bank and IMF; “the Chinese are aware of the historical background of Africans and the continent’s current travails under Western domination” (Ogunrotifa, 2011: 236).

Against the above backdrop, some scholars have argued against the view which holds that China’s role in Africa is totally disadvantageous and worsening the situation of underdevelopment in Africa. Willis (2014) looks at the argument on whether China’s socio-economic relations with Africa constitute neo-colonialism. The author agrees that China’s involvement in Africa is problematic, but this does not constitute neo-colonialism since this involvement brings some potential for greater economic development in Africa. However, Willis (2014) also notes that China’s role has the potential of aggravating the political economy of Africa entrenched by former colonial imperialists as asserted by Ake (1981). According to Willis (2014) China “is aggravating an existing political economy of resource extraction long practised by the West in collusion with African elites.” This is seen in China’s practices in the so-called strategic partnership with African countries like Zambia.

Zambia provides one example of the double-edged nature of the surge in Chinese imports. On the one hand, these have been extremely popular as they allow African consumers unprecedented access to low-cost manufactured goods (e.g. see Zi, 2015: 7). On the other hand, Chinese clothing and textile exports have undermined local African production as they crowd out both domestic and third-country markets – the likes of South Africa and its neighbours have witnessed large-scale unemployment as a result (Willis, 2014). Chilufya (2010: 11) notes that “the trade and investment ‘deals’ between China and most African governments are opaque and on barter terms largely dictated by China.” This undergirds the rhetoric from some scholars (for example Ogunrotifa, 2011; Dewidar, 2015) that China has a neo-colonialist agenda in Africa, since the barter system was also notably used during the Western colonial architecture of Africa’s weak political economy (Ake, 1981).

China’s alleged neo-colonialist strategy becomes even clearer in the age of globalisation in which China seeks to assert itself as a global power, dominating the global economic scene (Ogunrotifa, 2011). The aggressive move by China to dominate the economic scene in the developing world

is reminiscent of the scramble for Africa. Also, China’s so-called non-interference policy and the inability to call African dictators to order and to entrench human rights is in itself another problematic issue. This allows a situation in which African leaders and oppressive regimes utilize the means given to them by China to enrich themselves and become more powerful, quashing any opposition. Moreover, many of China’s “infrastructure projects seem to serve the interests of Chinese firms operating in Africa. There is also relatively little ‘aid’ given by China... China’s investment tends to favor a select group of African countries [that] tend to be natural resource exporters, whereas China mostly imports oil and other minerals from Africa” (Dewidar, 2015: 12).

However, it is also worth noting that apart from material resources, China extends overtures to countries with the intention of encouraging nations that share formal ties with Taiwan to foreswear those ties in favour of China. This is done through economic cajolery and displays of political affinity with the developing world. The use of soft power and claims of Third World solidarity create an identity of China that is palatable for actors that take umbrage at what they consider Western interference. These contrasts in constructed identities are arguably indicative of the difference in norms and ideas between the West on the one hand and China and the developing world on the other. A countervailing point to be made is that Africa does not always relate with China because it identifies itself with China. Zimbabwe’s “look East” initiative, for example, was out of necessity rather than sole belief in China’s identity and intentions in Africa (Moyo, Chambati and Yeros, 2019). Indeed, China’s non-interference principle which supported the governments of Sudan and Zimbabwe only enjoyed support in contrast to Western sanctions on those countries. Generally speaking, in their political outlook and behaviour, however flawed, African governments still lean towards Western politics rather than Chinese. It is also noteworthy that by adopting article 4(h) of the African Union (AU), which is the policy of non-indifference, AU members demonstrated that non-interference as a foreign policy is obsolete and irresponsible. Seen from this angle, Africa courts China not because it believes in the Chinese worldview but because it wants to show the West that it has alternatives and secondly, it demonstrates Africa’s antipathy to foreign oversight even though that article of the AU quoted points to the concession of such oversight.

2.1. Background of the Recent Zambia-China Relationship

Less than a week after the conclusion of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summit in 2018 in Beijing, there was a groundswell of emotion in Zambia as rumours filtered through that China had commandeered

the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) and the Zambia Electricity Supply Corporation (ZESCO) (Mutale, 2018). Furthermore, there were also rumours that China was in the process of seizing Zambian airports because the Zambian government had failed to pay the debt it owed to China. Indeed, Zambia's relationship with China has been the cynosure of debate in Zambia since the latter part of 2018.

In November of 2018, the Chinese ambassador to Zambia presented a formal complaint to the then Zambian president Edgar Lungu, complaining about what were termed as xenophobic attacks on Chinese nationals by Zambian citizens. This came after Hakainde Hichilema, Zambia's current president, who was at the time the main opposition party leader, allegedly asserted that China had overtaken the state-owned Zambia Forestry and Forestry Industries Corporation (ZAFFICO). Upon hearing this, riots broke out on the Copperbelt province of Zambia, amidst looting of Chinese-owned businesses (*Africa Times*, 2018). Zambian Government officials, including the Vice President, conceded that there was xenophobia against Chinese nationals but that it had been fuelled by "slanderous" utterances from the opposition.

Anti-Chinese sentiment in Zambia is well documented, especially after 2001. In fact, the the Patriotic Front (PF), Zambia's ruling party from 2011 to 2021, is credited with bringing the China–Zambia relationship to the centre of Zambia's political debate. Michael Sata, the founding leader of the PF, launched broadsides at the then ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) and how it had allowed Chinese nationals and the Chinese government to usurp Zambia's economy and threaten its sovereignty. These sentiments were common from 2001 to 2008, after which Sata reduced his emphasis on anti-Chinese sentiment. However, after the PF's accession to power in 2011, economic relations between China and Zambia grew, and so did anti-Chinese sentiment, only that this time, it was coming from opposition political parties, the labour force, and ordinary Zambians who are now stern critics of China–Zambia relations.

Like the MMD before it, the PF was at pains to defend China's economic presence in, and relations with, Zambia. The content of the rhetoric between representatives of the two governments, always teemed with references to a glorious past when China helped Zambia. Furthermore, China has successfully cultivated a picture of a kindred developing state of the South, a non-interfering partner and, like most of the South, a survivor of Western and foreign domination. This construct has appealed to countries that regard Western terms of relations and aid as punitive and interfering in the internal affairs of the global South. In the context of this paper, China in Zambia is regarded as the proverbial wise man from the East, bearing gifts of infrastructure and foreign direct investment while at the same time benefitting from the resources that Zambia is endowed with. The depth of the economic

relations between China and Zambia is shrouded in secrecy but the attitude of the PF government to defend China at all costs suggested an indebtedness that culminated in resignation and expediency on the part of the Zambian government. The ensuing article traces the historical origins of Zambia–China relations from a constructivist perspective.

3. China–Zambia Relations: A Glorious History with Unsettling Contemporary Realities

The celebrated Bandung Conference of 1955 in Indonesia was a watershed moment in the history of Afro-Asian relations. China and India played an important part in setting up the conference. The principles of coexistence that were adopted at the conference were a mere addition to the principles that China and India had previously signed, demonstrating again the pivotal and influential role that China and India played at Bandung. The conference was also an attempt for African and Asian countries to chart their course in the international system, independent of the Cold War belligerents.

At the time the Bandung Conference was convened, most of Africa was under colonial rule. This is an important point to consider because it reinforced the Afro-Asian view of the Western capitalist countries as oppressive. It is thus not surprising that Asian countries, mainly China, were zealous in their support for anti-colonial agitation. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was also an active supporter of countries that sought to end colonialism. The coincidence of communist powers supporting the anti-colonial struggle influenced the ideologies of African countries. Many African countries experimented with socialism and other ideologies (like humanism in Zambia) that were akin to socialism. Furthermore, the Chinese and Soviet largesse hardened the view that capitalism was inherently oppressive and that capitalist powers were loath to end colonialism.

Zambia was one of the African countries that looked askance at the role that Western powers were playing in Africa. Zambia gained independence in 1964 and established formal relations with China five days later. Zambia was one of the first few countries to gain independence in southern Africa. Thus, it was almost automatically saddled with the task of helping contiguous countries to end colonial and settler rule. A number of liberation movements like South Africa's African National Congress (ANC), Zimbabwe's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and Namibia's South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) were based in Zambia. Among the movements that China helped were the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and UNITA. Zambia and China were thus drawn together in their concerted interests in ending foreign domination. China's affinity with Africa was also encouraged by China's fight with Taiwan for

international recognition. Thus, cultivating cordial and politically beneficial relations with Africa could sway Africa towards favouring China as the *de jure* representative of Chinese people, at Taiwan's expense. This feat, China achieved in 1971, with significant support from independent African states. China's material and propaganda support for African's struggle was clearly a major factor in winning African solidarity.

One of the most important and ambitious projects that China undertook was the Tanzania Railway line (TAZARA). The TAZARA was important for a number of reasons. The rationale for the railway line was underlined by the fact that Zambia was dependent on Rhodesia (as Zimbabwe was then called) and South Africa for the conveyance of its exports and imports. However, Zambia's stance on apartheid, colonial and settler rule put it on a collision course with Zimbabwe and South Africa. Thus, Zambia had to circumvent the hostile countries and the idea of a railway line, moving up north, was mooted. Both Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania had approached Western powers to solicit for donations to build the railway but they were turned down. China promptly agreed to sponsor the project. Many years later Levy Mwanawasa, as president of Zambia, would explain deepening relations between China and Africa as a consequence of Western countries' reluctance to come to the aid of Africa. China emphasized the fact that Western countries and the Soviet Union had recoiled from helping Africa to lessen dependency on settler-ruled countries. China argued that the TAZARA "was a support to the African people in their struggles against imperialism, colonialism and for national independence and assist the African countries to develop their national economies and to consolidate their national independence" (Embassy of the PRC in Estonia, 2004).

To this day, the TAZARA stands as a testimony to China's reliability and friendship with Zambia. Kaunda described China and Zambia as "all weather friends." This description meant that the two countries would maintain their stable relations irrespective of changes in the international system. This was somewhat proved when Zambia reverted to multiparty democracy in 1991. Kaunda had broached the possibility of a one-party state as early as 1966. China's identity as a one-party state was similar to Zambia's own from 1972 to 1991. However, with the changes in Zambia's political practice, certain enduring identities and interests in Zambia and China ensured that the two countries maintained cordial relations.

This article argues that identities play a pivotal role in fortifying relations among nations. Intersecting identities and common interests are likely to foster stable relations among nations. Identities that are at variance with each other have the capability of precluding altruistic and mutually beneficial relations among nations. Zambia and China identified each other as survivors of foreign domination that sought to support any country that was under

colonial or settler rule. Thus, their identity resulted in a common interest. Relations between the two countries were historically based on principle.

Some observers (e.g., Carmody and Hampway, 2010) have divided the history of China–Zambia relations into three categories. The first epoch was characterized by solidarity. This was the phase of anti-colonial agitation. The second phase was more characterized by geopolitics. From 1978, China embarked on reforms that saw the country transforming from being a socialist zealot to a more pragmatic power, concentrating on growing the country rather than promoting and exporting socialist revolution as the first priority. The third phase was more inclined towards geoeconomics. Structural adjustment reforms that were prescribed to the developing world by Bretton Woods institutions did not bear the fruit they were ideally supposed to bear. Zambia, in particular, had to contend with an increasingly restive citizenry, after experimenting with structural adjustments by removing subsidies from primary commodities. Economic weakness, the growing popularity of trade unions, the eventual end of the Cold War and the certain collapse of settler rule in Southern Africa forced Kenneth Kaunda to concede that his one-party system, with its socialist-leaning economics, had outlived its usefulness. He was thus forced to return to multiparty politics, and an election was held in 1991 at which Kaunda’s United National Independence Party (UNIP) was resoundingly defeated by Frederick Chiluba’s Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD). The period starting from 1991, wherein Zambia changed its political as well as economic system, had an influence on how Zambia–China relations ensued.

In their current form, relations between China and Zambia have been transformed somewhat. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, China–Zambia realities have a scent of imbalance and impending disaster about them, and the previous Zambian government is largely to blame. There was rife speculation that the PF government was failing to service its public debt. In November 2020, Zambia “defaulted on a US\$42.5 million payment on a Eurobond”, becoming the first country to do so during the scourge of the coronavirus pandemic (Fabricius, 2021). Zambia struggled to secure bailouts and loans from the IMF partly for fear that the country would use the money to service its debt from China. The China Africa Research Institute established that by 2019, Zambia, with Djibouti and the Democratic Republic of Congo, are the only countries in Africa where “Chinese loans account for half or more of the country’s public debt” (Brautigam, 2019). In addition, *Africa Confidential* revealed that the Zambian government raided the “National Pension Scheme Authority (NAPSA), to pay overdue February salaries for public service employees” (*Africa Confidential*, 2019). The report attributed the situation to “the lavish spending and borrowing of President Edgar Lungu’s government” (ibid). The *Lusaka Times* (2019a) also reported that Zambia was failing to

pay Chinese road contractors and that earlier in 2019 China's Exim bank had sent "a delegation to Zambia... to demand overdue payments to Chinese contractors." In characteristic fashion, the then Special Assistant to the Zambian President for Press and Public Relations Amos Chanda, refuted these reports claiming that the reports by *Africa Confidential* were "aimed at killing the Zambian economy by stopping Foreign Direct Investment" (*Lusaka Times*, 2019b).

4. China's State-owned Enterprises in Zambia and the Content and Flow of China-Zambia Exports

One of the most attractive aspects of China's foreign policy is the vow of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. The country undertakes to offer aid and trade relations but has vowed not to dictate or prescribe the way in which its partner-countries choose to run their internal political affairs. It is for this reason, for example, that when Zambia reverted to multiparty politics in 1991 China pledged that its relations with Zambia would continue unabated because Zambia had elected a future for itself with which China would not interfere (Taylor, 2006). Non-interference has found fertile ground in African leaderships, when contrasted to the much-loathed Washington Consensus that has been interpreted as hawkish and hostile to Africa's sovereignty (Aidoo and Hess, 2015). While he was president of Zambia (from 2008 to 2011), Rupiah Banda reacted angrily to the Global Fund and the European Union when they withheld their aid to Zambia citing endemic corruption. Banda inveighed against this decision arguing that the reasons adduced were tantamount to interfering in the internal affairs of sovereign states (*Reuters*, 2010).

As has been said, post-Cold War relations between Zambia and China have mainly been characterized by economic ambition. The political and economic changes that Zambia instituted in 1991 created room for foreign investors to claim stakes in Zambia's economy. This has attracted both state-owned and private Chinese enterprises to venture into Zambia and claim not only investments but massive government tenders. It is noteworthy that, when former Chinese president Hu Jintao visited Zambia in 2007, he announced that China would be building a multi-facility economic zone in Zambia, the first of its kind on the African continent (Kopiński, Polus and Taylor, 2011).

Currently, the most visible Chinese state-owned enterprise in Zambia is the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC). The website of the enterprise states "that AVIC INTL upholds the mission of Go beyond Commerce for a Better World, takes advantage of global network and platform, and actively participates in promoting the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)" (AVIC INTL, 2013). The enterprise has won numerous and lucrative government projects. In October 2019, Zambia's Ministry of Home Affairs

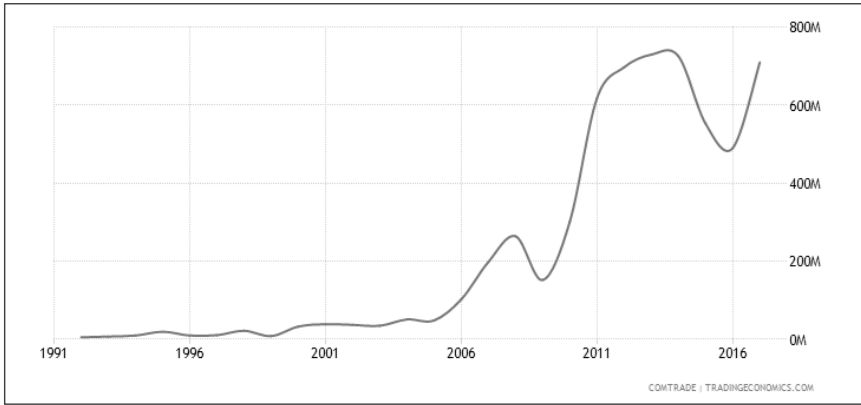
“engaged AVIC International Holding Corporation for the construction of Two Thousand Three Hundred and Fifty Housing Units (2,350) under Phase 1 for the four departments namely Zambia Police Service, Drug Enforcement Commission, Zambia Correctional Service and Immigration” (ZMHA, 2019). Some of AVIC’s biggest contracts in Zambia have been in the aviation sector. In Ndola district, on Zambia’s Copperbelt, AVIC was awarded a contract to build the Copperbelt International Airport, reportedly at the cost of \$397 million revised from \$574 million (*Lusaka Times*, 2019c). It was reported that, at the behest of the government of Zambia, “US\$4.5 million worth of contracts have been given to local Zambian contractors” (*Lusaka Times*, 2018). Together with AVIC, China Jiangxi is another Chinese state-owned that has claimed major infrastructural projects in Zambia. China Jiangxi was appointed to design and construct a new airport structure at the Kenneth Kaunda International Airport (KKIA) in Lusaka, Zambia’s capital. The construction started in April 2015. In 2019, Zambia’s Ministry of Housing and Infrastructure Development (ZMHID) presented a progress report to parliament on the KKIA reminding the house that the contract to China Jianxi was worth \$360 million and that “the funds were provided by the Exim Bank of China through established procedures” (ZMHID, 2019). The minister went on to state that:

With regard to the terms of the loan, I wish to inform the house that the maturity period for the loan facility is 240 months or 20 years with a grace period of 84 months or 7 years while the loan is expected to be repaid within a period of 13 years. Further, the applicable interest rate on the loan is two percent (2%) per annum while the rate applicable for the management fee is 0.25%. Lastly, the rate applicable for the commitment fee is also 0.25% per annum (*ibid*).

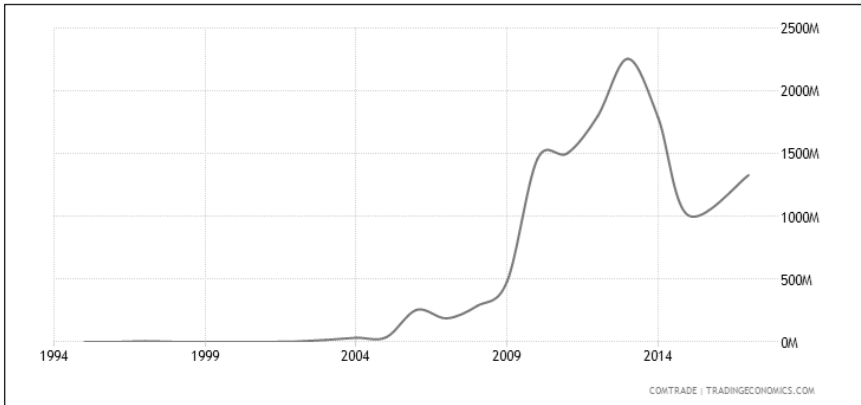
Apart from the aviation industry, China Jiangxi, like AVIC has been awarded tender in other sectors. “The Ministry of Home Affairs engaged China Jiangxi Corporation Limited to construct two five storey and one four storey office blocks at Ridgeway area” (Zambia Ministry of Home Affairs, 2019). From the 1970s (when the TAZARA) was built and the 1980s (when the Mulungushi textile was built), both under the auspices of China, there seemed to have been a hiatus in major Chinese investment in Zambia. That hiatus was somehow represented in the flow and ebb of Chinese imports and exports from Zambia as shown in Graphs 1 and 2.

As could be deduced from the graphs, the 1990s was characterized by marginal exchange by way of exports and imports between Zambia and China. While the new millennium saw a spike in trade, there is a worrying trend in the Zambia–China exports–imports equation that not only represents China’s trade with other African countries but seems to replicate the abhorred trade relationship between Africa and Western trade partners. This trade equation

Graph 1 Chinese Exports to Zambia from 1991 to 2016



Graph 2 Zambian Exports to China



has mainly been characterized by low value goods leaving Africa in exchange for high-end imports (finished products) from outside Africa. Another worry, particularly to Zambia, is the country’s failure to diversify its economy and disentangle itself from its chronic and unsustainable dependency on copper. The year 2017 demonstrated an instructive illustration of the Zambia–China trade imbalance. In that year, Zambia’s exports to China were worth \$1.33 billion with copper accounting for \$1.27 billion (95 per cent), with the second being tobacco at a paltry \$24.34 million (1.8 per cent). In the same year, China’s exports to Zambia were worth \$709.47 million, with electrical and electronic equipment accounting for \$205.09 million (29 per cent) and the second commodity machinery, nuclear reactors and boilers accounting for \$180.46 (25 per cent) showing a reasonable and more diversified distribution of exports than was the case for Zambia (Trade Economics, 2019).

These realities bring into perspective at least two observations: the first is that, in terms of exports and imports relations with China have not substantially changed Zambia's nature of exports and overreliance on copper. Secondly, and more economically ideological, is that China, as a relatively new trade player in Zambia should not carry the blame for the country's struggle to diversify its economy. Where China is reasonably culpable, however, is in the conduct of non-state actors of Chinese extraction who, according to the thesis of this article, are a representation of China to the Zambians that they interact with. State-level interaction should be pitted against non-state level interaction wherein international diplomacy and the tendency to gloss over points of discord do not feature. In other words, analysis on Zambia–China relations should take into cognizance the growing number of Chinese nationals in Zambia and their likely impact on Zambia–China relations. This is the essence of track 2 diplomacy made famous by Joseph V. Montville.

5. The Growing Number of Private Chinese Nationals in Zambia and its Impact

This paper argues that since the end of the Cold War, relations between China and Zambia have been more influenced by economic ambition. In addition to this, current Sino–Zambian interaction has culminated in an exponential increase of Chinese nationals who are coming to Zambia out of their own initiative rather than at the behest of the Chinese government. Zambia, a country endowed with human and natural resources, but with a relatively low population offers better prospects for Chinese nationals. The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) established that word of mouth among Chinese nationals has played a part in increasing the number of Chinese migrants in Zambia. Zambia's longstanding reputation for hospitality, as was the case during the southern African crusade against colonial and settler rule, is another reassuring incentive for those who might want to settle in the country. By 2015, "the number of Chinese nationals entering Zambia... increased by 60 percent since 2009" (Postel, 2015). The Zambian Ministry of Home Affairs put the number of Chinese nationals in Zambia at 20,000 commending them for having "invested about \$5bn in more than 280 business enterprises in mining, manufacturing, agriculture, infrastructure development and resource extraction" (quoted in Mutale, 2018). The trend of Chinese nationals in Zambia suggests that the depth of Chinese investment is proportional to the number of Chinese nationals in Zambia. The real number of Chinese migrants in Zambia is not easy to determine. Even the Migration Policy Institute conceded as much due to Zambia's immigration policies that do not keep strict immigration records of those accompanying a family with a work

or investment visa. In addition, corruption, which leads to illegal and hence undocumented migration and other poor tracking mechanisms, often leads to miscalculations. In the particular case of Zambia, the possibility of opposition political parties and other non-state actors inflating the number of Chinese nationals allegedly residing in Zambia is high due to “increasing levels of anti-Chinese sentiment” (Park, 2009: 3). Due to anti-Chinese sentiment in Zambia, however negligible the number of Chinese migrants might be, it is likely to be exaggerated by a Zambian citizenry whose government has struggled to provide gainful employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for those who seek to occupy the space being occupied by Chinese migrants. However, it also cannot be gainsaid that Chinese migrants whose activities are not regulated might be a threat to Africa–China relations and a blemish on China’s national identity.

The significant role that ordinary Chinese are likely to play in Africa and Zambia was put in a cogent perspective in Howard French’s 2014 book *China’s Second Continent*. In the book Howard argues that while the Chinese government has been adjudged to be a looming threat to Africa’s sovereignty, it is ordinary Chinese who are a bigger threat. He argues that Africa should focus more on the ordinary Chinese rather “than any carefully planned action by the Beijing government to build state power and reinforce national prestige” (French, 2014: 6). The findings made in this research show that there is a paucity of research that looks at China at the state level and ordinary Chinese in Africa as discrete dimensions of the “China in Africa” discourse.

In addition to French’s (2014) book, in *Events over Endeavours: Image of the Chinese in Zambia and Angola*, Jaroslaw Jura, Kaja Kaluzynska and Paulo de Carvalho (2015) also endeavoured to establish the perceptions of non-state actors from Zambia and Angola on the deepening relationship between China and their respective countries. From the time that the two books were written, there has been an escalation of tension between ordinary Zambian citizens and their Chinese counterparts. Up to 2018, the ire that ordinary Zambians held against China was mainly towards ordinary Chinese employers under whom ordinary Zambians work. However, the attacks on Chinese nationals in late 2018, were an expression of Zambian anxiety over fears that China’s state-owned enterprises were usurping Zambian sovereignty through taking over public enterprises from Zambia. The violence that erupted following rumours about ZAFFICO being taken over by a Chinese company forced “an unprecedented number of Chinese nationals” to leave Zambia vowing to return only if the situation had subsided (Mutale, 2018).

Regarding anger that is expressly aimed at Chinese nationals, one reason is the crowding out of potential local entrepreneurial spaces by Chinese merchants. In his book, French (2014) discusses the interactions he had with Chinese nationals who are involved in small and medium enterprises

in Africa. This article, in tandem with French's book, focuses on what Park and Alden (2013) call the 'downstairs' stairs of Africa–China relations, as opposed to the 'upstairs' which pays more attention to state-level politics. It is noteworthy that, during the Cold War, the majority of Chinese nationals coming to Zambia were state agents who had to go back to China at the termination of their contracts. Yoon Jung Park writes that of the estimated 50,000 Chinese workers who were conscripted to build the TAZARA, "almost all of these Chinese workers returned to China after completing their contracts." However, as elsewhere on the African continent, the complex Zambia–China relationship "is manifesting at another level with the rise of Chinese migration and expansion" (Park and Alden, 2013: 643).

Most of the condemnation from ordinary Zambians has been centred on appalling working conditions in Chinese firms and the fact that there is an alarming number of Chinese who come to Zambia to venture into businesses like poultry that could be done by ordinary Zambians. The concern is that this sort sought of 'investment' is predatory in that it does not bring the scarce skills that Zambia needs; it rather crowds out Zambians' small-scale business opportunities. It is arguable that the impression of ordinary Chinese might influence the impression that people will have on the Chinese government. An example of how ordinary citizens could paint a picture of their state is the xenophobic attacks that were visited on foreign nationals in South Africa. African countries opposed to the attacks threatened punitive measures towards South Africa as a state. Those that referred to Africa's solidarity against apartheid before 1994 argued that the South African government had turned against kindred nations that had helped to sustain the struggle against apartheid. The same logic has been used in Zambia to conflate the identities of individual Chinese nationals with state-sponsored Chinese investment in Zambia.

5.1. The Identity Dynamic: A Constructivist Analysis of Sino-Zambian Relations

The ensuing insights will borrow some virtues of constructivism and the importance of track 2 diplomacy in international relations. Constructivism is an international relations approach that departs from the rational school of international relations. According to Alexander Wendt (1995), one of its most celebrated and seminal proponents, constructivism fits under the reflexive school of international relations. Generally speaking the rational school uses theoretical tools that are laced with positivism in their understanding of relations among nations. Reflectivism, on the other hand, opposes the rational school mainly on the grounds that relations among nations are social and hence, the importance of social meaning, ideas, identities and interests are major determinants of the complexion of relations that nations have.

Constructivism is thus an approach that looks at the social dimension of international relations (Checkel, 1998). It argues that nations are not inherently compelled to behave in deterministic ways towards each other. There are ideas that give impetus to the type of relations that nations forge in the international system. This puts constructivism at variance with rationalist theories like rationalism that argue that the primary determinant of international relations is material rather than ideational.

There has been an argument (e.g. see Mapendere, 2005: 66) that since the end of the Cold War, “ideological differences are no longer the major cause of conflict, but rather ethnic identity and the distribution of resources are today’s main sources of violence.” In terms of intrastate ethnic conflicts, Rwanda and Sudan stand as obvious examples. While state actors can and occasionally do play leading roles in inciting non-state actors, lasting harmony cannot be achieved by state-level pronouncements without the buy-in of non-state actors who form the bulwark of actual forces in conflict (Matambo, 2018: 27). The importance of concord among non-state actors is the main thesis of track 2 diplomacy (Montville, 1991). Track 2 diplomacy can be fitted in the constructivist purview of international relations and vice versa. The unifying factor is identity and how it shapes relations among individuals and nations and determines prospects for lasting peace. Put at an interstate level, track 2 diplomacy has been elusive in countries where state actors have failed to cater for citizens. Ordinary citizens, already beset by ethnic cleavages and unfair distribution of state resources find in foreign nationals an outlet of frustration. This argument was presciently and correctly made by Frantz Fanon (1963) when referring to the failure of post-colonial governments to change the colonial edifice and establish an equitable society.

Post-apartheid South Africa is an example where state failure to cater for citizens has led to xenophobic attacks on African migrants who are often accused of usurping opportunities for South African citizens. The case of Zambians against Chinese comes against the backdrop of unemployment rates that are especially bleak for the youth. According to the 2017 Labour Force Survey Reports by Zambia’s Central Statistical Office (2018: ix), in 2017 “The unemployment rate was 12.6 percent. The male unemployment rate was 11.9 percent and that of females was 13.5 percent. The youth unemployment was 17.4 percent. The male youth unemployment rate was 16.2 percent and that of females was 19.1 percent.” In such circumstances, it is expected that those of working age who do not have employment, formal or informal, will grow increasingly restive. Successful Chinese businesses are thus construed as objects of limiting the space for working-age Zambians. Conflict is bound to ensue as unemployed Zambians are daily sharing their space with Chinese entrepreneurs. Thus, while state actors predictably continue to promote an image of China that is non-threatening, their constructions do not resonate

with a frustrated citizenry. It would seem that a lasting solution to conflict among non-state actors would be bolstering opportunities for Zambians by the Zambian government and exacting terms from both non-state actors and state actors from China that are not injurious to Zambia and its citizens.

Former Zambian Foreign Affairs Minister Harry Kalaba reiterated Kaunda's assertion that the Chinese are Zambia's "all weather friends", but went on to say Chinese should bring scarce skills rather than working in settlement areas "doing block making or selling chickens" (Kalaba, 2018). Apart from calling for critical skills from China, the PF government had called for Chinese investors to support Zambian-owned enterprises by deciding that not less than 20 per cent "of all Government-funded road contracts awarded by the Road Development Agency (RDA) and other government institutions must be executed by Zambian-owned companies" (Tembo, 2018). In deference to this, AVIC signed 16 subcontracts worth K52 million (Zambian currency) to local contractors, to build 164km of road as part of the Lusaka 400 Urban Roads (L400) project (Musonda, 2018). By December 2018, Zambia's state broadcaster reported that a total of 54 Zambian companies had "been contracted by AVIC International in its countrywide public infrastructure contracts" (Jere, 2018). The above terms represent a responsible version of agency from the Zambian government as opposed to xenophobic or racist activism which can easily be mistaken for agency.

From the foregoing, China has become essential to Zambia's economy and ambitions of infrastructure development. The importance of China at state level is thus apparent. What has been more fraught to the Zambia–China relationship has been the hostility of Zambian citizens towards Chinese migrants. Allegations of China being a would-be coloniser have been provoked by the uneasy dynamics by unemployed Zambians sharing common spaces with Chinese entrepreneurs. There are also cases of Zambians who work in Chinese-run enterprises under trying circumstances but are forced to do so as the last recourse. This is another site for possible conflict. From the conduct of controversial Chinese employers, an identity of oppression is attributed to China as a state. Therefore, a conflict of China's identity plays out depending on the socio-economic circumstances of Zambians. For the last 56 years, successive Zambian governments have touted China as friend and partner but ordinary Zambians have latterly begun to associate China with an unsavoury identity that arises from interacting with the growing number of Chinese migrants. This paper elides the inclination to blame China for the skewed nature of relations with Zambia, thus partly justifying anti-Chinese sentiment. It rather puts the responsibility on Zambia's failure to diversify its economy and provide opportunities in the formal and informal sectors for its working-age citizens. Thus, the constructions of China's identity could only

be transformed positively when Chinese migrants are not seen as threats to Zambians who have access to economic opportunities.

6. Conclusion

For the last 56 years, Zambia and China have sustained a fascinating relationship mainly characterized by cordiality but the relationship has recently been infested with tension among non-state actors from both countries. During the Cold War, the countries were united by concerted efforts to end colonial and settler rule. The interaction was mainly at the level of state actors and the Chinese citizens who came to Zambia did so at the aegis of their government according to contracts that enjoined them to go back to China once finished. However, the post-Cold War era saw an increase in Chinese investment in Zambia and a proportionate number of Chinese nationals coming to Zambia out of private ambition and volition rather than under auspices of their government. The PF party seized on this emerging trend and relentlessly harried the MMD government for its close relations with China. Michael Sata passionately argued that China's incursions into Zambia had a scent of colonialism about them. However, after coming to power in 2011, the PF retained and increased Chinese involvement in Zambia. This hints at a sense of resignation.

The flurry of attacks on Chinese nationals, especially from 2018 to 2019 were a consequence of rumours, some which were justifiable, that the Zambian government had mortgaged some of its assets as collateral for debt owed to China. In addition, lack of employment and opportunities in Zambia have forced Zambian citizens to scapegoat Chinese entrepreneurs in Zambia. One of the central theses of this paper is that relations, whether at state or non-state level are driven by constructed identities and that these identities often emerge from lived experiences and perception. To ordinary Zambians, China's identity is found in Chinese migrants that interact with ordinary Zambians and reports show that this identity has often been negative. Thus, the paper demonstrated that while track 1 diplomacy (state-level) diplomacy has been very successful in maintaining Zambia–China relations, track 2 diplomacy (non-state level) has not been equally successful and has often attracted the attention of state actors. Zambian governments shoulder the responsibility to change the prevalent circumstances. On 12 August 2021, Zambians held a general election at which they ejected the Patriotic Front out of power and voted in the United Party for National Development (UPND). The UPND condemned how the PF handled both domestic and international affairs. It will be interesting to note how the new ruling government will deal with China, a country that has been blamed for some of the PF's corruption, but still a country that remains almost indispensable to Zambia's economic and debt affairs.

Notes

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