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Sino-Africa Investment:

Examining its Role as a Political Preservation Strategy for African Political Elites

A Thesis in International Relations

by

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Abstract

China's significant involvement in African infrastructure, resource extraction, and trade presents a complex picture for African nations. While these investments create jobs, develop infrastructure and stimulate economic growth, concerns exist regarding their long-term impact and potential for perpetuating dependence on raw materials and unskilled labor. Taking these benefits and disadvantages into consideration, the existing scholarship often frames African acceptance of Chinese investment within a "neocolonial" narrative or emphasizes its perceived indispensability for development. This research proposes a different perspective, shifting the focus from what China is doing “to” or “for” African countries to the role African political elites play in negotiations. Understanding their motivations for accepting Chinese investment is crucial for having a grasp of the socio-economic dynamics of the region. These motivations, shaped by colonial legacies of power and resource control, intersect with Chinese investment to become tools for attaining and retaining power. A case study of Zambia, a major recipient of Chinese investment and a long-standing Chinese ally, will be used to investigate this framework. By examining interactions between elites, investment, and elections, this study aims to reveal how Chinese investment can be used by African political elites for political preservation purposes.

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I. Introduction

Once anchored in shared struggles for freedom and anti-colonialism, the relationship between Africa and China underwent a dramatic metamorphosis in the 1990s. This pivotal shift, triggered by Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, saw the emergence of a multifaceted partnership encompassing trade, cultural exchange, and strategic interests (Hanauer et al. 2014: 20). Driven by projects like the Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese involvement in Africa surged, with the financing and constructing of infrastructure, mining projects, and various commercial ventures across over 40 African countries (Taylor & Zajontz 2020: 7). For China, forging ties with African nations secures stable access to natural resources, establishes a marketplace for Chinese labor and goods, and cultivates a robust network of allies, furthering its global interests and influence. Conversely, such investments yield job opportunities, infrastructural development, and economic growth for African nations. Nevertheless, while these investments offer advantages, they also perpetuate the region's dependence on raw materials and unskilled labor, contribute to mounting debt burdens, and foster conditions conducive for corruption (Hanauer et al., 2014: 45). This negatively affects the economies of the countries in the region and raises concerns about the long-term impact of Chinese economic investment on the countries' development trajectory.

While national prosperity hinges on an intricate web of factors, delving into the rationales behind politicians' decision-making processes is crucial for understanding the socioeconomic realities of nations. In African countries, analyzing the impact of Chinese investment demands turning to the political elite. Their influence within society and their role as negotiators for their people make them key players in shaping Sino-African investment terms. This research delves into the "why" behind their acceptance. It argues, firstly, that African leaders primarily utilize

Chinese economic investment as a tool for securing and maintaining political power, prioritizing regime stability over long-term development goals. Secondly, it contends that historical colonial legacies have shaped the power dynamics within African societies, making corruption and nepotism appear as viable strategies for leaders seeking to consolidate their power base.

Before delving deeper, establishing a solid foundation is crucial. This requires briefly examining the historical context and the nature of Sino-African investment. This will shed light on China's extensive investments in Africa and prompt us to analyze the motivations behind African leaders' acceptance of these investments. Does necessity drive them, or is this a "neo-colonial" relationship? This paper argues that an often-overlooked factor is the personal motivations of individual leaders. When these motivations, shaped by colonial legacies of power and resource control rather than a drive for progress, intersect with Chinese investment, a perfect avenue emerges for leaders to use these investments as a strategy to gain and retain power. To investigate this theoretical framework, a case study will be conducted on Zambia. With its long-standing relationship with China since independence in 1964 and its status as the third-largest recipient of Chinese non-oil investments in Africa, Zambia is the perfect country to examine (Anders et al. 2009: 118). By examining the interactions between Zambian political elites, Chinese investment, and other forms of foreign investment, particularly in the context of elections and maintaining power, we can gain valuable insights. Our aim is to move beyond simplistic narratives of "neo-colonialism" or necessity and understand how Chinese investment can function as a tool for political preservation.

II. Historical Context and Nature of Sino-African Relationship

Before the 1990s, China promoted the formation of diplomatic relationships with independent African states. This entailed creating strong political alliances with ideologically similar African governments and also offering backing for African liberation movements that sought to overthrow colonial authorities (Oqubay et al. 2019: 63; Hanauer et al. 2014: 19; Mohan & Power 2008: 28). Beginning with Algeria's Front de Libération Nationale in 1954, China supported revolutionary groups across Africa who were working to end colonialism by force. Proving the success of this support and the struggle for independence by African freedom fighters, by 1965, at least 29 African colonies had gotten their independence (Yu, 1977: 97). With more African countries becoming independent, there was an increasing African presence in the United Nations. This was beneficial for China because it sought to replace the Republic of China on the UN Security Council. By capitalizing on its already-established relationship with African nations and by making several friendly visits to multiple countries in the region, China was admitted to the UN in 1971 and replaced the Republic of China on the Security Council, thanks to the support of twenty-six African nations (Oqubay et al., 2019: 67).

Following China's global political victory, it revitalized its relationship with Africa, reemerged as a significant actor on the continent, and began collaborating more closely with African governments, regardless of their political affiliation. China established that its foreign aid policies with African and Arab countries would be based on "equality, mutual interest, and non-interference" (Hanauer et al. 2014:19). These assertions underpin China's present focus on building relationships with African nations devoid of political conditionalities or interference in their internal affairs. This period was also when China undertook its first and largest initiative in Africa: the construction of a massive railroad, which cost over US$600 million, between the port of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and the copper resources of Zambia (Mohan & Power 2008: 29). However, this was the calm before the storm, because as Mao Zedong's regime drew to an end, China faced devastating earthquakes and a variety of economic and political challenges.

Necessitated by these domestic issues, Deng's reform era prioritized modernization and economic growth (Oqubay et al. 2019: 69). Under this new Chinese economic development model, the economy was predominantly structured and driven by exports (Lumumba-Kasongo 2011: 248; Mohan & Power 2008: 27). This industrial expansion brought about an increased demand for natural resources, leading to China's heightened interest in the resource-rich African region. Given their pre-existing relationship and the mutual understanding that China could provide African countries with necessary investment and infrastructure development, China aggressively pursued various raw materials in Sub-Saharan Africa, including petroleum, timber, cobalt, platinum, copper, and diamonds. This trade-focused approach solidified Chinese-African relations, making trade and investment the primary drivers of their interaction (Hanauer et al., 2014: 26).

In contemporary times, this trend continues, with Chinese ventures spanning the continent. However, a distinct pattern has emerged: the majority of Chinese infrastructure funding now converges upon resource-rich nations like South Africa, Sudan, Nigeria, Angola, and South Sudan (Hanauer et al. 2014: 31; Lumumba-Kasongo 2011: 254; Liang 2012: 671). With relations built primarily on resource extraction, China has emerged as a dominant market for African exports. From copper investments in Zambia to platinum in Zimbabwe and fishing ventures in Gabon, natural resources make up roughly 90% of African exports to China (Liang 2012: 671; Thrall 2015: 27). This is further exemplified by the 'Angola model deal structure,' where infrastructure loans are repaid with future resource revenue (Hanauer et al. 2014: 31, 53). While this model creates trade surpluses for resource-rich nations, it disadvantages those lacking valuable raw materials. Since trade with China expanded, over 30 African countries have accumulated significant trade deficits. This has caused a multitude of issues, including capital outflows, competition for domestic manufacturers, and job losses in non-competitive industries (Thrall 2015: 27; Hanauer et al. 2014: 31).

In addition, despite China's reputation for low-interest, no-strings-attached loans and infrastructure-building investment incentives, its aid always comes with stipulations benefitting Beijing. A staggering ninety-five percent of Chinese aid to Africa requires using much of it for Chinese goods and labor (Lumumba-Kasongo 2011: 257-8). The China Exim Bank, for example, mandates at least fifty percent Chinese procurement for projects (Hanauer et al. 2014: 38). This not only displaces African industries and labor but also extends to informal sectors, with reports of Chinese merchants entering areas traditionally dominated by Africans (Lumumba-Kasongo 2011: 260). This, coupled with the influx of cheaper Chinese imports, has resulted in hundreds of thousands of job losses in African manufacturing, particularly textiles. Some sources even argue that Chinese merchants have penetrated retail markets at unprecedented levels (Hanauer et al. 2014: 70). In Uganda, for instance, the Kampala City Traders' Association protested against Chinese traders for dumping sub-standard goods, repatriating profits, exacerbating unemployment, and evading tax (Mohan & Power 2008: 33).

Given these conditions and based on our understanding of this historical background, it is easy to understand why China is so willing to lend to African nations without any restraints. However, the key question explored in this research is why African leaders are willing to accept these terms. To delve deeper, it is crucial to examine the explanations offered by other scholars regarding the motivations of African leaders in accepting Chinese investment.

III. Neocolonialism or Necessity?

A logical starting point would involve examining the argument that African leaders have no choice but to accept Chinese investment. This argument presents two perspectives. On one hand, some believe that African leaders have no alternative due to China’s dominant, neocolonial influence over African nations, leading to the exploitation of the region. On the other hand, others argue that African leaders have no alternative because China's contributions to African economies are too substantial to disregard. Both viewpoints are commonly cited as explanations for why African leaders accept Chinese investment, and they warrant further exploration in this section of the paper.

Proponents of the neocolonial perspective contend that the Sino-African relationship is inherently unbalanced, with China holding the reins and African states possessing minimal leverage (Links 2021: 124-25). They argue that despite the narrative of a 'win-win' partnership, China is the primary beneficiary, thanks to embedded mechanisms that perpetuate its dominant position (Lumumba-Kasongo 2011: 262). Considered a politically and economically savvy nation, China is perceived as adept at exploiting global opportunities to advance its interests, which have historically depended significantly on African resources and support. Furthermore, critics contend that the primary difference between past European/American colonialism and China's approach lies in its "deceptive language of South-South relations" (Lumumba-Kasongo 2011: 261). They assert that this rhetoric, combined with the characteristics and conditions of the investment, enables China to infiltrate African societies and establish uneven partnerships that pave the way for neo-imperialism to emerge. Consequently, African societies and economies find themselves increasingly dependent, controlled, and exploited by China. This perceived lack of agency, as noted by Link, results in an “inability to 'steer' relations” effectively and to adequately “counteract any potential adverse repercussions” (Links 2021: 124). Notably, such concerns are not limited to academia but extend to renowned African leaders like Thabo Mbeki and Lamido Sanusi, who liken the Sino-African dynamic to a "second scramble for Africa" and "neo-colonialism." Sanusi aptly encapsulates this view: “China takes our primary goods and sells us manufactured ones. This was also the essence of colonialism. . . . Africa is now willingly opening itself up to a new form of imperialism” (Hanauer et al., 2014: 58).

While this paper does not delve into the accuracy of every argument regarding China's involvement in Africa, it invites reconsideration of one specific interpretation: the discourse's portrayal of Africa's role within Chinese investment. This viewpoint overlooks the agency of African actors, equating agency solely with material power and positioning China as the sole unitary actor with actual influence (Links 2021: 124-25). It is imperative to acknowledge that African actors are more than just passive recipients of Chinese initiatives. Evidence indicates that various African actors, from governmental bodies to small-scale entrepreneurs, actively influence their engagements with Chinese investment, seeking to steer these interactions towards outcomes that align with their interests (Malm 2020: 3). Particularly, African political leadership significantly influences the outcomes of such investments. As a British specialist aptly observed: “China is not listening to the African people's wills; it is listening to African elites’ will” (Sautman & Hairong, 2009: 734). This sentiment resonates with the argument that China's potential neo-colonialist or imperialist presence in Africa hinges on the willingness and collaboration of African political forces (Lumumba-Kasongo 2011: 263). Ultimately, the leaders of African states hold the primary responsibility for guiding their nation's interests, including determining the benefits or drawbacks of trade with China (Bruce & Smith 2011: 26; Jauch, 2011: 55). Therefore, arguments suggesting that China deceives African governments with debt burdens fail to acknowledge the awareness of these obligations within African nations (Were 2018: 8)

Having examined the limitations of the neocolonial perspective, we can now acknowledge the active role African nations play in shaping Chinese economic investment. Recognizing that African leaders possess choice and navigate complex decisions beyond the constraints of a neocolonial narrative, we can now turn to the next central argument explaining their acceptance of Chinese economic investment: its perceived indispensability to their economies. Proponents of China's invaluable contributions argue that African nations cannot afford to forego their substantial impact on the continent's economies (Hanauer et al. 2014: 59). These contributions manifest in various ways.

First and foremost, Chinese investment addresses a critical development gap, focusing on long-term investments and aid in sectors that Western aid agencies and private investors have neglected for decades, such as infrastructure, industry, and agriculture (Liang 2012: 678; Hanauer et al. 2014: 45; Schoeman 2008: 407). This development-first model prioritizes constructing and renovating vital infrastructure like highways and railways, establishing export processing zones, supplying equipment, and developing national industrial bases to enhance African extractive and manufacturing capabilities (Rotberg 2008: 1-2). Chinese aid further extends to generous professional development programs, scholarship offerings, and infrastructure projects like the Cairo International Conference Center, the Belet Uen-Burao Highway in Somalia, and the Friendship Harbor in Mauritania (Liang 2012: 679). To a large extent, Chinese trade and investment have created jobs, established long-overdue infrastructure, and boosted African economic growth. In April 2013, China's Foreign Ministry assessed that Chinese aid and investment directly led African economies to grow by more than 20 percent since 2000 (Hanauer et al. 2014: 48).

Secondly, not only does China contribute through trade and investment, but it does so without the typical economic and political conditionalities of the West, making it the kind of non-intrusive partner African leaders value (Hanauer et al. 2014: 57; Tull 2006: 463; Lumumba-Kasongo 2011: 255). This manifests as reduced pressure on recipient countries to conform to specific governance models or human rights standards, which some perceive as Western impositions on their sovereignty. As previously noted, China has historically emphasized equality and mutual respect in its engagements with African countries. This renders Chinese investment more attractive than Western counterparts. Thirdly, China's development assistance takes a unique form, with a significant portion offered as soft loans. These particularly appeal to African nations facing fiscal constraints, providing readily accessible financing with favorable interest rates and repayment terms. Also, in regards to repayment specifically, China's willingness to offer debt cancellation in cases of repayment difficulty solidifies its reputation as a preferred lender (Liang 679; Tull 2006: 469). A prime example is the partial or complete cancellation of Zambian loans (Tull 2006: 463). Lastly, China serves as a model of development success that gives African countries hope. Its rapid transformation from a developing nation to a global economic powerhouse, achieved despite a history of colonialism, resonates with many African leaders who see parallels in their own struggles. This perceived shared experience fosters a sense of solidarity and encourages African nations to view China as a potential partner in replicating its development model (Liang 2012: 669; Hanauer et al. 2014: 60; Schoeman, 2008: 410)

While the aforementioned factors undoubtedly contribute to the appeal of Chinese investment for African leaders, they only paint a partial picture. As academic experts remind us, the personal motivations of those directly negotiating these terms often carry significant weight in the realm of politics, potentially outweighing national interest, the common good, and general welfare (Bruce & Smith 2011: 21). That is the reason why this research paper focuses its analysis on the individual motivations of the African political elite. As adept navigators of the international system, these leaders significantly influence how their states' interests are shaped and expressed (Brown 2012: 1892, 1897). While national interests are seemingly paramount, political actors operate within a complex web of influences, and personal motivations often intertwine with their official duties. This sometimes manifests in reordered policy priorities to fulfill individual needs or the discreet selection of development projects with inflated costs and little to no development value (Khalil Timamy 2005: 386). Regardless of the method, these actions primarily benefit the political leader financially or politically, allowing them to enrich themselves or solidify their hold on power. Notably, Khalil Timamy suggests that in especially corrupt regimes, personal enrichment is often secondary to the primary motivation for graft: maintaining political office (Khalil Timamy 2005: 383-384). Practices of patronage and patrimonialism then become tools for securing and solidifying this unassailable control. The state itself then becomes the central medium used by rulers to pursue unspoken agendas, promote narrow developmental goals, and achieve desired political continuity (Khalil Timamy 2005: 384). This research paper posits a similar dynamic: African political leaders accept Chinese investment to further their own political agendas and ensure their continued hold on power. At this juncture, analyzing Chinese investment as a strategy for political preservation appears self-evident. However, this paper will initially address the question of "why". It will explore the rationale behind the imperative felt by African political leaders to safeguard their ongoing political dominance, to the extent that they leverage state apparatuses, interstate relations, and resources meant for the state. This will allow us to have a deeper understanding of political preservation within the African context, as well as the role that Chinese investment serves as a strategic component thereof.

IV. The Legacy of Power over Progress

While Khalil Timamy notes that “political leaders are not born thieves,” he argues that their "kleptomaniac tendencies" stem from a need for self-preservation and the pressure to satisfy loyalists and tribal communities (Khalil Timamy 2005: 391). This perspective suggests that, beyond mere greed or corruption, some political leaders engage in the appropriation of state resources as a perceived necessity to secure their political longevity. This perceived need could stem from various motivations, ranging from the desire to implement policies they believe beneficial to the country to the pursuit of personal agendas that may not align with national interests. However, the question remains: what are the root causes of this self-preservation imperative and the need to appease specific groups? Do these needs exist in a vacuum, or can they be traced back to historical events that shifted the primary purpose of government from serving the state and its people to catering to individual interests? Brown argues that the things leaders do are influenced by the power dynamics between them and the people they govern (Brown 2012: 1901). These dynamics, in turn, are profoundly influenced by the historical context of the political system's formation, state development processes, internal social and political reforms, and the integration history into the international system following the departure of colonial powers.

In the African context, a compelling argument exists that remnants of corrupt practices from the colonial era remain embedded within post-colonial leadership structures (Mulinge & Lesetedi 1998: 19). In other words, to understand the presence of corrupt practices within the African political system, we need to look to the colonial era. This proposition, however, does not deny the potential pre-colonial existence of such practices. Rather, it emphasizes the striking parallels between the resource appropriation methods employed by colonial administrations – particularly British ones – and those utilized by contemporary African leaders.

In the British colonies, for instance, to advance their economic interests and weaken independence movements, the British colonial masters co-opted “cheap African labor” in the form of local African leaders and chiefs (Mulinge & Lesetedi 1998: 19, 21). Many colonial administrations implemented compulsory taxation to meet the administration costs and generate revenue within their colonies. Relying on local African leadership to collect these levies, colonial authorities incentivized chiefs by letting them retain a portion of the collected taxes (Mulinge & Lesetedi 1998: 19). This practice aimed to motivate higher tax collection but inadvertently sowed the seeds of potential corruption by aligning personal gain with “state duties.” Similarly, during the wave of independence movements across Africa in the 1950s, some colonial governments sought to weaken the movements by cultivating collaborators, primarily local chiefs (Mulinge & Lesetedi 1998: 20). These individuals were offered monetary rewards or other incentives to divide the ranks of freedom fighters and betray them to the colonial authorities, further entrenching corrupt practices. There was also the system of ‘divide and rule,’ particularly prevalent in British colonies, whereby colonial authorities deliberately favored one tribe over others. This tribe would enjoy a privileged status in the colonial administration; it would have easy access to Western (missionary) education, as well as government-sponsored economic opportunities (Mulinge & Lesetedi 1998: 20). This strategy served a dual purpose: securing the loyalty of a chosen group to the colonial administration while stirring up rivalry between different tribes (Mulinge & Lesetedi 1998: 19). By preventing the development of a unified sense of identity, the colonial authorities aimed to mitigate the threat posed by potential collective resistance. This strategy, however, inadvertently laid the groundwork for the perpetuation of "ethnocentric favoritism and nepotism" in the post-colonial era (Mulinge & Lesetedi 1998: 20).

Upon gaining independence, African political and administrative elites, cognizant of the perceived political and economic advantages associated with patronage and nepotism, replicated the "colonial chief" model of administration within their newly formed states (Mulinge & Lesetedi 1998: 22; Khalil Timamy 2005: 385). This continuity, whether intentional or arising from established power structures, perpetuated patterns of corruption and unequal resource distribution. New leaders began to misappropriate public resources (Khalil Timamy 2005: 385; Adibe 2010: 1248-1249). This practice shifted the focus of governance from public service to the enrichment of a select few. Political actors prioritized the advancement of their interests, those of their immediate family, and members of their tribe.

Furthermore, they manipulated the newly established state institutions to facilitate their engagement in corrupt activities (Mulinge & Lesetedi 1998: 22-25). Important to note as well, there was an expansion of the economic role of the state, and this centralization of economic decision-making provided fertile ground for corruption. Public enterprises became lucrative assets for political and bureaucratic elites. This transition towards a self-serving governance model marked a significant departure from the principles of promoting the public good and fostering equitable development. It also exposed that despite attaining self-determination and the freedom to choose a path for their people, African political and bureaucratic elites opted for a system rife with negative consequences for their societies. This also manifested itself in the competition for political power within states. It set a precedent wherein personal survival and political continuity became contingent upon possessing significant financial resources substantial enough to mitigate challenges posed by detractors or adversaries (Khalil Timamy 2005: 392). In other words, accumulating substantial financial resources became a critical strategy for ensuring political untouchability and enhancing the likelihood of retaining power. This financial armor does not only serve as a shield against political opponents, though. It also serves as a means to cultivate and retain the support of key allies, ensuring their loyalty during future elections (Khalil Timamy 2005: 391; Bruce & Smith 2011).

Through the lens of the aforementioned analysis, it becomes apparent how Chinese economic investment, with its characteristically low-interest rates, "no-strings-attached" loans, and limited public transparency requirements, presents fertile ground for African political leaders to utilize as a potential strategy for political preservation. In Cameroon, when respondents were asked who benefited the most from the Chinese-Cameroonian economic relationship, seventy percent said the government mainly through China's grants, and thirty percent said the poor, mainly through affordable Chinese goods (Sautman & Hairong, 2009: 733). And as we know, what works for those at the top typically operates against those at the bottom (Bruce & Smith 2011: 21). The following section will carry out an analysis of Chinese economic investment as a political preservation strategy wielded by African political leaders.

V. Chinese Investment as a Political Preservation Strategy

As previously mentioned, beyond filling critical development gaps neglected by the West, Chinese aid appeals to African leaders because of its non-intrusive nature and lack of bureaucratic hurdles, which would otherwise entail prolonged planning and oversight. While this flexibility facilitates economic growth, it also creates fertile ground for corruption. As African leaders hold authority over the allocation of public funds and the utilization of state resources, they can freely accept and utilize aid and investment as their own political tools. This involves using secured 'off-the-books' funding from their countries' natural resources and also capitalizing on the prevalence of "under-the-table" practices during negotiations with Chinese firms (Hodzi, 2017: 200; Bruce & Smith 2011: 147; Schoeman, 2008: 408). All of these exacerbate corruption and reduce the likelihood of funds being allocated for developmental purposes (Hanauer et al. 2014: 50). Subsequently, these resources – Chinese aid, investment, and natural resource revenue – are strategically deployed to achieve various political objectives. Opposition leaders leverage them to ascend to power, while incumbents employ them to satisfy loyalists, secure vital constituencies, and resist domestic and international challenges. While the effectiveness of these strategies varies across governing systems, they demonstrably contribute to securing political success and ensuring longevity in office.

For an African leader aspiring to transition from opposition to head of state, Chinese investment presents a potentially lucrative avenue, albeit one fundamentally distinct from the incumbent's approach. Given that the perceptions of the average African regarding China are significantly shaped by their encounters and exposure to Chinese economic and commercial activities, discontent inevitably arises when individuals face job displacement, endure harsh working conditions, receive minimal compensation, or are forced to close their businesses (Hanauer et al. 2014: 61). Importantly, this discontent becomes more pronounced when a prominent political figure within the society, equipped with the means to effect change, highlights these issues. As asserted by Sautman and Hairong, negative reactions to specific aspects of the Chinese presence, such as business competition or labor relations, may be observed among segments of the population, but a generalized 'Chinese problem' does not arise until politicians decide to create it (Sautman & Hairong, 2009: 730). And they "create" such issues based on the internal political advantages that may be gained by emphasizing the "Chinese problem." Opposition leaders in African nations capitalize on the adverse effects of Chinese investment to radicalize voters in their favor. Since the average African bears the brunt of poor labor conditions, as well as labor and land expropriation, when these issues become prominent in elections, citizens are motivated by opposition leaders to take action at the polls (Antwi-Boateng, 2017: 188). Consider the case of Nelson Chamisa, leader of Zimbabwe's Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), during the first post-Mugabe elections. Framing China as an "asset-stripper" exploiting national resources, Chamisa vowed to renegotiate unfavorable contracts upon assuming office (Batty 2019: 159). While unsuccessful in his election bid, his rhetoric is a prime example of opposition figures employing anti-Chinese sentiment for political gain. Notably, this approach often undergoes a dramatic switch once power is secured, as was seen in the case of Sierra Leone's SLPP opposition party.

While campaigning, the SLPP adopted a fervent anti-China stance (Batty 2019: 160). However, upon assuming office, China became one of the primary destinations for the newly elected SLPP President, Maada Bio, who sought to explore new avenues for trade and commercial investments (Batty, 2019: 160). A similar scenario unfolded in Zambia, the focus of this research's case study (Sautman & Hairong, 2009: 730). Leveraging anti-Chinese rhetoric as a pivotal element of his opposition strategy to secure office, Michael Sata reportedly declared: "We want the Chinese to leave and the old colonial rulers to return; Zambia has become a province of China…the Chinese are the most unpopular people in the country because no one trusts them. The Chinaman is coming just to invade and exploit Africa" (Batty 2019: 160). Despite his inflammatory statements, Sata's 2011 election victory was followed by a swift normalization of relations with China, including increased investment pursuits (Kragelund & Carmody, 2015: 12; Hanauer et al., 2014: 59). While the relationship between Zambia and the Chinese will be examined in greater detail in the case study presented in this paper, Sata's response, as well as those of Bio and Chamisa, underscore the dual function of Chinese investment as both a means to attain and retain political power.

In the realm of retaining political power, African political leaders strategically leverage Chinese aid and investment to appease their loyalists and allies, thereby ensuring continued support and allegiance. This typically entails diverting funds intended for national development towards the private enrichment of a select group of supporters who hold significant sway in bolstering the leader's grip on authority and influence (Bruce & Smith 2011: 90). This core group may comprise party officials, business associates, and other influential individuals, thereby establishing a patronage network where political backing is rewarded with financial benefits, often at the expense of the wider populace. The Democratic Republic of Congo's 2007 agreement with China for a $6 billion mining and infrastructure project serves as a stark illustration. Negotiated in secrecy and excluding relevant government ministries, the deal involved individuals with close ties to the president who held no official government roles (Hanauer et al., 2014: 46). Shortly before receiving a large signing bonus from the Chinese, a parliamentary inquiry in the Democratic Republic of Congo revealed that the state mining company had transferred $24 million to an offshore bank account. Another example depicting this kind of corruption can be found in Ethiopia, where floods left hundreds of Ethiopians homeless. In the aftermath of this catastrophe, China pledged $4 million to build housing for displaced families. However, once construction was completed, the Ethiopian government transferred the eight apartment buildings to the Ministry of Defense—a key support base—for use as military housing (Hanauer et al., 2014: 54). These two scenarios exemplify a type of corruption where public funds earmarked for specific public use are diverted towards enriching loyalists and allies, fostering continued political support. Such misappropriation undermines the intended purpose of these resources and raises concerns about transparency and accountability in governance.

Another method by which African political leaders employ Chinese investment as a strategy for political preservation is by utilizing infrastructure projects to appease key constituencies. Often prioritizing short-term political gains over long-term economic sustainability, leaders tend to approve high-profile infrastructure projects financed by China, regardless of their long-term viability or cost-effectiveness (Bruce & Smith, 2011: 90; Hanauer et al., 2014: 52; Tull, 2006: 467). By doing so, they position themselves to claim credit for project completion and garner crucial support from those constituencies whose backing is vital for their continued stay in power. A notable example is the implementation of vanity projects by African leaders. Among such projects are (Hanauer et al., 2014: 52-53): soccer stadiums in Cameroon, Mozambique, Tanzania, Malawi, Ghana, Angola, Zambia, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Gabon; parliament buildings in the Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Sierra Leone, Mozambique and Malawi; presidential palaces in Burundi, Togo, Sudan, Guinea-Bissau, and Angola; and airports in Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Mauritius and the Republic of Congo. While these projects may provide political advancement opportunities for the African elite, they often lack essential long-term sustainability measures that would render them beneficial for the broader African populace. So, oftentimes, though these projects often create an initial impression of development with their visible infrastructure advancements, a closer examination reveals a more nuanced picture. Widespread poverty, persistent health issues, and low living standards coexist with the gleaming new infrastructure, often raising questions about the projects' overall effectiveness in addressing the needs of the majority.

In discussing the utilization of Chinese investment by African political leaders, it is also imperative to highlight its specific application by non-democratic regimes. Unlike Western aid packages often contingent upon human rights and democratic reforms, Chinese investment lacks such political conditionalities. This allows China to readily engage in mining activities, supply weapons, and provide military equipment to countries like Sudan, Zimbabwe, and others, regardless of their human rights records (Rotberg, 2008: 291; Batty, 2019: 158). Such investments serve as crucial lifelines, bolstering the longevity of these non-democratic governments. Consider Sudan, which received $143 million worth of heavy weapons and small arms from China between 2001 and 2009, along with assistance in establishing indigenous weapons factories. This transpired during the horrific period of government-backed militia violence against civilians in Darfur (Hanauer et al., 2014: 46). Similarly, despite documented instances of the Zimbabwean government under President Robert Mugabe using armed forces to suppress political opposition, China supplied the regime with fighter jets, heavy military vehicles, and military communication equipment (Hanauer et al., 2014: 46). Notably, until his removal from office in 2017, Mugabe weathered international isolation by leveraging billions of dollars in Chinese investments within Zimbabwe (Batty, 2019: 159).

All of these examples have helped illuminate the diverse methods through which African political leaders leverage Chinese investment as a strategy for political preservation. Building upon these insights, this paper seeks to delve deeper by conducting a focused case study of Zambia, a country in Southern Africa that has had a long-standing and unique relationship with China since 1964, when it gained its independence. Through a comprehensive analysis of its political elite and the historical struggles over state resources, we aim to gain a nuanced understanding of how the strategy of political preservation through resource control ebbs and flows within this specific national context.

VI. The Zambian Case

The political landscape in Zambia unfolds as a captivating story about the constant push and pull between those who hold control of state resources and those vying for control. This struggle for dominance is fueled by a fundamental truth: wielding state resources translates to power (Szeftel 1982: 7). And with such power at stake, there is a natural incentive to leverage state resources to maintain political authority and influence. This is why Zambia's context provides an excellent case study for this research. In the forthcoming analysis, this paper will explore how political preservation manifests in Zambia and how Chinese investment serves as a tool for those seeking to retain power. But to fully understand this, it is crucial to delve into Zambia's historical context, specifically its experience during colonialism and emerging from colonialism. As established earlier, colonial practices often have long-lasting impacts on political and economic governance, and British rule in Zambia is no exception.

A. The Legacy of 'Colonial Patrimonialism' in Zambia

In 1924, Northern Rhodesia (present-day Zambia) transitioned from British South Africa Company control to being a British protectorate (Scarritt 1971: 32). Subsequently, a copper mining industry was established in the country and became the primary attraction for European settlers. However, the colonial state's control of resources was oppressive and exploitative, primarily serving the interests of settler capitalists and multinational corporations, specifically in copper mining (Szeftel 1982: 6). This meant that there was little to no consideration for the welfare or economic empowerment of the local Zambian population, and this led to significant wealth and opportunity disparities (Szeftel 1982: 6). While some Zambians found work in the mines and on European farms, the majority remained in the rural areas under the official control of Native Authorities established through British indirect rule (Scarritt 1971: 32). Multinational corporations and settler capitalists barred entry into the private sector, and limited economic participation became the norm for the average Zambian. Unsurprisingly, though, this reality led to the emergence of nationalist movements that demanded greater involvement of Zambians in political and economic processes. This would put more resources in the hands of the Zambians, address the issue of deprivation, and provide avenues for upward mobility. This is the context in which parties like the African National Congress (ANC) and the United National Independence Party (UNIP) were formed (Scarritt 1971: 33). Through organized efforts, they fought for Zambian independence, and by October 1964, their efforts bore fruit when Northern Rhodesia became the independent nation of Zambia.

However, with the exploitative practices of the colonial state and the dire circumstances that characterized the colonial period, a precedent had already been set for the post-colonial state. The state became important for what it could do and what could be done with it (Szeftel 1982: 6; Szeftel 2000: 209). It wasn't just viewed as a governing body; it was now viewed as a treasure trove of resources that could be used to attain private benefits and upward mobility–an opportunity the colonial state denied. And that is when boundaries started to blur between the public and the private realms in newly independent Zambia (Phiri 2020: 108; Soest 2007: 622-24). It started a trend that would persist for years to come, one that the emerging Zambian political elite would actively perpetuate.

At this juncture, it is imperative to clarify the term 'Zambian political elite' referenced in this paper. Following independence, the political elite gained significant influence in Zambian society, enabling them to secure prestigious and financially rewarding government jobs (Scarritt 1971: 33-34; Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 130). Typically, the elite comprises members of the National Assembly, top civil servants, and even some influential party leaders who may not officially hold government positions. However, by virtue of holding such highly coveted positions in society, they became privy to conflict and opposition to their status in society. Hinfelaar and Achberger describe this as elite insecurity, whereby ruling politicians are constantly in fear of being ousted (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 130; Szeftel 1982: 7). While this is a measure that fosters accountability in governance, it took on such an intensity in Zambia that politicians operated myopically, often to the long-term detriment of the country (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 130).

For this reason, instead of working towards solving everyday problems, the focus shifted to organizing and promoting ideas, all in an effort to secure and hold onto positions of power (Scarritt 1971: 35; Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 131). This relentless pursuit of political preservation became imperative for Zambian politics. To maintain control of society, the political elite heavily relied on state resources and the substantial financial rewards associated with their positions. Rather than working for the public good, they used state resources to maintain their political support base (Soest 2007: 622). And it is precisely this phenomenon that this case study seeks to explore across various presidential administrations and pivotal moments in Zambian history. The first period to be explored is the early years of Zambia's independence, specifically the 27-year rule of Kenneth Kaunda (1964-1991). By examining different periods of Zambia's history, this case study seeks to draw a connection between the use of state resources for political preservation purposes and the comparable patterns observed in the utilization of Chinese investment.

B. Post-Colonial Zambia: Patrimonialism as a Political Preservation Strategy

After attaining its independence, a major focus of the Zambian political elite was responding to the resource demands of key supporters, particularly in alleviating economic hardships. Having inherited a copper-reliant economy from the colonial era, former President Kenneth Kaunda sought to maintain economic stability by reassuring foreign mining investors that his administration would not nationalize the mining sector (Szeftel 1982: 6). This stance brought considerable gains. As copper prices boomed, revenue from mining taxes increased, and the wages of average workers rose. Fueled by copper revenue, the government was able to make investments in education, urban social welfare, health, and infrastructure. This improved the living standards of the population and provided essential services to Zambians (Szeftel 1982: 6). It also appealed to the government's supporters and put Zambia on a stable growth trajectory to the point where even modern industrial workers employed in mines and factories received relatively high wages and benefitted from modern healthcare and education (Gort & Brooks 2023: 837).

Given this promising economic performance, the industrializing region attracted a steady stream of international investment, which contributed to the region's wealth (Szeftel 2000: 210; Shaw 1976: 6). It is important to note, though, that at this time, the Chinese relationship with Zambia was predominantly political and not economic. Former President Kaunda had a close relationship with the Premier of China, Zhou Enlai, and this friendship, as well as Zambia's geostrategic position, helped to ensure a close connection between the two countries (Kragelund 2009: 648). China was a natural ally of Zambia. Being a Third World country itself and a socialist state in comparison to the capitalist powers colonizing Africa, China supported Zambia's commitment to Southern African liberation (Matambo 2020: 97). Together, the two nations worked to end colonial rule and external reliance. Though it was not as affluent at the time, the Chinese state offered support to independence movements and took an emphatically anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist stance (Matambo 2019: 46). It demonstrated this solidarity by contributing funds and personnel to the building of the Tanzania-Zambia railway (TAZARA) that would go from northern Zambia to the Tanzanian coastal metropolis of Dar es Salaam. The purpose of the rail line was to eliminate the transport of Zambia's exports and imports through Southern Rhodesia (now known as Zimbabwe) and South Africa, thereby lessening the dependency on settler-ruled Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa (Matambo 2020: 98). This action was particularly significant and highlighted China's dedication to Africa's liberation struggle. The shared ideologies, identities, and diplomatic interests laid the foundation for the relationship between China and Zambia, particularly on a political front, from 1964 to 1991. However, even though this relationship was primarily diplomatic, as has been stated, other countries, such as Britain, invested in Zambia during this time.

By the late 1960s, however, Kaunda became convinced that Zambia was not reaping the full benefits of the economic riches within its borders (Sishuwa 2020: 596). In addition, he was also facing pressures from specific segments of society demanding greater access to state resources than those they perceived were being handed to them by private capital (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 122). In response, Kaunda implemented a "Zambianization" program aimed at increasing local control and pushing foreign influence out of key sectors like government, trade, and construction (Kragelund 2009: 647). This initiative encompassed various reforms. First, foreign participation in the mining sector was restricted to only two multinational organizations, which eventually merged into the state-owned Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM) in 1980 (Kragelund 2009: 647; Sishuwa 2020: 596). Second, tax revenue from mining operations was boosted (Matambo 2020: 97). Third, social welfare services and state-sponsored subsidies were established to address the economic and skill gap between expatriates, settlers, and indigenous Zambians. Fourth, restrictions were imposed on non-Zambians owning small businesses. And finally, British and other expatriate workers in the public and private sectors were replaced by Zambians (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 122).

These reforms significantly expanded public-sector employment. As a matter of fact, from 1963 to 1968, the number of Zambians employed in central government positions increased from 1,357 to 7,509 (Szeftel 1982: 6). It could be argued that, in addition to the reforms, this surge was driven by the incredibly stable and lucrative nature of government jobs. The average earnings in the parastatal sector were a staggering 60% higher than those in the private sector (Szeftel 1982: 6). And for those at the top of the public employment hierarchy, the perks were even more appealing. Top government executives received large annual salaries, generous leave and pension arrangements, subsidized housing and furniture, an entertainment allowance, a free car with petrol provided, water, telephone and electricity bills paid, servants' wages, security guards provided day and night, and the benefit of medical aid contributions (Szeftel 1982: 6). In other words, being a political elite at the time was incredibly advantageous. They had control over the state, and the state was an essential resource for attaining and retaining power. But even more so, being a member of UNIP, the ruling party, came with immense gain (Szeftel 2000: 210). And these gains were so significant that they fueled intense factional competition within the party (Szeftel 2000: 208). A relentless struggle ensued to change the balance of power within the party, and those who felt excluded from the spoils made attempts to defect to opposition parties like the ANC (Szeftel 2000: 212).

In a bid to preserve his hold on power and “weed out political opportunists,” Kaunda’s strategy was to institute a one-party state (Soest 2007: 625; Szeftel 2000: 213). This authoritarianism consolidated his rule and gave the center more control over the distribution of state spoils. Under this new system, not belonging to UNIP meant complete exclusion from the state’s resources (Szeftel 2000: 208). Within the party, however, a one-party patronage system flourished (Szeftel 2000: 214). Loyal supporters of Kaunda's government were showered with jobs, contracts, and generous compensation. However, as the public sector became more bloated with “loyal supporters,” real salary levels fell, and this diminished the rewards of government employment (Szeftel 2000: 214). Unfortunately, this decline coincided with the economic crisis of the 1970s, making things even more difficult for the Zambian government.

This crisis, which made the state increasingly indebted, came about as a result of copper prices plummeting dramatically and the international prices of oil skyrocketing (Shaw 1976: 14). As copper accounted for approximately 90% of Zambia's exports, Zambia’s economy and domestic production went into a free fall (Kragelund 2009: 646; Matambo 2019: 50; Gort & Brooks 2023: 837). There was a loss of mining jobs, an acute shortage of goods, and violent protests over the conditions in the country (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 123). To add insult to injury, amidst these difficult circumstances where Zambia was in debt and no longer had as many resources at its disposal, the available resources were being plundered by government officials who were offsetting their declining returns from having government positions (Szeftel 2000: 214-15). Not only that, public sector employment in government departments and parastatals increased (Szeftel 1982: 6). This goes to show that regardless of the circumstances, loyalists and allies were still satisfied. However, appeasing loyalists and allies was not enough for Kaunda’s popularity with the Zambian people to survive. Due to the absence of any rival political party, UNIP bore the sole responsibility for the deepening crisis (Sishuwa 2020: 596).

As one of the first nations to face a default during the global economic crisis of the 1980s, the Zambian government was desperate for a solution to the crisis (Gort & Brooks 2023: 831). For this reason, it turned to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in early 1983 (Sishuwa 2020: 597; Kragelund 2009: 647; Szeftel 2000: 216). And as a prerequisite for receiving assistance, the IMF imposed stabilization and adjustment measures, which entailed the devaluation of the Kwacha (Zambian currency) and the privatization of state-owned corporations and mines (Gort & Brooks 2023: 837-38). There was also a removal of subsidies on fuel and grain and an increase in the prices of essential goods. But these did little to rescue the collapsing economy. As a matter of fact, they instead produced contraction, inflation, and unemployment (Szeftel 2000: 216). And this, in turn, led to social crises of hunger, health care, education, and civil conflict around the country (Gort & Brooks 2023: 831). All of which threatened Kenneth Kaunda's hold on power. So, in an attempt to placate the urban populations, he renounced the implementation of the IMF agreement in the late 1980s. This did little to revive his reputation or the economic landscape, though. Western donors did not believe the Zambian government had taken the programs seriously, and the Zambian populace believed the programs should not have been implemented at all (Szeftel 2000: 216; Sishuwa 2020: 597).

As a result, Kaunda's government became incredibly unpopular. It became evident that contrary to what he promised, political independence had not brought prosperity or even economic gains to the large majority of the population (Sishuwa 2020: 607). There were several coup plots to overthrow the government, and there was a widespread call for the institution of a multi-party state that would allow the people to vote for a government that would once again give access to state resources back to the people. Most vocal among the advocates was the coalition party called the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD). It was a coalition comprised of trade unions, politicians, lawyers, students, academics, and the business community, and they came under the banner of the MMD to call for the dissolution of the one-party state (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 127; Sishuwa 2020: 597). They were also calling for the country to be opened up to multiparty elections in 1991. Eventually, UNIP bowed to democratic pressures and accepted a return to multi-party competition (Szeftel 2000: 208).

A key contender for political office at this time was the MMD, led by Frederick Chiluba. As the former Chairman-General of the 300,000 umbrella Zambian Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), Chiluba was able to appeal to the working-class Zambians (Mills 1992: 16; Matambo 2019: 50). In addition, because the MMD's broad aims included closer ties with South Africa, his campaign was also largely supported by key Zambian business interests (Mills 1992: 16). He campaigned on achieving economic liberalization in ways UNIP had failed. He also campaigned vigorously against high-level corruption, government mismanagement, and failed economic policies – all things that took away the much-desired access to state resources (Mills 1992: 17). In 1991, the MMD emerged the winner of the elections, with Chiluba as the President (Matambo 2019: 51). This ushered in a new era for Zambia. However, while there was a change in the government, the fundamental ideals of patrimonialism remained and manifested in the privatization that was supposed to revamp the Zambian political and economic society.

C. Privatization, Emergence of Chinese Investment, and Corruption

Upon assuming power, in order to deal with the economic crisis his government had inherited, Chiluba embraced the international adjustment and governance programs with enthusiasm and dedicated the country to democratic reform and liberal economics (Szeftel 2000:

216). A major reason for this was that many international actors tied debt relief to the privatization of national companies–most notably, the mines (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 127-28; Anders et al. 2009: 128). And this shift towards neoliberalism rendered the country more attractive to foreign investors. In addition, Chiluba's government also extended various financial incentives to foreign enterprises, encompassing measures such as investment repatriation allowances, tax exemptions, and the duty-free importation of materials and equipment. This, combined with the prospects of high profits in a market with little competition, enhanced Zambia's allure and played a pivotal role in facilitating the extensive involvement of Chinese firms across diverse sectors of Zambia's economy (van Dijke et al. 2009: 118; Kragelund 2009: 657; Matambo 2019: 51).

As has been stated, while the 1990s ushered in internal changes within Zambia, it also ushered in Chinese economic reforms, which necessitated expansion into African nations with abundant natural resources. Zambia was one of those countries. With its copper mines producing almost 60 percent of Africa's copper and Zambian copper exports making up 40 percent of Zambia's total exports, Zambia was the perfect economic partner for China, which had become the world's largest copper consumer (Anders et al., 2009: 128). Not to mention that the two countries already had a diplomatic relationship established during Kaunda's presidency. The privatization of Zambia and the welcoming investment climate brought about made for an advantageous economic relationship that the Chinese government leveraged. By strategically aligning with Zambian political elites through high-level bilateral visits and large-scale events like the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the Chinese government was able to forge a stronger relationship with the Chiluba administration. During these meetings, negotiations concerning Chinese development assistance and investment took place. The

Zambian government allowed the Chinese government to invest in and take over mines like the Chambishi mine, allowing China to gain considerable control over Zambia's lucrative copper resources (Anders et al. 2009: 126-28; Sibiri 2020: 15; van Dijke et al. 2009: 133). And the Chinese government pledged to openly support the MMD financially and politically, enhancing China's value as an investor in the eyes of Chiluba's government (Anders et al. 2009: 126).

Out of this close diplomatic and economic relationship came even more concrete supportive measures in the form of four central organizations that were set up at the request of the Chinese state to support Chinese investors in their day-to-day activities (Anders et al. 2009: 126; Kragelund 2009: 654; van Dijke et al. 2009: 126-334). These institutions, still operating in the present day, were the Chinese Embassy, the Association of Chinese Corporations in Zambia (ACCZ), the Chinese Centre for Investment, Promotion and Trade (CCIPT), and the Zambian branch of Bank of China (BOC). Their roles and functions in the Zambian context are as follows (Anders et al. 2009: 126-127): The Chinese Embassy is the most important contact for Chinese investors in Zambia. Through this resource, investors receive advice on investment options, as well as support on how to establish contacts with Zambian authorities and the Zambian elite. The ACCZ, on the other hand, functions as the Chinese Chamber of Commerce with around 60 Chinese member companies. The ACCZ takes care of Chinese companies' interests both vis-à-vis the Zambian public and the Zambian authorities, communicating and promoting the cause of the Chinese investors directly with local authorities and indirectly through public media. The CCIPT's primary function is to identify suitable investment options, provide practical support, and facilitate contacts with relevant Zambian authorities for potential or newly arrived Chinese investors. Finally, the BOC, which is a state-owned commercial bank, is strictly political and works towards facilitating the day-to-day activities of Chinese companies in Zambia.

Chinese companies typically use the BOC for their daily banking operations and for transferring money to and from China. Supplementing their efforts is the Zambia-China Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone (Anders et al. 2009: 127). This zone was set up to build a production chain centered around key Chinese enterprises. It would also create an export hub for locally produced Chinese products to the Southern African region.

These organizations were set up to support Chinese investment in the Zambian region. However, it is important to note that Chinese investment in Zambia was not only focused on the mining sector. Chinese investment showed up in the agricultural sector with projects ranging from technical assistance to fisheries to irrigation schemes and even to large-scale experimental farms (Anders et al. 2009: 131). This agriculture-based relationship was set up to serve as both a mechanism to generate profits and a safety valve for future food supply problems in China. At the same time, though, it was regarded by Zambian leaders as an aid project that was of the utmost importance for future development (Anders et al. 2009: 131). The construction sector was also a major site for Chinese investment. Because of privatization, large-scale construction projects in Zambia became largely competed for amongst foreign companies in Zambia (Anders et al. 2009: 130). Oftentimes, the bulk of these large-scale tenders went to Chinese companies. This left the delivery and maintenance of housing and infrastructure in the hands of the domestic small-scale Zambian construction companies (Anders et al. 2009: 130). This was not an arrangement that local Zambians liked. As a matter of fact, the entire arrangement of Chinese investment – regardless of the sector – proved to be a contentious issue for the average Zambian. Why? Because it took away their much-desired access to state resources and put it in the hands of foreigners the way colonialism and Kaunda’s attempt at privatization had done.

While large-scale foreign investments in mining brought new jobs for some, there were also lots of miners who lost their jobs due to Chinese companies' importation of labor (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 139). And for those who retained their jobs, labor policies and practices of Chinese companies were becoming increasingly harmful and negatively impacting Zambian miners (Sibiri 2020: 15). Chinese companies began to take advantage of weak unions and the non-enforcement of employment laws (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 140). There was also a displacement of local small businesses by Chinese companies and traders (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 10). "Not de jure" Chinese businesses were even able to employ Zambian companies as fronts to get Zambian small and medium business (SME) contracts (Kragelund 2009: 655). Not to mention the fact that nearly all of Chinese companies' capital goods and intermediary inputs came from China (Kragelund 2009: 656). Put together, all of these signalled that the presumed benefits of privatization for the average Zambian did not materialize.

However, regardless of these local concerns, China's presence in Zambia remained invaluable to the political elite (Matambo 2019: 52). And this is because privatization and deregulation opened up possibilities for using political office to acquire state assets and make personal fortunes on a much larger scale (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 139; Szeftel 2000: 221; Soest 2007: 628). With foreign investment steadily coming into the country, the foreign accounts of the government were being used for personal benefit and political patronage purposes. As a result, any money made from mining was expatriated before Zambians could see the benefits of the 'boom' (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 139). This gross misuse of state resources by the Chiluba administration was so widespread that what was supposed to be a reform agenda became an avenue for immense corruption (Matambo 2019: 54; Momba 2007: 115). And this is what solidified the already intimate link between political power and access to public and private resources, incentivizing administrative corruption within the civil service, judiciary, military, and even local councils (Momba 2007: 118). Holding political office became exceptionally desirable, offering a gateway to financial gain and immense influence within Zambian society. Those who had this power wanted to keep it, and those who didn't capitalized on the multiparty system to get it.

It could be argued that this is why elections from 2001 onward became more competitive (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 128). The widespread corruption in public office meant that the political elite were competing for control of the country's political and economic resources through periodic elections in which the strongest political group takes control of state resources (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 138). In this case, political competition was through patronage to allies and supporters. And this patronage was sponsored by the state's resources, more specifically by Chinese foreign investment into the country. A good example of this was the 'Presidential Discretionary Fund.' Unofficially called the 'Slush Fund,' the Chiluba administration created this state resource as a way to distribute favors to clients (Soest 2007: 628; Hatchard 2011: 262; Momba 2007: 120). The fund's reserved budgetary allocations of around 12 billion Kwacha per annum (roughly US$ 5 million at that time) were solely at the President's disposal and used for partisan purposes. Chiluba also had another slush fund called the Zamtrop account (Momba 2007: 117). This account was at the London branch of the Zambian National Commercial Bank, and while it was supposed to be used by the Zambian Security Intelligence Services to finance overseas operations, it was instead used by Chiluba for his benefit and that of his intelligence chief, Xavier Chungu (Momba 2007: 117).

This wasn't the only way Chiluba consolidated his rule, though. To appeal to the Zambian population, he actively campaigned on his government's track record of economic growth and infrastructure development, most of which was funded by Chinese investment (Hess & Aidoo, 2013: 137). This created an incentive for short-term politically motivated public spending, which did not account for a long-term development vision for the Zambian mining sector, for instance (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 128). It signaled the beginning of an era whereby elite commitment to a vision only occurred when the ruling elite felt they would stay in power long enough to reap the benefits of the accumulated investments.

In addition to all these ways Chiluba's administration used state resources to perpetuate his stay in power, he also maintained stringent control of the state's resources so no one else would benefit from it and usurp his power. The MMD government resorted to authoritarianism the same way Kaunda's government did (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 139). And this wasn't specific to just Chiluba's government. During their rule as a political party from 1991 to 2011, the MMD exercised stringent control over state resources and used them to bolster campaign endeavors and manipulate the outcomes of 1996, 2001, 2006, 2009, and, unsuccessfully, the 2011 Presidential elections (Momba, 2007: 116). Despite the growth of independent private media outlets in the 1990s, Chiluba's administration imposed strict constraints on the media. Critical journalists and newspapers were convicted of libel or violating security laws, reform-minded ministers were removed from office, and student demonstrations were suppressed (Hess & Aidoo, 2013: 132; Soest 2007: 625). Basically, anything that was a threat to Chiluba's rule was subdued. And it was through these repressive measures that Chiluba and his party were able to consolidate their dominance and secure their political interests. It is important to mention, though, that during this period, China was the ideal economic partner to have. While Western institutions had suspended their aid in mid-1996 over alleged corruption, electoral fraud and government suppression of the opposition, China's policy of non-interference proved to be extremely beneficial and helped perpetuate the trends of bribery, nepotism, and electoral fraud (Szeftel 2000: 221; Momba, 2007: 116).

This pervasiveness of corruption under Chiluba also led opposition parties to campaign heavily on anti-corruption platforms (Matambo 2020: 102). They didn't only champion anti-corruption, though. They also campaigned on dealing with the consequences of privatization and providing those who had been "locked out" by the Chiluba government greater access to state resources (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 140). As a result, after an unsuccessful attempt at an unconstitutional third term in office, Chiluba stepped down and appointed Levy Mwanawasa as his successor.

D. Chinese Investment as a Necessity Amidst Anti-Corruption Efforts

Unlike his predecessor, Mwanawasa had a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption and came into power declaring that his government was one of laws and not men (Soest 2007: 628). He asserted that his government would fight against corruption and followed up on it by lifting the immunity of former President Chiluba. By doing this, he allowed for a thorough investigation into the affairs of not just the former president but also his ministers and lieutenants (Momba 2007: 118). Upon investigation, it was discovered that Chiluba had grossly abused public office. He was charged with 96 counts of official misconduct and $40 million in theft (Momba 2007: 118). Additionally, in 2004, the London High Court seized approximately £13.5 million worth of assets belonging to him and his associates. Also, notable, in a civil case in 2007, the UK court found Chiluba guilty of theft of £23 million. Merely three months after this trial, Chiluba was also tried in Zambia, where he faced charges of theft of $488,000 in treasury funds (Momba 2007: 119). Along with him, several other politicians and senior civil servants who served under him were also investigated for looting the nation's resources. Prominent members of his administration that were charged were Atan Shansonga (former Ambassador to the United States), Stella Chibanda (former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance), Bede Mpande (former Finance Chief Economist), and Xavier Chungu (Matambo 2020: 102).

With all these investigations and prosecutions taking place, Mwanawasa was lauded for prosecuting corrupt members of his party (Matambo 2020: 102). However, while some argued that these actions were righting the wrongs of his predecessor, there were others who argued that Mwanawasa's campaign on corruption was just a means to silence political opposition (Soest 2007: 628). Whether this is true or not is not confirmed. However, what is confirmed is the fact that during Mwanawasa's presidency, Chinese investment expanded in ways that were both to the benefit and detriment of the Zambian people. From 2002 when Mwanawasa assumed the presidency, Chinese lending underwent diversification, with private institutional lenders increasingly providing more loans to government agencies and ministries (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 3). As a result of this, by 2006, the total volume of Chinese loans to Zambia amounted to US$409.4 million, accompanied by additional grants of up to US$5.4 million (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 3). These kinds of support were immensely beneficial for the Zambian economy and helped address some of the challenges being faced at the time. They also increased China's overall footprint in the Zambian economic landscape. A vivid example of this was that Zambia was the first African country to set up special economic zones under the FOCAC. After the 2006 FOCAC declaration that 5 multi-facility economic zones would be established within the African continent, the first zone to be set up was the Zambia-China Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone (ZCCZ) operated by the CNMC–China Nonferrous Metals Mining Group (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 11).

It is important to state, though, that while these developments were undoubtedly beneficial for the Zambian economy to some extent, they also created a situation whereby the Zambian economy became heavily reliant on external financial support (Soest 2007: 631). This was so much so that by April 2005, the IMF and the World Bank, under their Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, formally endorsed a US$3.9 billion debt relief for Zambia (Soest 2007: 631). This showed that, at the time, the Zambian economy was not completely stable. But this didn't deter the Zambian political elite. And neither did Mwanawasa's campaign on anti-corruption. During this period, the awarding of personal favors for private benefits was still very rampant, and this was evident in the unnecessarily large cabinet sizes and the expansion of public sector employment (Soest 2007: 626). There was even a media campaign in 2004 that was aimed at reducing the number of high-level government officials. That campaign remained unsuccessful, and by August 2005, the total number of high-level officials in government (president, vice president, ministers, and vice-ministers) stood at 67 (Soest 2007: 627). These officials used their positions to also acquire wealth. In February 2007, Mwanawasa fired the Minister of Lands for corruption, and in March of the same year, he fired the deputy Minister for similar reasons (Momba 2007: 116). His administration also retained the Presidential Discretionary Fund. Despite the fact that it was not being used in the same manner as it was during the Chiluba administration, there were still concerns that it was occasionally used to finance what could be construed as corrupt activities (Momba 2007: 120).

Along with this theft of state resources, concerns about Chinese investment practices arose within Zambian society. Local Zambian businesses regarded the growing presence of Chinese traders offering cut-rate goods and services as threatening to their business existence. And in the mining sector, the death of over 50 Zambian workers in a mine explosion and shooting incident led to deep-seated concerns erupting into chaos and riots (Sibiri 2020: 15). NGOs like the Citizens for Better Environment and the Zambia Institute for Environmental Management also campaigned and advocated for the strengthening of Chinese workplace safety and labor standards (Dynamic 2020: 198). However, even with all these movements and advocacy, because Chinese investment had its benefits for the Zambian economy, but most importantly, the Zambian elite who were focused on staying in power and satisfying their loyalists, Mwanawasa's government stuck by it and insisted that Africa chose the "look-East" alternative after the West abandoned it (Matambo 2020: 102).

When he unfortunately passed away in 2008, his successor, Rupiah Banda, maintained the same stance on Chinese investment. In a speech at Boston University, Banda was reported to have said (Kragelund 2014: 157):

> When we were facing the challenge of financing, constructing and rehabilitating our infrastructure in the various sectors, it became clear that we needed to seek financing quickly, and could not delay our plans to develop the country. The rise of new financial powerhouses in Asia, as you all know, is producing a geopolitical shift…In some cases, we had successful partnerships with the West…However, in other cases, increasingly, our needs were matched by the Chinese. They offered the financing we needed and the technical know-how, and so it followed that we should negotiate with them on certain projects.

And that is exactly what the Zambian government did during the administrations of Mwanawasa (2002-2008) and Rupiah Banda (2008-2011). They prioritized Chinese investment even in the face of hardships borne by the Zambian working class. And just like had historically occurred, it was this disconnect between the state resources available to the political elite and those available to the rest of the Zambian society that created a platform aspiring Zambian politicians could readily exploit (Sibiri 2020: 15). Michael Sata was the first and most prominent of such politicians.

E. *The Rise of Anti-Chinese Sentiment*

Desperately aiming to secure the presidency, Michael Sata left the MMD in 2001 and established his political party, the Patriotic Front (PF). As a leader of the opposition, he sought ways to discredit the MMD governments. Capitalizing on the prevailing politico-economic landscape, as well as channeling public discontent, Sata channeled anti-Chinese populist rhetoric that would appeal to fear and help mobilize voters (Sibiri 2020: 9). He tapped into discontent about the distribution of natural resource wealth and the highly unfavorable conditions under which Zambia's copper industry had been privatized to the benefit of the Chinese and the Zambian elite (Kragelund & Carmody 2015: 11). A notable example of this was his claim that China's economic goals benefitted solely the MMD political elite (Flint & Waddoups 2019: 909). Channeling anti-Chinese rhetoric, Sata attacked the MMD's misuse of state resources for campaign purposes. For instance, in 2008, while the MMD used its massive financial advantage to run advertisements and even produce lollipops with pro-Banda slogans, Sata portrayed this spending as evidence of the MMD's subservience to China, and actively spread rumors that Beijing was financing Rupiah Banda's re-election campaign (Hess & Aidoo 2013: 138). These allegations weakened Banda's claim to the success he had achieved through Chinese investment, tarnished the MMD's cooperation with Chinese investors, and negatively impacted Zambian perceptions of Chinese engagement. He also made the claim that Chinese investment was exploitative. In his campaign messaging, he portrayed Chinese investors as 'exploiters' of the country's natural resources and branded them as 'infesters' (Sibiri 2020: 14; Flint & Waddoups

2019: 909). He vowed that upon assuming office, he would not only deport Chinese investors and business owners but would also initiate a fiscal regime barring Chinese investors from repatriating their income from Zambia (Sibiri 2020: 14). He further focused his critique on Chinese labor practices, highlighting the inadequate safety measures prevalent in Chinese-owned enterprises (Matambo 2019: 54; Kragelund, 2012: 457; Matambo 2020: 102; Hess & Aidoo 2013: 135; Sautman & Hairong, 2009: 757). Through these efforts, Sata successfully galvanized the support of urban traders, the victims of mine accidents, mine workers, and trade union leaders who were upset with Chinese companies and their business practices (Sibiri 2020: 16; Matambo 2020: 94). As a result, widespread Sinophobia emerged, culminating in riots, labor disputes, and instances of looting targeting Chinese-owned establishments.

The 'China issue' in Zambia thus became a highly contentious topic that dominated election discourse and created a conducive environment for political actors to ride on anti-Chinese rhetoric to build popular support for electoral fortunes (Sibiri 2020: 8). In other words, anti-Chinese sentiments suddenly held such influence that by elevating and stoking it, constituents who were concerned or unhappy about China's perceived influence in the country could be persuaded to vote for the PF (Matambo 2020: 102; Sibiri 2020: 8-9). To further show his commitment to burning bridges with the Chinese, Sata issued threats that, if elected, he would formalize relations with Taiwan – a foreign policy stance that would have resulted in severed ties with China under the 'One-China' policy (Matambo 2020: 103; Sibiri 2020: 15). In response, the Chinese ambassador to Zambia at the time, Li Baodong, cautioned that China would disengage from Zambia should the PF emerge victorious in the 2006 election. While the PF did not secure victory in the election, the political feasibility of this strategy was evidenced as Sata's vote share dramatically increased from 4% in 2001 to 29% in 2006 (Hess & Aidoo, 2013:

133). It was also evidenced by the fact that Sata's loss sparked violent protests in Lusaka and the Copperbelt, demonstrating that the PF's rhetoric resonated deeply with urban Zambians. He was able to establish himself as a formidable opponent, and in 2008, after Mwanawasa's death, Sata only lost to Rupiah Banda by a narrow 40% to 38% margin (Hess & Aidoo, 2013: 133). In the 2011 elections, though, Sata regained ground and ousted the MMD from power with 42% of the votes to Banda's 35%. Riding on anti-Chinese sentiment, Sata and the Patriotic Front won the presidency.

This was a huge learning curve for aspiring Zambian politicians and confirmed that they could also capitalize on the negative aspects of Chinese investment to win votes in the elections (Matambo 2020: 95 & 101). It was at this point that Chinese investment was seen as a political preservation strategy that could work for not just those who were in power but for those who wanted to attain power as well. Anti-Chinese populism proved to be an effective voter mobilization strategy, and opposition politicians realized they could exploit and channel popular sentiments of resource nationalism against Chinese investment (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017: 146; Sibiri 2020: 9). It is important to note, though, that this kind of anti-Chinese populism was often not grounded on ideational leanings (Sibiri 2020: 22). It was primarily employed for electoral purposes and this is evident by the fact that after emerging victorious, Michael Sata largely backed out from the threatening rhetoric he was using during his campaign. In fact, he became a compliant partner for Beijing, affirming that his government would refrain from attacking the Chinese due to the significant importance of their investment and technology for Zambia's economic advancement (Sautman & Hairong, 2009: 751; Flint & Waddoups 2019: 910; Matambo 2020: 104). Like the Zambian leaders before him, he began to sing the praises of the Chinese and affirm the 'win-win' nature of the economic relationship.

However, unlike those who came before him, he tried to impose certain restrictions on Chinese investment. For instance, he doubled mining royalties and attached a mineral tax to production instead of sales (Matambo 2020: 101; Kragelund & Carmody 2015: 12). Additionally, he banned dollar-denominated transactions to channel resource revenues through local banks and assumed control of the Chinese-owned Collum mine due to their failure to pay mineral loyalties, blatant disregard for mining and environmental laws, and the tragic loss of 12 miners' lives (Kragelund 2014: 157-58). It is also worth mentioning that he nationalized several previously privatized Zambian companies – such as the telecommunication provider Zamtel and Zambia Railways – and advocated for limitations on the influx of Chinese workers, emphasizing the necessity for these workers to possess specialized skills unavailable locally. This was in response to mounting concerns among ordinary Zambians regarding China's tendency to import laborers for roles that could be easily filled by locals. Hence, it could be argued that Sata's actions were efforts to align foreign companies operating in Zambia with the country's overall development objectives (Kragelund 2014: 157). Unlike any of the preceding administrations, the Sata government displayed a greater inclination to crack down on Chinese companies failing to abide by labor laws.

Nonetheless though, despite this semblance of a more controlled relationship, the PF's new stance resulted in deeper commercial ties and the initiation of new infrastructure projects. Notably, the Link Zambia 8000 initiative, which was aimed at enhancing Zambia's road network, was initiated during Sata's presidency. Additionally, Chinese contractors worked towards improving the Kenneth Kaunda International Airport (Matambo 2019: 56). With these continued economic relations, Chinese presence in Zambia increased. Some observers claim that this increasing presence created a level of tension between the two populations – Chinese and

Zambians – that had never been seen before on the African continent (Matambo 2020: 100). Once again, the Chinese were accused of ignoring regulations designed to keep workers safe, resulting in a series of tragic industrial accidents, and disagreements broke out between Chinese employers and Zambian workers, occasionally escalating into violence. The irony of the situation was that this was all unfolding during the tenure of the PF, a party that had won over many urban voters during its years in opposition by rallying against Chinese investment and presence in Zambia (Matambo 2020: 101).

This abrupt shift in rhetoric sought to reassure both domestic and international elites of Zambia's stability while also justifying their pivotal role in maintaining economic ties with China (Sautman & Hairong, 2009: 751; Flint & Waddoups 2019: 909). Due to Sata's success, this oscillation between oppositional anti-Chinese rhetoric and incumbent pro-Chinese language became the defining characteristic that drove the ebb and flow of Zambian politics (Flint & Waddoups 2019: 910). It ushered in a new normal for the Zambian political elite.

F. The New Normal: Chinese Investment as a Tool for Political Preservation

So far, this case study has delved into the strategies employed by the Zambian political elite to secure and retain power. This foundation has set us up to understand how leveraging Chinese investment, specifically, has become one of such strategies. We have witnessed the effectiveness of this strategy under the Sata administration and seen its influence on subsequent aspiring leaders. However, the dynamics surrounding this strategy in the post-Sata era, particularly after his passing in 2014, remain unexplored in this paper. This section of the research will investigate the continued utilization of Chinese investment as a strategy by Zambian elites in the years following Sata's presidency, examining its influence on their attainment and preservation of power.

Edgar Lungu's presidency is a good place to start. He was president from 2015 to 2021, and though he was not elected on a platform of anti-Chinese sentiment, he demonstrably followed the playbook of previous Zambian leaders. Upon assuming office, Lungu became a more vocal advocate for a strong Zambia-China alliance. This stance aligned with his broader vision of "not looking east or west (but to) look forward and go with whoever wants to go with us" (Flint & Waddoups 2019: 903). Lungu's campaign heavily promoted the idea that Chinese investment fostered mutual benefit and respect rooted in shared historical ties (Matambo 2020: 105). He highlighted this by pointing to the success of the PF in re-nationalizing Zambia's mines and building new infrastructure, like the $2 billion 750-megawatt Kafue Gorge Lower Hydropower station, funded by China (Gort & Brooks 2023: 844; Hampwaye et al. 2024: 12). During the commissioning of the station, Lungu celebrated and took credit for the Chinese-funded modernization of the economy. In his address, he remarked, "It is no secret that my government continues to invest in roads, clinics and hospitals, airports and power infrastructure..." (Gort & Brooks 2023: 842). Evidently, he was leveraging Chinese investment and the resulting infrastructure boom to bolster his power. And with that power, corruption became rampant to the extent that European countries like the UK, Ireland, Finland, and Sweden shunned Zambia as a form of punishment for errant or corrupt behavior (Matambo 2020: 104). Because China adheres to a policy of non-interference, though, the Sino-Zambian relationship flourished and strengthened. Lungu became largely against Western loans and viewed China as a break from the established Western practices of development. He believed that through relations with China, Zambia would have a fruitful pathway for maneuvering the world economy (Flint & Waddoups 2019: 903).

There were many that were skeptical, though. While the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2018 projected a positive outlook, concerns emerged. Civil society organizations united to issue a statement expressing concern over Zambia's indebtedness to China and the lack of transparency around Sino-Zambian transactions (Matambo 2020: 105). Critics labeled the situation a neo-colonial relationship. And others, like prominent opposition leaders James Lukuku of the Republican Progressive Party and Daniel Shimunza of the Movement for National Transformation, took a page out of Sata's strategy and campaigned on anti-Chinese sentiment, even going as far as equating China to Hitler (Matambo 2020: 102). Most notable of the opposition leaders, though, was Hakainde Hichilema. As expected of political opposition to Lungu and his pro-China stance, Hichilema's campaign contained anti-Chinese rhetoric, including allegations that the government had sold the state-owned timber company 'Zambia Forestry and Forest Industries Corporation' (ZAFFICO) (Flint & Waddoups 2019: 910). Former President Lungu cracked down on this kind of anti-Chinese sentiment and opposition politics, earning the PF a reputation as a corrupt party eager to use any means necessary to silence dissent. However, the cracks went deeper. It became apparent that the support for Chinese investment wasn't driven by its benefits for Zambians or the economy but for Lungu and his allies. This was evidenced by the fact that the Chinese megaprojects of the time offered minimal social benefits (Gort & Brooks 2023: 843-44). As had been the recurring theme across several administrations, while grandiose projects held minimal benefits for the everyday Zambian and the economy, they allowed the elite to climb the political ladder through perceived achievements. These "achievements," however, were often so small. While there would be increased commerce for local traders and temporary employment during the construction phase, employment conditions were often exploitative and insufficient to meet basic needs (Gort & Brooks 2023: 843). And to make matters worse, the massive loans needed for these projects pushed Zambia towards a debt crisis.

By 2020, Zambia had borrowed heavily to fund infrastructure, with some of the highest per capita Chinese debts in Africa being in excess of $10.1 billion (Gort & Brooks 2023: 830). Unfortunately, this coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic that led to a worldwide downturn in the demand for copper. Facing such a fiscal crisis, the Zambian economy shrunk, and the Zambian kwacha lost a third of its value (Gort & Brooks 2023: 831). Amidst these debt issues, the Zambian government was also unable to meet the demands of multiple creditors. As a result, in November 2020, Zambia became the first country to default on its Eurobonds (Gort & Brooks 2023: 830-31). And with this kind of debt crisis came soaring inflation, a cost-of-living crisis, rampant joblessness, and a widespread struggle to meet basic needs (Gort & Brooks 2023: 842). Again, another elected Zambian political elite had made decisions beneficial to their retention of power in the short-run but immensely harmful to the Zambian economy and the everyday Zambian. It was under these circumstances that Zambians rejected Lungu at the ballot box in 2021 and picked his long-term rival, Hakainde Hichilema, to be president (Gort & Brooks 2023: 844).

As has been stated, Hichilema came into power critical of the Zambian-Chinese economic relationship. However, upon assuming office in 2021, he was faced with the daunting prospect of managing a weak economy and unserviceable debt obligations (Gort & Brooks 2023: 844). During an interview with the BBC regarding the state of the economy and his plans to address it, he acknowledged, “We inherited an extremely difficult situation…a very bad situation” (*Zambian President Hichilema*). Hichilema's concern wasn't just the debt, but also the rampant corruption, evident in the "horrifying illicit movement of funds" and the bloated government payroll, which was exerting further pressure on an economy that was already stressed. As a central part of his recovery plan, Hichilema emphasized "self-restraint" in accessing public funds (*Zambian President Hichilema*). This meant zero tolerance for corruption, controlling frivolous spending, and optimizing resource allocation. He also prioritized trade and investment. While these affirmations promised a new era, as we've learned from previous Zambian administrations, such bold promises often serve to garner initial public support, but their full implementation remains questionable.

The question the next section of this paper seeks to answer is whether Hichilema channeled anti-Chinese sentiment to get elected, got into power, and began to utilize the bounties of Chinese investment for personal gain. Or, whether Hichilema ushered in a new era for Zambia-Chinese relations. One where the priority is not on how Chinese investment as a state resource can be used for personal gain and political preservation but on how it can serve as a tool for economic growth and a sustainable high standard of living for the everyday Zambian.

G. The New Era of Sino-Zambian Relations?

Thus far, it seems the latter best characterizes Hichilema's rule. Coming into power with a mission for economic growth, Hichilema has made it explicitly clear that his government is willing to receive support from Western-dominated financial institutions (*Zambian President Hichilema*). Highlighting the IMF as key to Zambia's economic recovery, Hichilema has asserted that his government is not concerned about IMF conditionalities. This affirmation has led to a revitalization of Zambia's relationship with not just the IMF but also with the US as a whole. During Hichilema's presidency, there have been high-profile visits to Zambia by US government officials like Vice President Harris, and the US has shown interest in the manufacturing of batteries for electric cars in Zambia (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 4). While this evident improvement in the relationship may be promising to some, there are others who have been concerned about what this means for Zambia-China relations. And they've had cause for concern, too. In Zambia's most recent loan agreement with the IMF, the prerequisite for aid being provided to Zambia was that Zambia would totally cancel 12 planned projects, half of which were set to be financed by China Exim Bank, one by ICBC (Industrial and Commercial Bank of China) for a university and another by Jiangxi Corporation for a dual highway for the capital (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 12; Gort & Brooks 2023: 830-31).

Despite these potential threats to the Sino-Zambian economic relationship, Hichilema has assured that strengthening relations with the US will not lead to weakening relations with China (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 4). This might seem surprising after his anti-Chinese rhetoric while running a campaign against Lungu. However, considering China's role as a contentious election issue in Zambia, it makes more sense. Upon assuming office, Hichilema emphasized the importance of Chinese investors for developing value-adding industries (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 3-4). Pointing out the fact that the occupancy rate in the three Chinese multi-facility economic zones in Zambia is low, he encouraged Chinese investors to set up industries in these zones, preferably as joint ventures with Zambian companies (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 4). Another notable aspect of China's positive contributions to Zambia lies in the realm of defense and security. Through the disbursement of Chinese loans, the Zambia Ministry of Defence has received substantial support (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 9). The army, for example, has received various types of military equipment, as well as training from China. Additionally, the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security has benefited financially from the Chinese Government, with China playing a significant role in bolstering Zambia's internal security through equipment supplies and financial assistance exceeding US$35 million over the past decade. This support has been directed towards initiatives such as the Public Security System Safe City Project and the construction of over 2,000 houses for security personnel (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 9). Furthermore, it is also essential to acknowledge that given Zambia's substantial infrastructural deficit, Chinese support as a flexible lender is particularly vital (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 13). However, despite these positive contributions, because China is also a lender that prefers to deal with high-ranking government officials in secret meetings that lack transparency, there are some who still believe that economic ties with China could serve as a problem for Zambia's budding relationship with the IMF (*Zambian President Hichilema;* Hampwaye et al. 2024: 8).

Regardless of these concerns, though, some argue that a strong relationship with the US and other Western European countries could lead to Zambia having a stronger negotiating capacity with China around issues such as debt (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 4). Previously, loan acquisition was a tedious process involving many stages (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 6): First, the Ministry of Finance and National Planning decides where to source funding if the national budget cannot support the project. The loan then receives approval from the Minister and cabinet members (including Ministers, Politicians, the Vice President, and the President). Finally, the Attorney General ensures all legal matters are thoroughly addressed. Throughout the process, it is clear to see that politicians hold undue sway over decision-making. And this is where greedy politicians have the opportunity to make decisions that benefit them primarily. This politicized process, despite checks and balances, has facilitated undetected over-borrowing for a long time. As a result, Zambia now defaults on over US$14 billion in loans (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 6). To China specifically, Zambia owes in excess of US$6 billion (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 14).

To address the poor debt acquisition process of the past, Hichilema's government has been engaging in extensive discussions with creditors – China as the largest of these – about how to restructure the country's debt (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 2, 14). He also enacted a new Public Debt Management Act of 2022, which would ensure that all debt acquisition by the government is approved by the National Assembly and the Cabinet (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 8). This will enhance transparency and ensure that the loans contracted benefit all people. This strategy shows that more than his predecessors, there is a more significant consideration for how the positive benefits of the bilateral relationship will trickle down to the Zambian population (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 4). This commitment to the people is also evidenced by his establishment of the 'Constituents Development Fund.' This fund reallocates resources from the central government to provide direct funding to the local governments so decisions can be made and implemented there in accordance with local priorities (*Zambian President Hichilema*). Additionally, this commitment is evident from the proceedings of the 2022 Zambia-China Trade and Investment Forum, which emphasized the importance of foreign investors partnering with local ones through joint ventures so that more benefits will accrue to Zambia (Hampwaye et al. 2024: 14).

VII. Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of research thus far suggests that under Hichilema's administration, there is a notable shift towards prioritizing the welfare of the populace over personal interests. This indicates a departure from solely viewing Chinese investment as a political preservation strategy, although elements of such tactics may still persist. Rather, there is a growing recognition of its potential as a catalyst for economic growth that benefits all citizens. Whether this will stand the test of time can not be known for sure at this moment. However, what is known is that both the Zambian government and its citizens possess agency in dealing with contentious issues as they arise (Dynamic 2020: 198).

This phenomenon is not exclusive to Zambia but extends to leadership across the 54 nations in Africa. Though colonization once placed the control of Africa's resources in the hands of colonizers, now endowed with power and freedom of action, the African political elite must take the resources they are now in control of and use them to lessen inequality and promote sustainable development (Taylor & Zajontz 2020: 19; Brown 2012: 1904). This necessitates rising above the notion that state resources are solely for personal survival and political continuity, as such a mindset only exacerbates suffering and distorts the trajectory of economic development. Instead, recognizing that the dominant economies of the world have already played their role in curtailing internal development, African leaders need to demonstrate political will amidst power imbalances to leverage relationships to the maximum benefit of their people (Irogbe 2005: 44; Hampwaye et al. 2024: 13; Soest 2007: 628). With that political will, they will have the necessary budget discipline that ensures government funds are used in ways that are beneficial for the people and sustainable for the economy.

African countries are not merely powerless pawns in the geopolitical games of great powers (Flint & Waddoups 2019: 911). They possess agency in navigating foreign relationships, and the elites within the country are working to make the most of the limited opportunities provided by the geopolitical context (Flint & Waddoups 2019: 910). Achieving mutually beneficial relationships is feasible; what is first required is the political will of African political elites to prioritize the well-being of their people.

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