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# China and Zimbabwe: The Context and Contents of a Complex Relationship

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## ABSTRACT

China's relationship with Africa has been the subject of considerable interest and controversy. The general assumption that the continent is moving closer to China because of its generosity (in contrast with traditional Western partners) and the widespread allegation that China is using this new-found relationship to exploit Africa's natural resources, are among the issues that have dominated headlines. However, few of China's relationships with African countries are of as much interest as the one it has with Zimbabwe. While China's support for the Zimbabwe African National Union in the war of liberation played in its favour and gave the country a take-off advantage in the new Zimbabwe, the African country is using China's economic and diplomatic backing to weather criticism of its domestic policies. This paper takes a detailed look at Sino-Zimbabwean relations, examining how these have transformed over time, and concludes that the decades ahead are likely to be crucial for the relationship between the two countries, especially as Zimbabwe has to begin looking at a future without its aging president.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ATDC	Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centre
GDP	gross domestic product
MP	member of Parliament
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
Norinco	China North Industries Corporation
UNSC	UN Security Council
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front)
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZBC	Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation

## INTRODUCTION

‘The Chinese have managed to accomplish at least one impressive thing in Africa – they have made everyone else uncomfortable. The Americans are uneasy, worried about (and perhaps jealous of) China’s rapid and profitable investments throughout the continent ... Europeans have only to look at trade figures: the share of Africa’s exports that China receives has shot from one to fifteen per cent over the past decade, while the European Union’s share fell from thirty-six to twenty-three per cent ... Some Africans [too] have become ... unhappy with unbalanced relationships in which China has taken proprietorship of African natural resources using Chinese labour and equipment without transferring skills and technology.’<sup>1</sup>

China’s extensive relations with African countries continue to attract interest and concern, especially as the category of those expressing disquiet about the possibility of this being another kind of colonialism now seems to be growing beyond the usual Western critics to include critical opinion leaders in key African countries.<sup>2</sup> While China’s activities in Africa are of broad general interest, its relationship with specific African countries faces more intense scrutiny. Countries that come under this spotlight fall broadly into four categories: 1) those with considerable political clout and whose friendship is crucial to external countries hoping to have influence on the continent; 2) those with considerable natural resource endowments, especially those resources that are crucial to China’s strategic interests; 3) those recovering from conflict and where post-war reconstruction activities have brought in an array of external actors; and 4) those where the leadership has acquired a controversial or even pariah status that has ostracised it from the West. These divisions are, however, not sacrosanct, as there are cases where some countries fall into two or more of the broad categorisations. Although relationships with other African countries are also important to Beijing, especially since China has connections with them through its support for various regional and continental organisations,<sup>3</sup> relations with the countries that fall within the four categories listed above are crucial to gauging different aspects of Sino–African relations.

Of all the China–Africa relationships, the one that merits the most attention is Beijing’s ties with Zimbabwe. This is largely due to the controversies associated with the contents and multi-dimensional extent of this relationship. These controversies, emanating largely from Zimbabwe’s domestic politics and the international reaction to them, have placed China in situations where its diplomacy in Africa has had to be explained and sometimes readjusted to ensure that it does not lose the friendship of other African countries that view events in Zimbabwe differently. Occasionally, Zimbabwe also has had to modify its domestic politics in order to ensure that China can maintain a measure of moral high ground that would earn it (Beijing) some respectability among human rights communities.

The objective of this paper is to examine Sino–Zimbabwean relations between 2003 and 2013, a decade in which the relationship between the two countries has become complicated as much for what it contains as for what it excludes. This paper consists of four main sections: the first provides a background to Sino–Zimbabwean relations, interrogating how China’s role in the Zimbabwean war of liberation became a factor in the subsequent display of camaraderie between the two countries; the second examines the ramifications of the relationship between the two countries, especially the nature and pattern of Chinese involvement in Zimbabwe during the period under study; the

third section focuses on the reactions of Zimbabweans to China's extensive and somewhat controversial involvement in their country; and the fourth concludes discussions.

### THE DETERMINANT OF EVENTS: CHINA'S ROLE IN THE ZIMBABWEAN LIBERATION WAR

'... we will continue to maintain and deepen our alliances with those who have been our truest friends.'<sup>4</sup>

*President Robert Mugabe's comment about China at the end  
of the Zimbabwean war of independence*

It is widely believed that the nature and extent of Sino-Zimbabwean relations since the latter's independence in 1980 are rooted mainly in China's contribution to the Zimbabwean liberation cause, during which it supported President Robert Mugabe's ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union).<sup>5</sup> Against this background, a brief discussion of this pre-independence link is crucial to any discussion of post-independence Sino-Zimbabwean relations.

In a way, China's relationship with ZANU during the Zimbabwean liberation war was a strategic gamble for both sides. While it was to be expected that Beijing would support revolutionary forces against a colonial rule that was not only feudal but also authoritarian, the preference for Mugabe over Joshua Nkomo was a risk, especially as most international observers had thought that Nkomo would be the victor in any election held among the black population in the country. This risk was all the more profound because China had earlier miscalculated in its support for the FNLA (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola/National Liberation Front of Angola) during the Angolan liberation struggle. On ZANU's part, a relationship with China was also a risk, albeit a somewhat lower one. From 1964, China had a negative reputation in Africa because of its alleged involvement in a coup attempt against then President Hamani Diori of Niger.<sup>6</sup> Shortly afterwards, pro-Chinese governments were removed from power in countries such as Dahomey (later renamed Benin Republic), Congo (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), the Central African Republic, Burkina Faso and, most importantly, Ghana.<sup>7</sup> By maintaining a close relationship with Beijing at this period ZANU risked losing sympathy and support from African countries to which Chinese policies had become unacceptable. In both cases, however, the gamble paid off.

China's support for Mugabe's ZANU has been well covered by the literature, and it serves no useful purpose rehashing it in detail here.<sup>8</sup> Broadly, the support came in four different forms, all with long-term implications for both Zimbabwe and Sino-Zimbabwean relations. The first was the provision of military assistance, which saw China sending military hardware to guerrillas in the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA, the military wing of ZANU). The second form of support was the extensive military training that was given to ZANLA guerrillas. A significant number of ZANLA soldiers received military training in China that would advance the ZANLA insurgency.<sup>9</sup> The third was the financial assistance given to the cause of Zimbabwean liberation through ZANU, while the final was the nature and extent of the ideological solidarity that resulted from the above.

The Chinese support for ZANU, coupled with the numerical strength of ZANLA, gave Mugabe's ZANU an advantage during the war and possibly accounted for ZANU's victory in the election that brought independence to Zimbabwe. As would be expected, Russian support for ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union) intensified the rivalry (if not enmity) between ZANU and ZAPU (and implicitly between their respective military wings, ZANLA and the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army).<sup>10</sup> ZANU's victory in the election was celebrated by ZANLA as the victory of the Maoist doctrine of military insurgency over the Russian doctrine of guerrilla warfare.

Largely because of the role it played in the liberation war, China was the country with the greatest advantage at the time of Zimbabwean independence. The two other countries that could have rivalled Beijing in terms of importance to Zimbabwe – Britain and South Africa – were handicapped by ideological incompatibility and historical antipathy with Harare. Mugabe's acceptance of any assistance from Britain was due mostly to the latter's historical obligation to Zimbabwe as a former colonial power and the weakness of the Zimbabwean economy, which necessitated the acceptance of assistance from whichever source.<sup>11</sup> South Africa's relevance was largely because of the new country's economic dependency due to the link between apartheid South Africa and the erstwhile Rhodesia. In short, of all the countries that Zimbabwe genuinely respected and wanted to establish links with at the time of independence, none could compare to China. However, China's relative economic weakness at the time of Zimbabwe's independence denied it the opportunity of exploiting this advantage. This was set to change when China's economic status grew.

Its external involvement in the war of liberation played in China's favour and gave the country a take-off advantage in the new Zimbabwe. China's bitter rival, the former Soviet Union, had supported Nkomo during the war of liberation. With the deepening rivalry and tension between Nkomo and Mugabe, Mugabe's negative reaction towards the Soviet Union continued to grow, as did his affection for China. Thus, by the time Zimbabwe became independent, not only was everything in place for a very cordial relationship with China but Beijing's rivals also faced an uphill task in convincing a new and potentially prosperous nation of their friendship and loyalty. One of the country's first official acts after independence in 1980 was for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Simon Muzenda, to pay a 'thank-you' visit to China.

While Chinese involvement in the Zimbabwean war of liberation was central to the friendship between the two countries in the early 2000s, it should also be noted that the war was only an antecedent around which trust could be built. The coalition of mutual interests seems to have had an even greater effect on the relationship. Even without the war of liberation, it is possible that the West's isolation of Zimbabwe would still have thrown it into the arms of any country that was willing to accept its style of leadership. This becomes all the more plausible when one looks at the ramifications of Chinese involvement in Zimbabwean affairs between 2003 and 2013.

## CHINESE ENGAGEMENT IN ZIMBABWE

‘Developing friendly relations between China and Zimbabwe is an unshakable policy’.<sup>12</sup>

*President Hu Jintao*

As would be expected, China’s relationship with Zimbabwe during the period under study has many facets, all with complex undertones that reflect the changing domestic situation in Zimbabwe and, at times, wider global politics. Discussion here is divided into three main sections: economic and commercial, diplomatic and military links.

### **Economic and commercial links**

In looking at China’s involvement in Zimbabwe’s economy since 2003, a discussion of the economic situations of the two countries at the beginning of this period may serve as a necessary preface. As of 2003, the Chinese economy has become one of the strongest in the world. In 2003, the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) growth was 9.1% (about \$1.4 trillion) and the GDP per capita exceeded \$1,000 for the first time.<sup>13</sup> This period of sustained economic growth also meant that the country began a policy of economic expansionism to other parts of the world, especially Africa. At the same time, the Zimbabwean economy started its downward plunge after the considerable progress that had been made in the decade after independence. The forceful acquisition of land from the white population and the subsequent sanctions that were imposed on the Mugabe administration combined with increasing socio-economic pressures to put the economy in a downward spiral.<sup>14</sup> A discussion of the economic links between the two countries should also point out that a complete picture of all the aspects of the relationship cannot be captured within the space constraints of this paper. Consequently, only a summary of the key aspects of the relationship can be given here.

Although the antecedents of the extensive economic and diplomatic relationship between China and Zimbabwe, exemplified by Harare’s ‘Look East’ policy, were the sanctions imposed on the Mugabe administration, the complexities of the relationship also need to be placed in context. It seems that the whole phenomenon was woven around three developments that were taking place at about the same time. These were the decision by the West to ostracise Zimbabwe in the aftermath of the country’s land acquisition policy; Mugabe’s determination to shift the country’s focus away from the West; and the change in Chinese policy towards economic expansion, especially in Africa. All these will be discussed at some length later in this paper.

Between 2003 and 2013, China’s economic and commercial links to Zimbabwe became so extensive and so diversified that hardly any aspect of Zimbabwean life did not feel the Chinese impact. The magnitude of these links qualifies Zimbabwe as one of the countries experiencing the most extensive Chinese influence, ranging from mining, construction and agriculture to telecommunications, retail and hospitality. In most cases, the relationship entails Chinese development in exchange for Zimbabwean natural resources.

Nothing is more indicative of the relationship between China and Zimbabwe than the remarkable growth in the trade links between the two countries. Bilateral trade between them surged by 20% to \$533 million in the first five months of 2012. By the end of the year, Zimbabwe’s trade with China stood at \$800 million, double the trade



levels recorded in 2011.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, exports to the EU fell sharply from \$1 billion in 1997 to \$476 million in 2008.<sup>16</sup> Although the growth in Zimbabwean exports to China is attributable mostly to minerals, among them diamonds, many Chinese business people also started small-scale businesses in the country. The Chinese embassy in Harare claims to have records of about 5 000 Chinese nationals living and working in Zimbabwe.<sup>17</sup> Officially, 53 Chinese companies were registered with the Chamber of Chinese Enterprises in Zimbabwe in 2012.<sup>18</sup> However, while the Chinese in Zimbabwe are investing in many businesses and the trade links among them are quite diverse, key areas have seen the biggest concentration. Some of these areas are discussed below.

### **Mining**

Mining is a subject around which China and Zimbabwe's interests converge: China needs the strategic mineral resources available in Zimbabwe, while the latter needs the income from these resources, especially after its show of defiance against the West. Cash-strapped Zimbabwe had very little choice but to seek a country that was willing to accept its resources in exchange for meeting its developmental needs. Thus, viewed from the perspective of individual needs and desires, the mining arrangement between China and Zimbabwe was destined to work, at least initially. Figures made available by the Zimbabwean government reveal that between January and May 2013, 'China accounted for 74% of the \$134 million of the foreign direct investments and during the same period, Chinese businesses invested \$16 million in mining'.<sup>19</sup> However, despite this convergence of interests, there has also been a string of controversies, especially as a result of the involvement of the military in the politics of mining, allegations of Zimbabwean workers suffering human rights abuses at the hands of Chinese employers, Chinese lack of environmental consideration (discussed later) and what is believed to be the contractual inequality between the Chinese and Zimbabwean governments.

During the period under study, one of China's earliest involvements in the Zimbabwean mining sector took place in 2003, when the Shanghai Baosteel Group signalled its intention of investing \$300 million in the country's metal and mining industry. China's initial interest was in minerals such as iron, steel, chrome and platinum. However, its interest became far more pronounced when the Southern African country discovered diamonds on a commercial scale.<sup>20</sup> Since November 2004, several trade agreements have been signed in the mining sector.<sup>21</sup> One of the earliest of these agreements constitutes the basis for the establishment of a joint venture with China North Industries Corporation (Norinco). Norinco is a leading armaments company and this agreement indicates the mutually reinforcing links that would exist between mining, defence and the economy in Sino-Zimbabwean relations. Another agreement gave exploration rights to a group of Chinese experts that would carry out a study of mineral resources in Zimbabwe.

China's involvement in the politics of mining in Zimbabwe changed significantly with the rise of diamonds in the African country's economic profile. Since the early 2000s, China has invested enormously in diamonds in Zimbabwe. The major investment in this area comes through the activities of the Chinese company Anjin, which invested \$400 million in a joint venture with the Zimbabwean government to mine diamonds in the Marange fields. This concession was given in exchange for the \$98 million construction of the country's National Defence College. Anjin Investments is controlled by subsidiary company Zimbabwe Defence Industries, and 10% by another company linked to the

army.<sup>22</sup> This has resulted in the militarisation of the extractive sector in Zimbabwe, where the generals have become company directors and shareholders on behalf of the government.

In March 2011, China signed nearly \$700 million in loan deals with Zimbabwe, which at that time was the biggest loan package to the country. In exchange, the Chinese government hinted that Chinese companies in Zimbabwe should be protected from the country's nationalisation plans. Earlier, the Mugabe government had announced an indigenisation plan that would give 51% of all companies worth more than \$500,000 – including mining companies – to local shareholders. While discussing the \$700 million loan with Zimbabwean Deputy Prime Minister Joice Mujuru in 2011, the then Chinese Vice Premier, Wang Qishan, specifically noted that he 'hope[d] Zimbabwe will protect the legitimate right [sic] of Chinese businesses in the country'.<sup>23</sup> During the previous month Zimbabwe had announced that a Chinese-owned alluvial diamond mine in the country's eastern region, Marange, would be exempt from nationalisation.<sup>24</sup>

There has been growing tension among top politicians close to Mugabe and the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development over ways in which to handle certain aspects of Chinese mining activities. In July 2013, the Deputy Minister of Mines, Gift Chimankire, publicly confirmed that the ministry was in a dilemma over how to deal with Chinese nationals involved in illegal mining activities.<sup>25</sup> He expressed the ministry's frustration when he said that these Chinese nationals often claimed to be undertaking the mining with 'permission from the top', apparently referring to the President's office.<sup>26</sup>

Many aspects of Chinese involvement in Zimbabwe's diamond mines are not public, which has resulted in speculations being made about the arrangement. It is also widely believed that the relationship has underlined the scores of human rights abuses recorded in the mining sector.

### **Retail**

China has had an impact on Zimbabwe's retail sector, with Chinese nationals living in the country starting small-scale businesses such as internet cafés, barber shops and hairdressing salons, grocery stores, electrical and home appliance stores, entertainment venues, and fast food outlets. The Chinese are also getting involved in the hospitality business, with the construction of hotels in Mutare and Harare, and are building a shopping mall on wetlands in Borrowdale on the outskirts of Harare. Chinese textiles and leather goods have flooded Zimbabwean markets at prices that drive locals out of business. As will be discussed later, this has threatened the producers of local products, and as early as 2004 it was estimated that Chinese activities in these sectors alone threatened about 30 000 local jobs.

### **Agriculture**

Agriculture has been at the centre of many Chinese activities in Zimbabwe, especially after Western sanctions against Harare became pronounced. A detailed study recently conducted by Langton Mukwereza showed that<sup>27</sup>

[a]id programmes completed, underway and planned between Zimbabwe and China in agriculture include the Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centre (ATDC), Emergency Food Aid, a loan agreement with the China Export and Import Bank, a donation of

agricultural machinery by the Sichuan Provincial Government of China, and the training of key staff in the government of Zimbabwe's Ministry of Agriculture.

In 2011, the China Export and Import Bank extended a loan facility of \$334.7 million for procuring tractors and supporting the mechanisation of Zimbabwe's agricultural sector. Despite the loan agreement being subsequently ratified by the Zimbabwean Parliament, it is yet to be drawn down.

Chinese donations have also come in the form of foodstuffs. For example, in February 2012 China made a \$14 million donation in the form of 4 910 tonnes of rice and 9 723 tonnes of wheat to Zimbabwe as emergency food aid. This donation constituted 40% and 3% respectively of the country's annual rice and wheat requirements.<sup>28</sup> The Sichuan Provincial Government donated a consignment of agricultural machinery that comprised 10 farm trucks, 30 walking (two-wheel) tractors and 50 water pumps. There have also been study tours and short courses for key personnel in Zimbabwe's Ministry of Agriculture and secondments of agricultural experts from China, with Zimbabwe specifying the preferred skills in seconded staff. In 2011, 10 experts were seconded under this arrangement and during their stay they developed training programmes and accompanied Zimbabwean officials on field visits and extension outings.<sup>29</sup> China is also involved in Sino-Zimbabwe's Sino-Cotton and Chrome along the Great Dyke Belt.

Apart from this, the Chinese government funded the establishment of the Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centre (ATDC) at the Gwebi Agricultural College costing \$30 million. This is part of a wider commitment to establish agricultural centres across the continent. Under the terms of the donation, the Gwebi ATDC is to be run by the Chinese government for three years before it will be handed over to the Zimbabwean government. It is hoped that the centre will be absorbed as one of the Ministry of Agriculture's centres of excellence in research.<sup>30</sup> China has also offered major support in the tobacco and cotton sectors. In the former, a Chinese company, Tianze Tobacco, had an 11.7% share of the total contract crop that was marketed in 2011,<sup>31</sup> while in the cotton sector, Sino-Zimbabwe Cotton Holdings (SZCH) continues to be the key actor.

### **Telecommunications**

China has made several inroads into the telecommunications sector. For example, in September 2004 a credit facility agreement worth \$35 million was reached between Powertel Communications, a subsidiary of Zimbabwe Electric Power Authority, and the state-owned Chinese telecommunications company China Putian, for the construction of a public fibre-optic data network. A major part of the agreement was the provision of equipment for the building of a fibre-optic network running from Chitungwiza to Plumtree, with plans to extend cables from Harare to Mutare, Bulawayo to Beitbridge, and Bulawayo to Victoria Falls.<sup>32</sup> In November 2004, representatives of Huawei accompanied the vice chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, Wu Bangguo, to sign two agreements with Zimbabwe's state-owned fixed-line and mobile operators worth a total of almost \$330 million. In July 2005, the Chinese National Aero-Technology Import and Export Corporation signed an agreement with the Zimbabwean Ministry of Communication on the export of communications equipment.

As part of its assistance in the field of telecommunications, the Chinese government provided \$45 million in concessional loans to Zimbabwe to help NetOne, one of

the telecommunications providers in the country, with the implementation of a telecommunications upgrade project.<sup>33</sup> Specifically, 'the money went towards the construction of 2G and 3G base stations nationwide, and enabled the mobile service provider to deploy 3G networks in Bulawayo and other key cities'.<sup>34</sup> It was also envisaged to assist in the production of quality wireless services in the country.

### **Medical**

The Chinese have been involved in the building of hospitals in Mahusekwa and Chikomba. In March 2011, the Chinese government and the parastatal Export-Import Bank of China signed an agreement with the Zimbabwean government for a \$99.5 million loan for the procurement of medicine. The China-Zimbabwe Friendship Hospital has also been constructed. Prominent Zimbabweans frequently travel to China for medical treatment, especially after it became difficult for them to seek treatment in Western Europe.<sup>35</sup> In December 2012, a group of Chinese medical personnel under the auspices of the Chinese Zimbabwe Medical Team provided free medical treatment for Zimbabweans living around Bindura, the capital of Mashonaland Central province.

### **Transportation**

China has been involved in all aspects of public transportation in Zimbabwe: road, rail and air. In the area of road transportation, Zimbabwe has acquired commuter buses for the state-run Zimbabwe United Passenger Company. In the area of rail transportation, a co-operation agreement was signed in November 2004 between the National Railways of Zimbabwe and China Northern Locomotive and Railing Stock Industries.<sup>36</sup> In the area of air transportation, the Zimbabwean national airline, Air Zimbabwe, took delivery of two Chinese aircraft in December 2009. In 2004, Air Zimbabwe reached an agreement with the Chinese National Aero-Technology Import and Export Corporation for the acquisition of a long-haul plane.

Air Zimbabwe has also benefitted from Chinese generosity through the gift of an MA60 aircraft that the airline has been using on local and regional routes. It was noted at the time that this was aimed at assisting tourism in Zimbabwe. Although there were initial reports of technical difficulties, these were largely unfounded. At one stage the MA60 carried 50 000 to 70 000 passengers annually, accounting for 20% of the total number of passengers carried by Air Zimbabwe. The Chinese government has made a \$150 million concessional loan to Zimbabwe for the upgrading and expansion of Victoria Falls Airport.

### **Power generation**

In the area of power generation, China's involvement in Zimbabwe has also been extensive. For example, China holds a 70% stake in Zimbabwe's only electricity generation facilities at Hwange and Kariba.<sup>37</sup> The country was involved in the installation of two generators at Kariba South worth \$4 billion through Sino-Hydro Company. Other activities in this area include China International Water and Electric's contract to build a mini-hydro power station, and the construction of a solar power project. In June 2003, Catic China was involved in the purchase of Rural Electrification Agency equipment worth over \$6 million. In June 2005, a \$1.3 billion agreement was signed for the rehabilitation of the national power grid in return for chrome resources. In May 2005, a contract of \$145 million was awarded to China Jiangxi Corporation for International Economic and

Technology Co-operation for the construction of the Kunzi Dam, which was to be used to generate hydroelectric power. Also in July 2005, a Memorandum of Understanding for loan financing was signed for the expansion of Zimbabwe's Hwange Power Station.

### **Education and recreation**

The impact of China has also been felt in the educational sector. The country assisted in building two schools in Harare and Bidura. In August 2006 an agreement was signed to establish a Confucius Institute at the University of Zimbabwe to promote the Chinese language and culture. In the area of recreation, China renovated the Rufaro Stadium in Harare it had initially given to the country at a reported cost of \$10 million.

### **Military and security links**

The military links between Zimbabwe and China, although controversial in certain aspects, have not been as extensive as the economic links between the two countries. A number of reasons could account for this. First, China did not play a big role in the establishment of the Zimbabwean Defence Force, an exercise that was largely carried out by the British, and as such there was not much it could do in the subsequent development of the security establishment.<sup>38</sup> Second, the unsuccessful invitation extended to the North Koreans to train a segment of the Zimbabwean Army (the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade) apparently served as a salutary lesson for the Mugabe administration that any attempt to invite a country from 'the East' to come into the national army would be problematic.<sup>39</sup> After the ill-fated North Korean experience, Zimbabwe did not allow any serious contact with the Communist bloc in building its military until its relationship with the West deteriorated and the latter cut off military assistance to Zimbabwe.

In terms of arms supplies, between 2000 and 2009 China accounted for 39% of Zimbabwean imports of major conventional weapons.<sup>40</sup> China has also assisted in the provision of training for the Zimbabwean military, especially at the Army Staff College, and Beijing has provided military hardware and fighter jets. In November 2009 the Zimbabwe Air Force took delivery of six fighter jets at a cost of over \$120 million in total. In 2005, 39 military trucks and education equipment were supplied as a \$3 million grant to Zimbabwe, while in 2006, military machinery and construction equipment worth \$1.5 million were supplied to the Zimbabwean Defence Force. Also in 2005, Zimbabwe received six K-8 trainer aircraft with a second batch of six arriving in 2006.<sup>41</sup> Between 2006 and 2007, 55 military officers were trained under a technical co-operation agreement signed between the two countries. As noted earlier, China and Zimbabwe have found an area of convergence of interest in the Marange mines and it is widely believed that their mutual interest in ensuring that the exploitation of diamonds in this region continues undisturbed remains one of the cardinal aspects of their military relationship.

The most controversial Chinese military link with the Mugabe government has been the infamous *An Yue Jiang* incident of March 2009, which saw a shipment of arms to Zimbabwe at about the same time the country was preparing for an election that was widely expected to witness considerable government clampdown.<sup>42</sup> The sale of the weapons, which included AK-47s, 3 million rounds of ammunition, 1 500 rocket-propelled grenades and 3 000 mortar rounds and mortar tubes, was agreed in January 2008 and the shipment was sent to landlocked Zimbabwe via the South African port

of Durban on 15 March 2009. However, when the weapons arrived in South Africa on 14 April, dockworkers in Durban, realising what the weapons could be used for, refused to allow the ship to dock. After a diplomatic furore that ultimately reached the Durban High Court, China had no choice but to recall the ship. It is not known whether the shipment eventually reached Harare, as there were different versions of what happened to the contents of the ship.<sup>43</sup>

### Diplomatic links

For most of the first decade of its independence, diplomatic relations between Zimbabwe and China were particularly close. Mugabe had made it clear from the time of independence that China would have a take-off advantage over the Soviet Union. In an interview with the London *Observer* on 9 March 1980, Mugabe said about the relationship with China, 'we will continue to maintain and deepen our alliances with those who have been our *truest friends*', while on relations with the Soviet Union, he said, 'We will not deny them the right to come to a *better* relationship, but at the same time, we cannot prompt them if they don't want to be our friends' [own emphasis].<sup>44</sup> During the period under study, among the key Chinese visitors to Zimbabwe were Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang (May 2013) and Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi (February 2011). Prominent Zimbabwean visitors to China included Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai (May 2013), then Minister of Defence Emmerson Mnangagwa (leading a ZANU-PF delegation in July 2009), Foreign Minister Simbarashe Mumbengegwi (February 2010), a ZANU-PF team to witness elections (October 2012) and Mugabe himself in November 2011.

A major criticism to which China has often had to respond is that it has a hidden expectation of national advantage in its relationship with Africa and that its ultimate ambition is to be the latest in a series of external countries to exploit the continent. The persistence of this accusation has made it necessary for China to deny it at every opportunity. In 2007, the country's Commerce Minister, Bo Xilai, made one of the strongest rebuttals of this assumption when he noted:<sup>45</sup>

What China has for Africa is out of sincere feeling, out of friendship from the bottom of the heart forged in past decades, but I have heard some criticism ... An important criticism is that China is taking oil from Africa, but according to statistics last year, of Africa's total oil exports, China took 8.7 per cent, Europe took 36 per cent and the United States 33 per cent. If importing 8.7 per cent means exploitation, how about 36 per cent and 33 per cent? ... We hear non-stop that China is becoming a new colonialist. Africa in [the] past let its natural resources be taken away at very low prices, but now it is not the same. China and Africa, according to reasonable market prices, conduct normal and reasonable buying and selling.

The exact number of Chinese nationals living and working in Zimbabwe is not known and the Commercial Counsellor at the Chinese Embassy in Harare, Rosalind Xue, confirmed that as of February 2013, the number ran into thousands. The influx of Chinese migrants into Zimbabwe started almost immediately after 2003. In 2003, tourist arrivals from China had increased by 245% over the previous year.<sup>46</sup> A Chinese source reports that Chinese tourists in Zimbabwe numbered 3 354 in 2003 and 11 584 by the end of October 2004.<sup>47</sup> Animals have also featured in the complex Chinese diplomatic relations with Zimbabwe.

In 2009, Mugabe agreed to send elephants, zebras and impala antelopes to China in return for four Siberian tigers.

The UN has become the centre of intense diplomatic activities concerning Zimbabwe. Two issues have brought the country to the floor of the UN. These were the forceful land acquisitions by the Mugabe administration and the allegations of rigged elections. Both, in the eyes of the Western permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC), qualified the country for economic sanctions.

Throughout the time Mugabe faced intense criticism, China provided all the necessary backing, ensuring that the country escaped UNSC sanctions. It should be added, though, that Russia supported China in this position. On a number of occasions, it was Russia that championed the cause of Zimbabwe in the UNSC. For example, in July 2008, when the US tabled its proposal against Mugabe's government, the Russian ambassador to the UN, Vitaly Churkin, voiced Russia's opposition on the grounds that it would result in the UNSC's exceeding its mandate. Once Russia had taken this stand, China supported it.<sup>48</sup>

China gave three reasons for its position on Zimbabwe at the UNSC. First, Beijing argued that it did not consider the situation in Zimbabwe to be a threat to international peace and security. Consequently, Chapter VII of the UN Charter did not apply to the situation. China argued that, conversely, Article 2 of the UN Charter (which recognises non-interference in the internal matters of other states) was more applicable. Second, Beijing claimed that the imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe would severely hamper the mediatory efforts then being undertaken by South African President Thabo Mbeki. Last, China stated that the most relevant regional organisations, ie, the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community, had not pushed for UN sanctions but had asked for more time to conduct negotiations.

However, an aspect of Chinese diplomacy in Zimbabwe that is not widely known is the role the country played in ensuring that an agreement was signed between the Mugabe government and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). It has now come to light that Mugabe was told by China that it would no longer block any UNSC sanctions if ZANU-PF did not genuinely commit itself to ensuring that the agreement with the MDC was signed. This was similar to the subtle threat the late President Samora Machel of Mozambique had given to Mugabe when he had wanted to back out of the Lancaster House Agreement that ultimately resulted in Zimbabwean independence.<sup>49</sup>

In concluding this discussion on the activities of China in Zimbabwe, it is clear that the relationship is extensive, and all that can be presented here is a summary of it. However, to form a complete picture of the relationship, it is necessary to examine the way Zimbabweans have reacted to the activities of Chinese in their country.

## IMPACT ON AND REACTION FROM ZIMBABWEANS

'Our government has behaved like a desperado, casting a blind eye on the abuse of labour laws and ignoring labour unions which made noise about the abuses because there is a horse and rider relationship with Zimbabwe being ridden by China'.<sup>50</sup>

*Alexander Rusero (Zimbabwe political analyst)*



Largely because of the extent of their involvement in Zimbabwe's socio-economic affairs and of their connection with the Mugabe government, the Chinese have featured prominently in the minds of average Zimbabweans, with very few being indifferent towards them. In the section that follows, there is a discussion of the impact of Chinese involvement in Zimbabwe and the reactions of Zimbabweans to increasing Chinese involvement in their affairs.

### **Chinese impact on Zimbabwean domestic politics**

A well-known aspect of Chinese diplomacy is its unwillingness to intervene officially in the domestic politics of any country with which it has dealings. While some have seen this as a policy that respects the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of African states, others argue that this is a subterfuge to ensure maximum exploitation of Africa's natural resources.

'Prevailing circumstances' and the 'peculiarities of the Zimbabwean case' have, however, made this a problematic issue in Zimbabwe. In terms of 'prevailing circumstances', two issues are particularly important. First, by the beginning of 2000, opposition to the Mugabe administration had become well organised. While previous domestic challenges against Mugabe, especially those from ZAPU and the Zimbabwe Unity Movement, could easily be dismissed, the opposition that came from the MDC under labour leader Tsvangirai ruled out indifference as an option open to China in its response to developments in Zimbabwe. Although it was widely known that the West supported the MDC, the extent of its domestic strength was such that the movement could not be ignored by China.

The second issue that underlines the importance of 'time' was the politics surrounding China's hosting of the 2008 Olympics. Almost immediately after China had won the bid to host the games, the country received a barrage of criticism about its tolerance of human right abuses in a number of developing countries.<sup>51</sup> This had China considering embarking on a 'charm offensive' to win it a measure of global respectability. Against this background, it became necessary for Beijing to take a closer look at developments in Zimbabwean domestic politics.

The peculiarities of the Zimbabwean case manifested along a number of fronts. First, Mugabe was fighting on two domestic fronts: against the whites and against the opposition MDC. Although there is no evidence to show that China advised Mugabe against this, it realised that Zimbabwe's domestic situation (arising from Mugabe's response to opposition) meant that developments in the country had to be taken seriously. A second domestic development was the increasing damage to the economy that came with the land acquisitions. The withdrawal of support from Western countries as a result of Mugabe's land acquisition policy made it obvious to China that there were reasons for deeper involvement in Zimbabwean domestic politics.

Two external developments also made it necessary for China to reconsider its policies on domestic politics. First, the reaction of South Africa, undoubtedly the most important regional neighbour of Zimbabwe, to domestic developments there made China realise that it too must come up with a concrete policy. South Africa's subtle criticism of Zimbabwe's domestic politics showed China that a blanket policy of non-interference would be unpopular. Second, China was facing considerable criticism because of its policy in Sudan, where Beijing had been known to support the government's controversial actions,



especially in Darfur.<sup>52</sup> China was thus determined to ensure that Zimbabwe was not added to the list of Chinese policies of support to dictatorial African leaders. These were crucial background issues that came into play in determining how China responded to Zimbabwe's domestic situation.

For a long time, China's position in Zimbabwe's political life had been unassailable. Even before the fall-out with the West, Mugabe had made it clear that China was a 'dear friend in need' that would always be held in high esteem. Once ZAPU had been browbeaten into conformity, there was no other voice in the country that could turn the Mugabe administration away from China. Consequently, discussions in Parliament and the government's positions were in support of closer ties with China.

Broadly, in the last 10 years the Chinese impact on Zimbabwean domestic affairs seems to have undergone three phases. The first phase, which began to emerge around 2005, is one that may be described as that of 'emerging opposition'.<sup>53</sup> With the emergence of the MDC, criticism began to be levelled at the extent to which the Chinese government was trying to sustain the Mugabe government in the face of Western sanctions. China's initial response to the challenge the MDC posed to Mugabe's ZANU-PF was to give Mugabe unflinching support, especially as the West was using the opportunity to criticise Mugabe's domestic policies on human rights, alleged electoral fraud and farm acquisitions. Realising that Mugabe needed support, China ensured that the president was well provided for. Throughout the time that the West remained vocal in its criticism of Mugabe's domestic politics, China's assistance to Mugabe was unwavering. The criticism against China became most profound after the arms meant for the Zimbabwean government were intercepted in South Africa. As noted earlier, the general impression was that these arms were meant to stifle the MDC in a crucial election period.

The second phase came after a government of national unity was formed in Zimbabwe in 2008. With this, both China and the MDC realised the need to have a workable if not amiable relationship. First, China saw that, unlike the previous opposition to Mugabe, the MDC was quite strong, with a considerable domestic support base and a measure of external support. It could not be wished away, as had been the case with previous opposition parties. Beijing thus had to find a way to handle the situation. On its part, the MDC recognised that China had become so entrenched in Zimbabwe's economic life that the West could not match its support even if sanctions were lifted. The party realised that China's economic grip on Zimbabwe made some form of accommodation inevitable, but it cautioned against the assumption that China's interest was not coloured by its own national interests. Tsvangirai specifically warned that the Chinese 'are not missionaries, they have their own business interest, they have their own national interest, especially when it comes to resources'.<sup>54</sup>

The third phase is that of the gradual establishment of an accommodation between China and the MDC. This phase grew out of the second one and consists of the desire of both the Chinese government and the MDC to know each other better and explore the possibility of a deeper relationship. This may be a case of 'common-sense' diplomacy on both sides. On the part of China, the intention is to get on the good sides of both parties. While the very cordial relationship between Beijing and ZANU-PF continues, China has also started cultivating a relationship with the MDC. In May 2012, Tsvangirai was invited to visit China.<sup>55</sup> This was clearly a policy of foresight by Beijing to cater for all possible eventualities in Zimbabwe – just in case ZANU-PF lost the election. The MDC's strategy

has been to ensure that China realises that it will not significantly alter the advantage Beijing currently enjoys in the country, even if warm hands were to be extended to the West. Also as part of its long-term diplomacy, China is also building a close relationship with Mnangagwa, currently the Minister of Justice and widely considered as the likely successor of Mugabe. Here, the Chinese have a significant advantage because Mnangagwa trained in China during the liberation war. So the Chinese are covering all angles.

At the same time, the warm relationship between China and Zimbabwe does not mean that there have not been occasional hiccups. For example, not all of Mugabe's requests to China have been successful. In July 2005, while on a state visit to China, he asked for a loan of \$1 billion, but this was not granted. Instead he came home with an honorary degree and \$6 million in food aid. In 2012, Zimbabwe defaulted on a \$200 million Chinese loan that was used to procure farming equipment. However, these were minor incidents that have not had a serious impact on the deepening friendship between the two governments.

One individual who is in a particularly difficult position in the whole equation is the Finance Minister, Tendai Biti of the MDC. While he is known to be critical of the various deals being struck between the Mugabe administration and China and to be opposed to some of the labour practices of the Chinese, he is unable to take decisive steps for at least two reasons. First, Zimbabwe's economic connection with China is too deep for easy withdrawal. He thus has very little choice but to handle the whole situation with tact. Second, any repudiation of the various agreements the ZANU-PF government has made with the Chinese may portray Zimbabwe in a bad light among international investors. Biti also realises that the Chinese can go over his head to get whatever they want through their direct contact with Mugabe.

Chinese issues do not often come to the Zimbabwean Parliament for debate as most decisions concerning these issues are taken at the executive level. However, on the few occasions that they have made it to Parliament, discussions have often followed party lines, with ZANU-PF members defending the government's position and the MDC sounding a (sometimes subtle) note of caution. Parliament is also often briefed on key developments. For example, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Defence, Trust Maphosa, reported the acquisition of K-8 trainer jets to the Zimbabwean Parliament.

Parliament also passed the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act, which allocates certain segments of the economy to indigenous Zimbabweans, defined broadly as 'any person who, before the 18<sup>th</sup> April 1980, was disadvantaged by unfair discrimination on the grounds of his or her race, and any descendant of such person, and include any company, association, syndicate or partnership of which indigenous Zimbabweans form the majority of the members or hold the controlling interest'.<sup>56</sup> Although it was not explicitly stated, it is widely believed that Chinese, Indian and Nigerian nationals dominate the retail market.<sup>57</sup> However, once this Act was passed, the Chinese began exploiting their direct access to the president to ensure that they were exempted from this law.<sup>58</sup> The general manager of the National Indigenisation Economic Empowerment Board, Zwelibanzi Lunga, has pointed out that the law 'was meant to streamline foreign direct investment in key economic sectors'.<sup>59</sup>

### **Chinese activities as viewed by non-governmental organisations and local communities**

Most Zimbabweans find it difficult to be indifferent to China. Opinions about the Chinese seem to have developed in two phases. At the time of China's initial involvement in Zimbabwean affairs with the constructions of buildings, roads and other infrastructure, most Zimbabweans were positive about Beijing's role in the country's affairs. Supported by the government's massive propaganda campaign promising that China's involvement would dwarf the effects of whatever sanctions the West might want to impose, only avowed critics of Mugabe frowned at the coming of China. Most Zimbabweans without deep political commitment were either in support of or, at best, indifferent to the Chinese presence in the country. Three interconnected developments brought about a second phase: 1) the realisation by many that Mugabe was determined to use the Chinese to do his dirty political work; 2) the attitude of many Chinese, whom Zimbabweans consider unfriendly and at times lacking respect for human rights; and 3) the forceful entry of Chinese nationals into commercial ventures that had been held exclusively by local Zimbabweans. From this period, opposition began to emerge against the Chinese in Zimbabwe and local non-governmental organisations and members of the public began raising critical issues about the nature of the relationship their government was developing with the Chinese. History also seems to have played a role in some Zimbabweans' perception of the Chinese, with members of the older generation remembering the activities of the North Koreans and the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade they trained in the 1980s.<sup>60</sup>

Closely related to this is the general attitude of the Chinese to the environment. Many Zimbabweans believe that the Chinese have little respect for the environment. This allegation is not limited to Zimbabwe. Shalmali Guttal seems to have summed it up when he notes:<sup>61</sup>

Just as Chinese overseas development assistance comes without the policy prescriptions demanded by IFIs and traditional Northern donors, Chinese investments in revenue generating sectors such as mining, energy, hydropower, agriculture and forestry are not tempered by commonly accepted environmental, labour and social standards.

The Center for Research and Development (CRD) has documented human rights abuses by Chinese companies in the country's extractive industries, most notably in the Marange diamond fields. The Affirmative Action Group has been putting pressure on the government to ensure that the Chinese do not do business in Zimbabwe at the expense of the local population.

### **Assessment of Chinese impact on employment, the economy and commercial relations**

Many Zimbabweans hold negative views on the impact of Chinese businesses on employment, the economy and commercial relations. Their objections tend to fall under two main headings: the stifling of local businesses, and the tendency of the Chinese to compromise government officials and politicians.

### **Stifling of local businesses**

A major complaint coming from Zimbabweans is that the Chinese are forcing local entrepreneurs out of business. Many Chinese business people are involved in small businesses dealing in foodstuffs, household goods, clothing, etc. They are known to sub-contract work that could have been done by local companies to other Chinese companies. This has resulted in a situation where many Zimbabweans see the involvement of the Chinese in their economy as being detrimental in the long term.

### **Getting things done through the 'back door'**

Complaints have also come from Zimbabweans about the inappropriate means through which Chinese business people often get things done. For example, there are many complaints over the exemption granted to Chinese mining companies from the community empowerment crusade run by the Indigenisation Minister. Additionally, in a deal that was somewhat murky, China paid \$3 billion for exclusive access to Zimbabwe's extensive platinum deposits – a contract estimated to be worth \$10 billion. The impression among many Zimbabweans is that the Chinese were able to do this because of the greed and corruption of the Zimbabwean political class.<sup>62</sup>

### **Assessment of the social impact of Chinese activities**

One of the most controversial aspects of Sino–Zimbabwean relations is Zimbabweans' perception of China's involvement in their social lives. While opinions differ on the subject, there can be no doubt that many Zimbabweans are very critical of Chinese activities in the country. A continued increase in this opposition could affect future relations between the two countries. Broadly, Zimbabweans' opposition to China's social involvement falls into two categories, as discussed below.

### **Violence and human right abuses**

Perhaps the most severe criticism levelled against the Chinese in Zimbabwe is the allegation of human rights violations. First, many Chinese employers pay their Zimbabwean workers very low wages. For example, most of the workers employed in the Marange diamond mines by the Chinese are being paid as little as \$4 a day. Second, Chinese employers are often alleged to inflict physical abuse on Zimbabwean workers. There have been numerous allegations of beatings and rapes.<sup>63</sup> The impression among many Zimbabweans is that their government has sacrificed their protection to the greed of the elite class. Third, Zimbabweans are upset by Chinese business people's boasts about their control over affairs in the country because of their connections to political office holders.

### **Quality of goods**

The general opinion among Zimbabweans is that the goods and services provided by Chinese businesses are inferior. Discussions held with Zimbabweans for this study showed that most Zimbabweans believe China is turning Zimbabwe into a dumping ground for cheap and inferior goods. These objections were captured in an article in one of the local newspapers.<sup>64</sup>

The Plaza [built by the Chinese] has reportedly developed cracks due to poor workmanship and failure to adhere to local building laws, while the National Defence College (NDC) is structurally unsound ... The Plaza along Bulawayo Road adjacent to the National Sports Stadium – another Chinese project whose quality of work has been condemned – is being constructed on a wetland against the advice of environmentalists, in violation of environmental laws and despite council objections. Projects that are not procured via a transparent, public and open tender system are usually over-priced and of poor quality. Chinese projects have not been subjected to local council by-laws as they are given preferential treatment by their influential government connections. In most cases, local authorities have been prevented from supervising the structures at necessary stages ... In terms of the agreements, most of the projects are erected using Chinese labour and products, irrespective of the fact that some of these Chinese professionals may not be qualified to work in Zimbabwe, particularly in specialised fields such as engineering ... In these bilateral Zimbabwe–China projects, the entire professional team is Chinese and most of the building material is imported from China, except manual labour which would be Zimbabwean.

Opposition to Chinese activities is now getting to the stage where the government cannot easily ignore it any longer. In May 2005, the head of the ZANU-PF Women's League, Nyasha Chikwinya, called on the police to crack down on Chinese engaging in illegal currency deals.<sup>65</sup> There have also been complaints by the local population about how the government has been using the media to praise Chinese activities in Zimbabwe without reporting adequately on some of their negative aspects. Talks held with Zimbabweans for the purposes of this study uncovered the objections of many Zimbabweans to the activities of the electronic media and even the government-owned *Herald* newspaper in what many see as 'negative propaganda'.<sup>66</sup>

### **Sino–Zimbabwean relations and the Zimbabwean Parliament**

The Zimbabwean Parliament's relationship with China is a complex one. First, it should be pointed out that Parliament has received a lot of support from Beijing. Among others, in 2009 Parliament was given digital recording and conferencing equipment worth \$150,000 by China. The country also pledged \$145 million toward the construction of a new \$400 million Zimbabwean Parliament building. In 2009, the Chinese government gave Parliament gifts (such as 45 computers, 20 printers, 10 television sets and 25 scanners).

In 2011, the then vice premier, Wang signed about \$700 million in loan agreements with Zimbabwe during a visit to the country. The loan was the biggest international deal in years for Zimbabwe. However, the MDC has mostly been opposed to Zimbabwe's continued indebtedness to China, and the party's members have been vocal about this in Parliament. When the discussion of the 20-year \$98 million loan from China to build a defence college came to the floor, MDC members argued that the country's economic situation did not justify spending such a large amount of money. One MDC member, Shepherd Mushonga, was particularly vehement in his opposition, but his position was opposed by other members of Parliament (MPs), especially those from ZANU-PF, who argued that the country needed a quality defence college.

MDC parliamentarians sometimes oppose other MDC members on issues relating to loans from China. For example, some MDC members criticised Biti's signing of a

loan in April 2010 for \$250 million from the Export-Import Bank of China. There are a number of problems with this particular loan. First, there was a disagreement on the loan amount, as the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) and the *Herald* newspaper gave different figures, with the ZBC saying it was \$271 million and the *Herald* claiming it was \$380 million. Second, the government had signed the agreement before seeking Parliament's approval – Parliament had to be called from recess. It was also claimed that the government wanted to use the money to rehabilitate Victoria Falls Airport ahead of the UN World Tourism Assembly; to develop and rehabilitate municipal water and sewage treatment works for the City of Harare (\$141.3 million); and to fund a \$89 million medical equipment and supplies project, among others.

MDC members opposed what seemed to them to be deception on the government's part, as Chinese contractors had already begun to work on site for the project at the time the government came to Parliament with its request. Specifically, MDC members accused Biti of failing to 'respect the Legislature by bringing something that had already been consummated'.<sup>67</sup> They were also worried that the deal with China could have 'sidelined locals even in small issues such as labour and raw materials',<sup>68</sup> with even the raw materials being imported from China. Among the MDC parliamentarians who were particularly critical were Ian Kay (the Marondera MP), Felix Magalela Sibanda (Magwegwe), Thamsanqa Mahlangu (Nkulumane) and Misheck Shoko (Chitungwiza South). The government claimed that the decision was an urgent matter, as the country would have lost \$150 million had the agreement not been ratified quickly.

At one stage, other MPs also began taking a broader perspective, with ZANU-PF members raising issues about Chinese activities in Zimbabwe. In December 2011, ZANU-PF MP Paddy Zhanda openly called for a review of China's involvement in the economy. Zhanda said that Chinese involvement was 'bleeding' the economy.<sup>69</sup> This was one of the most critical comments made by a ZANU-PF member against China. The criticism is particularly crucial because Zhanda chaired the parliamentary portfolio committee on budget, finance and investment promotion.

Against this background of increasing deterioration in relations between Chinese and Zimbabwean nationals, the Chinese government dispatched a special delegation to Zimbabwe in June 2011 to encourage better relations between its nationals and locals after reports of inhumane treatment and underpayment. They held seminars for the Chinese living in Zimbabwe to encourage them to play a role in building the Zimbabwean economy'.<sup>70</sup> Not much success, however, seems to have attended this initiative, as many Zimbabweans still believe that they have justifiable grounds to criticise Chinese activities in their country.

## CONCLUSION

From the above, it seems clear that Chinese involvement in Zimbabwean affairs is both extensive and controversial, and there are indications that this trend is likely to continue for as long as Mugabe remains in power (and possibly even longer if he is replaced by a pro-China ZANU-PF member). The closeness of China and Zimbabwe between 2003 and 2013 was due largely to the confluence of a number of events, including the antipathy between Zimbabwe and the West, which resulted in the imposition of various sanctions

against the country; China's desire to benefit from Zimbabwe's resources, especially those that are strategic to Chinese interests; and the determination of the Mugabe administration to use Chinese support to address domestic political challenges, especially its political rivalry with the MDC. Both the Chinese and the Zimbabwean governments seem to have benefitted from this relationship, even if the extent to which the average Zimbabwean has benefitted is doubtful.

While there can be no doubt that China has assisted Zimbabwe in dealing with the economic challenges that came with Western-imposed sanctions, there are serious grounds to question the degree to which these connections with China are in Zimbabwe's long-term interests. It is the opinion in some circles that China has won almost exclusive rights to all of Zimbabwe's resources and that Zimbabwean politicians have sold out their country in their dealings with China. However, apart from their ideological affinity and Zimbabwe's desire to shun the West, China's position as the strongest emerging economy has given the Mugabe administration justification for the close relationship.

As Zimbabwe faces the future, a number of crucial issues will come to the fore. Although Mugabe has only recently won another term in office, even his greatest supporters realise that, aged 90, he cannot stay in power for much longer. It is almost certain that all those connected to the country are looking at the period beyond him, and it is well known that there is already competition within ZANU-PF regarding his successor. The current political situation in Zimbabwe means that the competition over the future of the country will be between ZANU-PF and the MDC. Although the extent of China's involvement will make it difficult for any successor to discountenance it, there is also the distinct possibility that a successor will want to bring about some form of accommodation with the West after more than a decade of disagreement. This may reduce, even if minimally, China's grip on the affairs of the country.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Okeowo A, 'China in Africa: The new imperialists', *The New Yorker*, 12 June 2013.
- 2 One of the most recent people to express this concern is the Governor of the Nigerian Central Bank, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi. See 'Africa must get real about Chinese ties', *Financial Times* (London), 11 March 2013.
- 3 See Olonisakin F, 'BRICS and African Regional Organisations', SAIIA Occasional Paper, forthcoming.
- 4 *Keesing Contemporary Archives*, 22 June 1980, p. 30377.
- 5 The pre-independence link between China and ZANU is often considered the takeoff point for discussions on Sino-Zimbabwean relations.
- 6 See Adebayo AG, *In the Sphere of the Dragon: China's Economic Relations in the New Millennium*. Ibadan: Ibadan School of History, Monograph Series, 2, 2010.
- 7 For a detailed discussion of this, see El-Khawas M, 'China's changing policies in Africa', *Issues: A Journal of Opinion*, 3, 1, Spring, 1973, pp. 24–28.
- 8 For more on this, see Chung FK, *Re-living the Second Chimurenga: Memories from the Liberation Struggle*. Harare: Weaver Books, 2006.
- 9 Among those who were trained in China and were to occupy important positions in



independent Zimbabwe was Emmerson Mnangagwa, who is considered in some circles as the heir apparent to Mugabe.

- 10 For a more detailed discussion, see Seegers A, 'Revolutionary armies, Mozambique and Zimbabwe', in Baynham S (ed.), *Military Power and Politics in Black Africa*. London: St Martins Press, 1986.
- 11 For more on this, see Alao A, *Mugabe and the Politics of Security in Zimbabwe*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2012.
- 12 *New Zimbabwe*, 'China, Zimbabwe relations "unshakeable"', <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/china24.14956.html>.
- 13 China's Economy, The US–China Business Council, <https://www.uschina.org/statistics/2004/economyforecast.html>.
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- 16 Kaminski B & F Ng, 'Zimbabwe's Foreign Trade Performance during the Decade of Economic Turmoil: Will Exports Recover?', World Bank Report, 2011, p. 44.
- 17 Moyo J, *op. cit.*
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 See 'China remains Zimbabwe's top investor', *Newsday*, 3 July 2013.
- 20 Although diamonds were discovered in 1971, production did not start until 1995 and had to stop in 1998 because of low diamond prices. Commercial production started in 2000. See Hawkins T, 'The Mining Sector in Zimbabwe and its Potential Contribution to Recovery', UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), *Comprehensive Economic Recovery in Zimbabwe*, Working Paper Series, 1, 2009, p. 14.
- 21 For example, in November 2004, six agreements and contracts were signed, including an agreement and technical co-operation agreement.
- 22 See *New Zimbabwe*, 'Army farm owns diamond mines – Minister', 14 June 2012,
- 23 See *Engineering News*, 'China lends Zimbabwe \$700m, seeks protection', 21 March 2011, <http://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/china-lends-zimbabwe-700m-seeks-protection-2011-03-21>.
- 24 *Mining Review*, 'China signs nearly US\$700 million in loans with Zimbabwe', 22 March 2011.
- 25 Dube M, 'Zimbabwe: Government in dilemma over illegal Chinese mining activities', *The Standard*, 19 May 2013.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 Mukwereza L, 'Chinese and Brazilian Cooperation with African Agriculture: The Case of Zimbabwe', *Future Agricultures*, CBAA Working Paper, March 2013.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 Aid Data, 'Zimbabwean Telecom receives Chinese funding', <http://aiddatachinesa.org/projects/17503>.
- 33 *The Herald online*, 'China working towards a better Zimbabwe', 11 September 2012.
- 34 *Ibid.*



- 35 For example, the former vice president, the late Simeon Muzenda, was known to have travelled to China for treatment.
- 36 *Xinhua News Agency*, 'Zimbabwe, China sign agreement to strengthen trade relations', 21 February 2004.
- 37 Melville C & O Owen, 'China and Africa: A new era of "South-South cooperation"', Midlands State University, Gweru, 2005, [www.msu.ac.zw/elearning/.../1212401554China%20and%20Africa.doc](http://www.msu.ac.zw/elearning/.../1212401554China%20and%20Africa.doc).
- 38 For more on the role of the British in the formation of the Zimbabwean army, see Alao A, 'The metamorphosis of the unorthodox: The integration and early development of the Zimbabwean National Army', in Bhebe N & T Ranger (eds), *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*. London: James Currey, 1995.
- 39 The training was deemed unsuccessful. After almost a year of training, the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade was undisciplined, low in morale and hopeless in the sort of counter-insurgency operations it was meant to tackle. For example, despite the brigade's considerable presence in Matabeleland, it could not trace six tourists abducted by dissidents in June 1982.
- 40 Jeuck L, 'Arms Transfers to Zimbabwe: Implications for an Arms Trade Treaty', SIPRI Background Paper, March 2011.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 This was first revealed by South African investigative journalist Martin Welz.
- 43 As Lukas Jeuck points out, there are people who believe that the weapons were unloaded in Pointe Noire, Republic of the Congo, and then flown to Harare, Zimbabwe by transport aircraft. There were also those who claimed that the consignment eventually got to Zimbabwe through South Africa. See Jeuck L, *op. cit.*
- 44 Keesing Contemporary Archives, *op. cit.*
- 45 Adebayo AG, *op. cit.*, pp. 26–27.
- 46 *Mail & Guardian*, 'Zimbabwe tourism figures plummet', 25 September 2004.
- 47 *Xinhua News Agency*, 'Air Zimbabwe to launch flight to China', 13 October 2004, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-10/13/content\\_382042.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-10/13/content_382042.htm).
- 48 As expected, the US was disappointed at this position, especially as an African country on the UN Security Council, Burkina Faso, had supported it. The US Ambassador to the UN, Zalmay Khalilzad, was particularly scathing in his remarks to the Russians, since Russia had, during a G-8 meeting that same week, supported a joint statement criticising the situation in Zimbabwe.
- 49 It was believed that Machel warned Mugabe when he was assuming office that he should tone down his Marxist rhetoric. Specifically he was said to have told him that he should not do anything that would scare the whites away. See Meredith M, *Mugabe: Power, Plunder and the Struggle for Zimbabwe*. Oxford: Public Affairs Limited, 2002, p. 9.
- 50 Chidavaenzi P, 'Chinese exploiting Zimbabwe', *Analysts*, 4 February 2013.
- 51 Apart from Zimbabwe, there were those who also raised concerns about China's support for President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan, then under intense global criticism for his activities in Darfur.
- 52 For more on Chinese policy towards Sudan, especially as this relates to the crisis in Darfur, see Human Rights Watch, 'China's Involvement in Sudan: Arms and Oil', <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/sudan1103/26.htm>.
- 53 In a way, this seems to follow a general pattern that the opposition parties use to criticise the ruling party. Anti-Chinese arguments, usually with claims of 'un-transparent deals' and 'theft

- of the country resources', are some of the standard arguments that have been used against the ruling party.
- 54 *The Guardian* (London), 'Workers claim abuse as China adds Zimbabwe to its scramble for Africa', 2 January 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk>.
- 55 The trip turned out to be quite controversial because of what critics termed to be its 'extravagant' nature. The Prime Minister travelled with his new wife and a delegation of 31 officials. Critics accused him of extravagance, especially because the trip came barely a week after he and his wife had made a 'family trip' to the US and Austria.
- 56 See the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act, Chapter 14:33, <http://www.myiee.gov.zw/>.
- 57 See *Business Economy*, 'Chinese, Nigerians face boot', 23 May 2013.
- 58 The activities of the AAG have also been extended to Indians and Nigerians – the two other nationalities at the forefront of business in Zimbabwe.
- 59 See *Business Economy*, *op. cit.*
- 60 Shortly after independence, the government invited the North Koreans to assist in the establishment of the new national army. Apart from training the notorious 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which became infamous for its role during the Matabeleland unrest, the North Koreans were also unpopular because of their brutality towards civilians. For more on this, see Alao A, 'The metamorphosis of the unorthodox', *op. cit.*
- 61 Guttal S, 'Client and competitor: China and international financial institutions', in Guerrero DG & F Manji (eds), *China's New Role in Africa and the South: A Search for a New Perspective*. Cape Town: Fahamu, 2008, p. 29.
- 62 Research assistant's interviews with Zimbabweans, June 2013.
- 63 See Mutsaka F, 'Zimbabwe's mines still rife with abuse', *Global Post*, 6 October 2011.
- 64 *Ibid.*
- 65 'Chikwinya calls for the arrest of Chinese', *Daily Mirror* (Harare), 27 May 2005.
- 66 Interview conducted by research assistant in Harare, 28 June 2013.
- 67 See Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce, 'Parly ratifies protocols of US\$380 million loan facility', August 2012, <http://www.zncc.co.zw/2012/08/parly-ratifies-protocols-of-u-s-380-million-loan-facility/>.
- 68 *Ibid.*
- 69 *New Zimbabwe*, 'Chinese companies "bleeding" economy: Zanu PF MP' 9 December 2011, <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/business-6690-Chinese+companies+bleeding+economy/business.aspx>.
- 70 See *The Telegraph*, 'China to encourage better local relations with Zimbabwe', 19 June 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/southafrica/8585138/China-to-encourage-better-local-relations-in-Zimbabwe.html>.

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