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# China–Zimbabwe Relations: A Model of China–Africa Relations?

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## ABSTRACT

There are two parallel interpretations of the relationship between China and Zimbabwe: on the one hand, it is often viewed as a microcosm of China–Africa relations due to its economic and resource elements; on the other, it is portrayed as an example of China’s support for a ‘pariah regime’ without any consideration of human rights and good governance. However, this paper argues that the China–Zimbabwe relationship is neither of these, but rather a possible model for China–Africa relations as a whole. Driven by the ‘look East’ policy on the Zimbabwean side and the engaging policy supported by the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation on the Chinese side, this relationship has its own dynamic, development path and implications. Through a historical review, the paper looks at the current political, security and economic engagements between China and Zimbabwe, and concludes the following about their relationship: (1) it is unique in that it has a momentum driven by two elements, namely the sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe by the West and the re-engagement policy by China; (2) it is balanced internally among different pillars, especially the political and economic pillars; and (3) it has great potential to be a pioneer for China–Africa relations as a whole. However, it is important to point out the obstacles ahead, which calls for both parties to reverse the negatively motivated and balanced relationship to a positive one.

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
EU	European Union
EXIM Bank	China Export-Import Bank
FDI	foreign direct investment
FOCAC	Forum on China–Africa Cooperation
GPA	Global Political Agreement
GNU	Government of National Unity
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDC-M	Movement for Democratic Change under Mutambara
MDC-T	Movement for Democratic Change under Tsvangirai
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics of China
NPC	National People's Congress
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UNSC	UN Security Council
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriot Front
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
Zim Asset	Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation
ZDERA	Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act

## INTRODUCTION

China's rise has been one of the most significant phenomena in contemporary international affairs, along with the diffusion in power from sovereign states to non-state actors and even individuals, and the power shift from the West to 'the Rest'. It is important to note that China's rise is a mainly material rising but not a comprehensive one.<sup>1</sup> China's economic ascent and the increasing engagement between China and Africa are two of the most prominent features of this process. The international community has had a mixed reaction to China's rising, most obviously in terms of its growing economic power and the China–Africa relationship. For example, when talking about China–Zimbabwe relations, people have contradictory attitudes: on the one hand it is portrayed as 'a microcosm of China–Africa relations',<sup>2</sup> especially in terms of China's economic engagement and resource-seeking activities in Zimbabwe; on the other, it is seen as support for a 'pariah regime' (along with China's support for Sudan) without any consideration for human rights or good governance.<sup>3</sup>

This contradictory and sceptical attitude sheds little light on China's rising in general and China–Zimbabwe relations in particular. This paper tries to provide a comprehensive and coherent logic for understanding China–Zimbabwe relations. It argues that the China–Zimbabwe relationship is *not* a microcosm of China–Africa relations. On the contrary, this relationship is quite different from the general China–Africa interactions, most importantly because of its two-way nature, which has a different momentum, interaction model, development path and implications. It is important to be aware of the unique elements of this relationship, and to explore its relevance in building a new strategic partnership between China and Africa.

This paper is organised in six parts. After reviewing the historical background of the current China–Zimbabwe relations, the paper follows a traditional approach in presenting the various dimensions of this relationship, focusing on strategic and diplomatic co-operation and economic co-operation. Based on a comprehensive scan of this relationship, the paper assesses future opportunities and challenges, while the conclusion gives some policy recommendations for China in further developing the relationship based on the above findings.

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA–ZIMBABWE RELATIONS

According to Manyeruke and Mhandara, the relationship between China and Zimbabwe dates back to 'over 600 years ago during the Ming and Qing dynasty when the Chinese established relations with the Munhumutapa Empire based on trade and cultural exchange'.<sup>4</sup> China's contemporary interactions with Zimbabwe began with its support of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle against colonialism and racial oppression,<sup>5</sup> when China helped the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), one of the movements that fought for the liberation of Zimbabwe in the early 1960s. This laid the foundations for the current relationship between China and President Robert Mugabe's government. Since then, the China–Zimbabwe relationship has undergone three development phases.

### Supporting the national liberation struggle, 1960s–1980

The end of the Second World War in 1945, the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and the rise of national liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America gave China an opportunity to break through the siege of the capitalist camp in 1950s and then the siege of both capitalists and the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1960s. It was this unfavourable international environment that forged the comradeship between China and Zimbabwe, both fighting for the common cause of national liberation.

In the early 1960s, China provided largely unconditional military support for Zimbabwe's fight against colonialism. However, matters became complicated when the civil war, known as the Rhodesian Bush War, broke out in 1965. The conflict pitted three sides – the Rhodesian government under Ian Smith, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) under Joshua Nkomo, and ZANU, led by Mugabe – against one another.

ZANU had been formed in 1963 as a rival organisation to ZAPU, which was supported by the Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup> Upon its formation, ZANU also sought military support from the Soviet Union, as many other liberation movements in Southern Africa had done. However, after failing to get Soviet military support ZANU turned to the People's Republic of China, which gave it military and strategic assistance,<sup>7</sup> helping it to develop into a powerful liberation movement.<sup>8</sup> China facilitated the training of guerrillas from ZANU's military wing, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA).<sup>9</sup> It was under Chinese tutorship that ZANLA's military strategy underwent a fundamental transformation from conventional military tactics to the Maoist model, which entailed the mass mobilisation of the population.<sup>10</sup>

After much violence, all three sides signed a ceasefire. In 1978, the Rhodesian government signed an agreement with ZANU and Zimbabwe officially gained independence in April 1980, when Mugabe and his ZANU party won a landslide election. Mugabe became Prime Minister and, despite his socialist rhetoric, integrated Zimbabwe into the global financial and capitalist system. His government began as a vaguely social-democratic one-party dictatorship and he promptly established official relations with China. Mugabe knew whom to thank and he travelled with a large delegation to China the year after his election.

However, this bilateral relationship was not as perfect as portrayed later. During this period, China–USSR relations deteriorated quickly with both parties frequently criticising the other and seeking to oppose the other's policy, which caused China–Zimbabwe relations to improve. Both China and ZANU manoeuvred the ideological split between China and the USSR. China, through supporting ZANU, found a method to propagate its anti-Soviet campaign in Southern Africa: 'Support for ZANU was a vehicle by which Beijing's anti-Sovietism could be pursued in Africa.'<sup>11</sup> For ZANU, the China–USSR split presented an opportunity to maximise its gains in its struggle against ZAPU. The ZANU–ZAPU split coincided with the Sino–Soviet split, partially explaining why China and the Soviet Union were so invested in this proxy-like war in Zimbabwe. However, the initiative was not in the hands of the Chinese or Russians, but in Mugabe's. During the war, Mugabe had often sought aid from the Soviet Union but had been rebuffed, leading to further solidarity with Beijing. Even so, Mugabe was pragmatic and invited Moscow to the country's independence celebrations. His half-hearted turn to Moscow prompted additional arms shipments from China.<sup>12</sup>

### Strange comrades, 1980–2000

The year 1980 marked the end to a long and bloody liberation struggle against colonialism. The 1979 Lancaster House Agreement ushered in a new framework that supported black majority rule in Zimbabwe. On 18 April 1980, Zimbabwe officially declared its independence from British colonial rule. Official diplomatic ties between China and Zimbabwe were established immediately after Zimbabwe's independence was announced. Since then, formal relations between the two countries have been strengthened by high-level official visits.

The China–Zimbabwe relationship grew through loans, projects and further visits. Beijing reaped the political capital it had sown in the 1960s and was invited to construct hospitals and the National Sports Stadium in the 1980s.<sup>13</sup> Mugabe again travelled to China in 1985 and received \$55 million in loans.

Political turmoil in Beijing in 1989 provided another opportunity to cement China–Zimbabwe relations. Although the Tiananmen Square controversy damaged China's international image, it also reinforced China's relations with Zimbabwe and other developing countries that supported its right to defend its sovereignty. During this incident, Mugabe in particular strongly defended the Chinese government, stating that 'any reforms in China can only take place on the basis of its own tradition and its own characteristics'.<sup>14</sup> Zimbabwe refused to join the anti-China campaign, declaring that it was Beijing's right to stabilise its domestic situation. This strengthened bilateral co-operation, proving that the early ties between China and Zimbabwe remained important as they continued to direct the shape and scope of interactions between the two countries. The two countries continued supporting each other even when faced with criticism from the international community.

However, China and Zimbabwe remained 'strange comrades' in this period, with their close political relations not translating into greater economic co-operation. Their relationship was, in fact, not as good as reported. The shortcomings of communism had become apparent and capitalism seemed unavoidable in countries that wanted sustainable development. Zimbabwe thus related more to the West than China during this period, and was often described as 'the darling of the West'.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, while Mugabe wanted to 'free' Zimbabwe from its traditional Western partners, the country received substantial aid from them in the 1980s, including \$417 million from the World Bank, \$204 million from the US, and \$156 million from the European Economic Community.<sup>16</sup> In the early 2000s, most of Zimbabwe's trade, investments and loans were with or came from its neighbours and the West,<sup>17</sup> despite the imposition of targeted sanctions by the latter. On the other hand, China–Zimbabwe economic relations have for a long time been dominated by development co-operation through China's provision of aid and concessionary loans to Zimbabwe.

The turning point in their economic relations came in the wake of the crisis surrounding Zimbabwe's constitution and land reform, starting in 2000. As a result of the land acquisition policy of the Zimbabwe government, starting in 1997; the Fast Track Land Reform Programme of 2000–2002,<sup>18</sup> and the reported violence perpetrated by ZANU-PF against its opposition during elections; the US, the European Union (EU), the UK and other member states of NATO imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe. This only strengthened the relationship between Zimbabwe and China. According to a report, trade

volumes between Zimbabwe and China increased from \$56.35 million in 1997 to \$125.45 million in 2000.<sup>19</sup> This sudden surge was caused by the tensions between Zimbabwe and the UK, to which Western countries had a negative response. The period 1997–2000 saw sporadic land occupations and the acquisition of mostly white-owned farms in Zimbabwe, and in 1997 the UK government under Prime Minister Tony Blair denied that it was responsible for funding land reform in Zimbabwe.

### **The making of a special relationship, 2000–2013**

Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China–Zimbabwe relations began to evolve thanks to their unique two-way momentum. The convergence of Zimbabwe’s ‘Look East’ policy with the establishment of China’s Forum on China–Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) had a knock-on effect on the emerging ‘special relationship’.

After nearly 20 years of relative neglect China now shifted its attention back to Africa, not only to provide political support but also for the considerable economic opportunities, natural resources and market potential.<sup>20</sup> In 2000, China created the FOCAC platform to cement and expand its political and economic ties with African countries. Through FOCAC China institutionalised its symbolic diplomacy with Africa.<sup>21</sup> Within this framework, relations between China and Zimbabwe have been further consolidated through China’s credit facilities and loans to the Zimbabwean government, as well as through investment projects in different sectors of the Zimbabwean economy.

At the same time, more momentum has come from the Zimbabwean side. Over the past decade Zimbabwe has faced severe political and social-economic challenges that have compromised its people’s lives and livelihoods. The adoption of the land reform policy in early 2000 resulted in the souring of relations with the international community, and Zimbabwe’s being subjected to sanctions by the US and European countries after being accused of human rights violations and undermining the rule of law. After the US’ promulgation of the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZDERA) in December 2001,<sup>22</sup> Zimbabwe reeled under tightened targeted sanctions, the effects of which were exacerbated by the prohibition of budgetary assistance by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Zimbabwe was isolated from the international community after 2000, and the ZANU-PF government was criticised for flouting the tenets of democracy, rule of law, governance and human rights. The crisis was characterised by political instability, dilapidated infrastructure, increased poverty levels, high unemployment, economic meltdown and hyperinflation. Since then trade with and investment from the West have faced continuous difficulties, which have had a negative impact on Zimbabwe’s economic growth and development prospects. Confronted with these challenges, the Zimbabwean government adopted its ‘Look East’ policy in 2003. In terms of this policy Zimbabwe prioritised its relationships with countries such as, China, Singapore, Iran, Indonesia, India and Malaysia, broadening the scope of its foreign policy.

China has played a critical role in Zimbabwe’s political crisis for three reasons: its veto power in the UN Security Council (UNSC); its own developing-country status; and its non-interference policy. As Zimbabwe began to face increasing economic and political turmoil, its relations with China became more pragmatic and commercially oriented, grounded in the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention in one another’s internal affairs. For example, China demonstrated its divergent approach to Zimbabwe



when it partnered with Russia in 2005 to block Western-backed UNSC sanctions against the Zimbabwean government. More recently, following the June 2008 Zimbabwean presidential run-off election China again joined Russia in vetoing UN targeted sanctions that would have imposed more travel bans and financial restrictions on ZANU-PF's top officials.<sup>23</sup> In response to the political crisis in Zimbabwe, China consistently preferred a dialogue solution, suggesting that any interference would constitute meddling with the domestic politics of the country.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, China has supported the efforts of regional organisations such as the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in trying to come up with a negotiated settlement to the Zimbabwean political stalemate. Ambassador Lui Guijin, China's top envoy to Africa, was quoted by several news outlets on China's position on the Zimbabwean situation as saying, 'We think the issues concerning Zimbabwe should only be resolved by the Zimbabwean people and the international community could play a constructive role by promoting dialogue and reconciliation.'<sup>25</sup>

Given that Mugabe turned 90 in 2014, and that a peaceful and free presidential election was held in 2013, it is time for both China and Zimbabwe to consider the future of their bilateral relations. What follows is a review of the major pillars of these bilateral relations.

## STRATEGIC AND DIPLOMATIC CO-OPERATION

The China–Zimbabwe relationship has at least three pillars, namely strategic and diplomatic relations; economic relations; and social and cultural relations. The difference between this relationship and China's other bilateral relations lies in the internal balance of these pillars. Most international observers of China–Zimbabwe relations focus only on political support, non-interference and arms sales. However, this view is too narrow to fully understand the relationship.

### **Strategic and governmental ties**

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1980, China and Zimbabwe have enjoyed stable and friendly ties. The year 2010 marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations; bilateral relations grew steadily and made positive progress. The two countries have maintained frequent high-level exchanges (see Table 1).

The most important and interesting aspect of current China–Zimbabwe relations is the overlap between China's re-engagement with Africa, with the creation of FOCAC at the core of this engagement, and Zimbabwe's 'Look East' policy; and, more recently, the overlap of the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (Zim Asset)<sup>26</sup> announced in October 2013 with China's 'six projects and three networks' proposal for upgrading China–Africa relations announced by Premier Li Keqiang during his trip to Africa in May 2014.<sup>27</sup> These overlapping initiatives highlight the two-way dynamics of this relationship, in that both parties have strong motivations to drive this bilateral relationship further, in contrast with lesser initiatives shown by other African countries in China's other bilateral relations.

**Table 1: High-level visits between China and Zimbabwe, 1980–2013**

Year	Delegation leader
<b>Chinese delegation to Zimbabwe</b>	
1994	State Councillor and Defence Minister Chi Haotian
1995	Vice Premier Zhu Rongji
	President Jiang Zemin
1996	State Councillor Chen Junsheng
1999	Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) Xu Jialu
2000	Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan
2002	Standing Member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Wei Jianxing
2003	Vice Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Wan Guoquan
2004	State Councillor Chen Zhili
	Chairman of the NPC Standing Committee Wu Bangguo
2006	Vice Chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, Chairman of the Chinese People's Association for Peace and Disarmament He Luli
	Vice Chairman of the Chinese People's Foreign Friendship Association Wang Yunzhe
2007	Chairman of CPPCC Jia Qinglin
2010	Vice Chairman of CPPCC Wang Gang
2011	Vice Premier Wang Qishan
	Vice Chairman of the NPC Standing Committee Zhou Tienong
	Vice Chairman of CPPCC Li Wuwei
	Standing Member of the Political Bureau of the CPC, Central Propaganda Department Minister Liu Yunsan
	Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi
2012	Vice Premier Hui Liangyu
2013	Vice Premier Wang Yang
<b>Zimbabwean delegation to China</b>	
1980	President Robert Mugabe
1981	President Robert Mugabe
1985	President Robert Mugabe
1987	President Robert Mugabe
1993	President Robert Mugabe
1996	Vice-President Simon Muzenda
	Foreign Minister Stan Mudenge
1999	President Robert Mugabe
2001	Speaker of the Parliament Emmerson Mnangagwa
	National Chairman of ZANU-PF John Nkomo
2003	Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs and the leader of ZANU-PF in Parliament Patrick Chinamasa

Year	Delegation leader
2005	President Robert Mugabe
2008	President Robert Mugabe
2010	President Robert Mugabe
2011	President Robert Mugabe
	Vice President Joice Mujuru
	Vice President John Nkomo
	Vice Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara
2012	Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai

Sources: Chinese Foreign Ministry website ([www.fmprc.gov.cn](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn)) and other news reports, including *Xinhua News* ([www.xinhuanet.com](http://www.xinhuanet.com)), *People's Daily* ([www.xinhuanet.com](http://www.xinhuanet.com)), *Sina.com* ([www.sina.com.cn](http://www.sina.com.cn)), etc.

In 2000, in response to African countries' call for a collective platform to strengthen China–Africa relations, China established FOCAC and received positive feedback from its African partners.<sup>28</sup> Since then, China–Africa relations have evolved from 'a new type of long-term and stable partnership based on equality and mutual benefit' in 2000, to 'a new type of partnership featuring long-term stability, equality and mutual benefit and all-round co-operation' in 2003, to 'a new type of strategic partnership between China and Africa featuring political equality and mutual trust, mutually beneficial economic co-operation, and cultural exchanges' in 2006.<sup>29</sup> FOCAC provided a framework for China–Zimbabwe relations.

As previously mentioned, against the backdrop of a rapidly failing economy and a dented political image, the Zimbabwean government had to look for alternative sources of financial and diplomatic support, hence the formulation and adoption of its 'Look East' policy in 2003. This policy was formulated to curtail the effects of international isolation by courting investors and political allies from South-East Asia, the Far East and Pacific countries. Zimbabwe was able to develop cordial relations with countries such as China, Malaysia, India, Singapore, Indonesia, Iran and Pakistan.<sup>30</sup> Although the 'Look East' policy was initially meant to engage Asian and other Pacific countries its implementation saw the focus shifting to China.<sup>31</sup> This was facilitated by China's provision of a platform that allowed the two countries to pursue their own national interests while helping each other to withstand the effects of Western supremacy. After the 2013 presidential election, the new government launched Zim Asset, scheduled to run for the next five years, which will also contribute to Chinese efforts to further upgrade the China–Africa relationship.

### **Diplomatic support and non-interference**

One of the main characteristics of current China–Zimbabwe relations is mutual support in the international arena and mutual respect in domestic affairs.

Due to the unfinished reunification, China always seeks external support for its 'One China' policy. Zimbabwe has stood firmly by China's side since the establishment of diplomatic relations. For example, when China's Anti-Secession Law was promulgated

in 2005, the Zimbabwean government declared, 'We in Zimbabwe fully support the decision to adopt the Anti-Secession Law, which first upholds China's basic policy of peaceful reunification and regards the non-peaceful means only as the last resort to stop Taiwan's independence.'<sup>32</sup> And, on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of China–Zimbabwe relations in 2010, the Zimbabwean ambassador to China stated, 'Zimbabwe has been unwaveringly consistent in its support for the "One China" policy as well as for China's other core interests.'<sup>33</sup> In 2012, during the signing of a \$180 million economic and technical co-operation agreement, Zimbabwe's Vice President, Joice Mujuru, stated that Zimbabwe adhered to the 'One China' policy.<sup>34</sup> China has in turn expressed its gratitude for Zimbabwe's adherence to this policy, as stated by then Vice President Xi Jinping during his visit to the country in 2011.<sup>35</sup>

There is international consensus that China has played a significant role in Zimbabwean politics between 2000 and 2013. The anti-sanctions campaign and China's conduct alongside Russia in the UNSC, gave Zimbabwe a historic opportunity to redefine itself – in terms of its democracy and governance – through the establishment of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) with the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and the draft constitution. China and Russia attempted to demonstrate to the international community that it was important to listen first to the Zimbabwean story before rushing into UNSC action. The most significant example here is the voting on UNSC draft resolution S/2008/447 in July 2008 that would have applied further sanctions against Mugabe and his supporters. The draft resolution came after the highly contested 2008 presidential election from which MDC opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai withdrew in protest after alleged voting fraud. China used its permanent seat on the UNSC to veto the draft resolution and was joined by Russia.<sup>36</sup> South Africa also voted against the resolution, although it did not have veto power. In keeping with its principle of non-interference, China maintained that Zimbabwe's problems were internal and did not constitute an international security threat. Guijin, China's Special Envoy for Africa, explained that China's vote was also motivated by humanitarian concerns over those who would suffer under sanctions.<sup>37</sup> Actions such as these were seen as giving credence to the argument that China supported a regime that violated human rights, including freedom of speech and the right to elect one's leaders.<sup>38</sup>

The non-interference principle is not the only rationale behind using the veto in the UNSC but also reflects a real spirit of respect for Zimbabwe's domestic affairs. While the US and the EU pursued further sanctions and arms embargoes against Mugabe and his supporters in 2005 because of Zimbabwe's 'flawed' elections, Beijing responded by signing eight wide-ranging agreements on irrigation, roads, power plants, telecommunications and electrical power, estimated to be worth \$1.6 billion,<sup>39</sup> and became the only non-African nation to support Zimbabwe in resolving its domestic affairs without external interference. As Premier Wen Jiabao said, 'China respects and supports efforts by Zimbabwe to bring about social justice through land reform.'<sup>40</sup>

In another example of non-interference, perhaps more profound, China also demonstrated its neutrality on Zimbabwe's domestic affairs by leaving it to SADC to mediate in the restoration of Zimbabwe's democracy and governance, as stipulated by the GPA signed between ZANU-PF and the two MDC formations (the MDC under Tsvangirai

[MDC-T] and the MDC under Arthur Mutambara [MDC-M]) in September 2008. China has not interfered in the constitution-making process; instead, it has been co-operating with all the political parties in Zimbabwe. China's non-interference in Zimbabwe's domestic affairs sends a clear message to the international community that its political problems are best mediated by SADC and its current chair, South African President Jacob Zuma.

More recently, from 28 July to 3 August 2013, at the invitation of the Zimbabwean government, Guijin, the former Chinese ambassador to Zimbabwe and South Africa and the former special representative of the Chinese government on African affairs, led the Chinese observer mission to observe Zimbabwe's presidential election. The observer mission visited about 60 polling stations in five provinces and witnessed the voting process on 31 July. It was the first to announce that the Zimbabwean elections were peaceful, free, orderly and fairly credible, despite some flaws in the process.<sup>41</sup>

Another crucial battle is currently raging, albeit this time behind the scenes and within the inner workings of the Zimbabwean ruling party. Given the fact that Mugabe is getting older, the prospect of a new president is becoming all the more real, and the usually concealed power struggles within ZANU-PF are increasingly being played out in the national spotlight, with the two main contenders being Mujuru and Justice Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa.<sup>42</sup> While there is a marked impression that China supports Mnangagwa,<sup>43</sup> the Chinese government stands by its non-intervention principle.

### **Military exchanges**

The military relationship between China and Zimbabwe is the most controversial aspect of China–Zimbabwe relations. However, most analysis simplifies these military relations as arms trade, particularly while Zimbabwe is facing Western arms embargoes.<sup>44</sup> Two examples can be used to exemplify these relations, namely China's arms sales to Zimbabwe and the *An Yue Jiang*'s cargo in 2008.<sup>45</sup>

China–Zimbabwe military relations were forged in the twilight days of the liberation struggle, when China supplied ZANU with training and weapons. Building upon these relations, China and Zimbabwe increased their military co-operation in the sanctions era. As military relations form part of its 'Look East' policy, Zimbabwe has bought a sizeable number of fighter jets, military vehicles and other equipment from China. The major arms sales include 12 jet fighters and 100 military vehicles valued at \$240 million in 2004; six trainer/combat aircraft in 2005; six additional trainer/combat aircraft in 2006; and 20 000 AK-47 rifles, 21 000 pairs of handcuffs and 12–15 military trucks in 2011.<sup>46</sup> However, these figures are not backed up by valid evidence, since the Chinese government became very cautious about selling arms to Zimbabwe after the 2008 *An Yue Jiang* cargo controversy, when it decided to add the country to its list of 'limited level' military trading, from which it was only removed at the end of 2013.

The military relationship extends beyond the arms trade to personnel exchange and training. There are frequent training courses at the People's Liberation Army's National Defence University for Zimbabwean military officials, and Chinese military officials present courses at Zimbabwe's National Defence College. The role that China has played in improving and maintaining the efficiency of the Zimbabwean Defence Force cannot be underestimated, especially during Zimbabwe's international isolation.

### Medical assistance

There is yet another dimension that is always ignored in general accounts of China–Zimbabwe relations, namely China’s medical assistance to Zimbabwe through the supply of medical personnel. These medical teams promote not only the health of the Zimbabwean population but also China–Zimbabwe relations.

The first team arrived in 1985, five years after the establishment of China–Zimbabwe relations. Beijing’s usual approach is to sign a bilateral agreement and then to identify a province in China to provide the medical personnel, operating under the instructions of the Ministry of Health. The first such agreement was signed in 1983, with Hunan province responsible for providing the medical team to Zimbabwe. From 1985 to 2013, Hunan province sent 13 medical teams, with 127 doctors and nurses, and currently the team has 10 doctors and nurses. The Chinese medical team has helped to build a rural hospital at Mahusekwa Growth Point in Marondera District, and has operated several ‘Brightness Actions in Zimbabwe’<sup>47</sup> that were welcomed by the Zimbabwean government and population.

## ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION

With the combination of FOCAC and Zimbabwe’s ‘Look East’ policy, the economic pillar of China–Zimbabwe relations has developed rapidly in the past decade. However, it is important to note that economic co-operation between China and Zimbabwe is only a small part of the China–Africa economic partnership, which is in turn a small part of China’s overall foreign economic engagement.

### Trade

Since 2000, China and Zimbabwe have sought to augment their trading relationship. Trade relations between the two countries have been strengthened through high-level visits by government officials, sharing experiences in different sectors. China is now Zimbabwe’s third largest trading partner after South Africa and the EU.<sup>48</sup> Despite the repeated decrease in the value of the country’s currency since 2000, China continued trading in a variety of commodities with Zimbabwe. The recent trade between the two countries is reportedly based on China’s appetite for Zimbabwe’s mineral resources and raw materials.<sup>49</sup> In February 2004, trade relations between China and Zimbabwe were further deepened by the signing of an economic and technical agreement.<sup>50</sup> As part of this agreement China committed to helping Zimbabwe improve its tobacco production, a sector adversely affected by the land reform process, by providing the necessary resources. This agreement was expected to have mutual benefits for both countries.

According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) of China, Zimbabwe’s trade with China has steadily increased since the mid-1990s. It is reported that bilateral trade between the two countries increased from \$52.2 million in 1996 to \$275.25 million in 2006, with a peak of \$874.37 million in 2011. This trend continued under the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2012 and 2013, witnessing further growth in

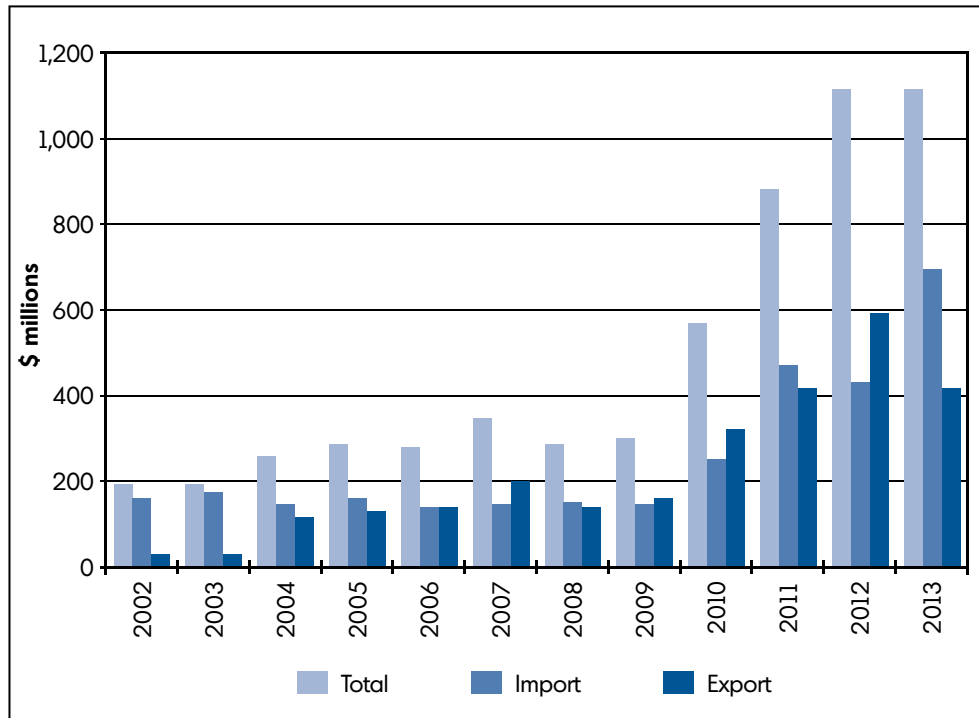
bilateral trade with the figure reaching \$1 billion in 2012 and \$1.1 billion in 2013. (Table 2 and Figure 1 show that the increases occurred mainly from 1996–2000; 2004–2007; and 2009–2013.

**Table 2: China–Zimbabwe trade volume, 2002–2011, \$ million**

Year	Total	Import	Export
2002	191.75	159.59	32.16
2003	197.35	167.08	30.27
2004	254.24	141.18	113.06
2005	283.29	157.92	125.37
2006	275.39	139.09	136.29
2007	344.38	142.77	201.61
2008	281.31	148.21	133.10
2009	297.13	140.87	156.26
2010	561.56	245.70	315.86
2011	874.37	464.09	410.28
2012	1,105.00	430.00	585.00
2013	1,102.00	688.00	414.00

Source: National Data, National Bureau of Statistics of China, 20 May 2014, <http://data.stats.gov.cn/workspace/index?m=hgnd>; ‘Chinese investment in Zim surges’, *The Herald Business* (Zimbabwe), 22 May 2014

Much like the trading patterns between China and other African states, bilateral trade between China and Zimbabwe has been characterised by the export of raw materials in return for manufactured goods (including clothing, textiles and footwear), vehicles (cars, busses, tractors and aircraft), electrical machinery and other equipment.<sup>51</sup> However, in contrast with many other countries’ trade profiles with China, its two-way trade pattern with Zimbabwe (see Figure 1) indicates that trade between the two countries is skewed towards Zimbabwe. It is unusual that a non-oil-exporting developing country can export more products to China than it imports. This trend is an indication that Zimbabwe secured a market in China for its resources after the withdrawal of the West. Exports from Zimbabwe to China have been dominated by cash crops (tobacco, cotton) and minerals (particularly nickel and ferroalloys). Tobacco is Zimbabwe’s main export product to China.<sup>52</sup> Since the late 1990s there has been a gradual increase in Chinese imports as a result of the number of loans China has extended to Zimbabwe to buy agricultural and manufacturing equipment.

**Figure 1: China–Zimbabwe trade volume, 2002–2013, \$ million**

Source: National Data, National Bureau of Statistics of China, 20 May 2014, <http://data.stats.gov.cn/workspace/index?m=hgnd>; 'Chinese investment in Zim surges', *The Herald Business* (Zimbabwe), 22 May 2014

With the flood of Chinese goods into the Zimbabwean market, the issue of low-quality Chinese goods, such as food, clothing, textiles and electrical goods, has been raised by the local population. Customers complain about the quality of the goods while local businesspeople complain about being forced out of business. Although cheap Chinese products have nonetheless become a source of relief to the majority who can only afford Chinese-made products it is worth noting that some of these low-quality Chinese goods do not come directly from China but rather from neighbouring countries. The situation is, however, changing as the Chinese become aware of the necessity for exporting higher-quality goods, and the Zimbabweans understand that the price determines the quality and that China is able to produce goods for all markets.<sup>53</sup>

### Investment

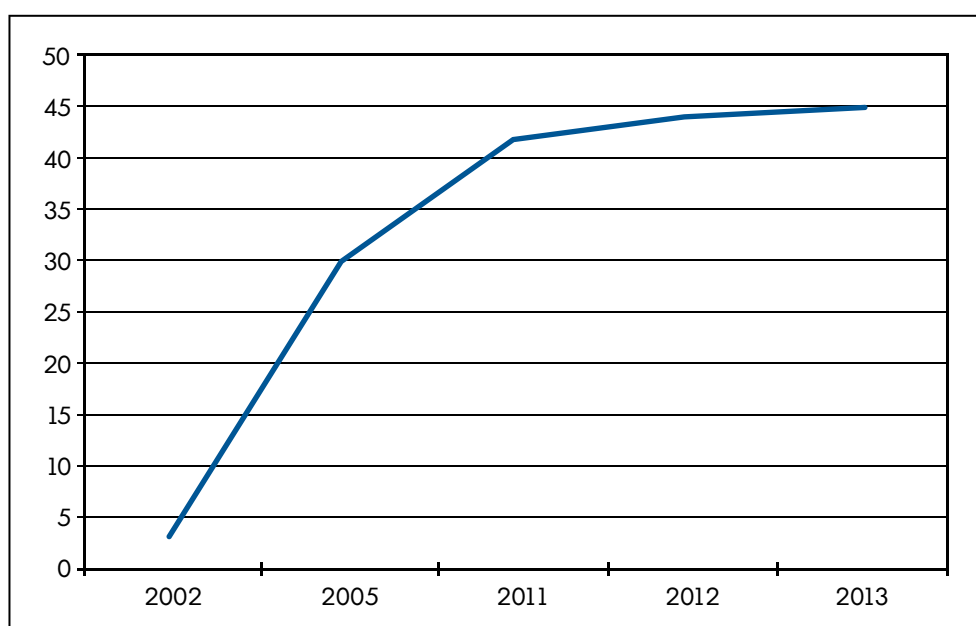
'We have turned East, where the sun rises, and given our backs to the West, where the sun sets,'<sup>54</sup> Mugabe declared when he launched his 'Look East' policy in 2003. This policy has been rewarding, especially for China. The Chinese have significantly increased their investments in Zimbabwe, which accounts for the growing number of Chinese citizens in the country.<sup>55</sup>

Chinese companies began investing in Zimbabwe in 1994. However, the process was relatively slow up until 2003. From 1994 to 2003, three Chinese companies actively



invested in Zimbabwe: China Building Material Industrial Corporation for Foreign Economic-Technical Co-operation invested \$5.844 million (65% of shares) in the Sino-Zimbabwe Cement Company, Zimna Tractor Assembly Factory invested ZIM<sup>56</sup> 4.8 million (58% of shares) in Dwala Enterprises (PVT) Ltd, and Hongda Intertexture Factory invested \$810,000 (50% of shares) in a private company named Super Garments.<sup>57</sup> After the launch of the 'Look East' policy, China's investment in Zimbabwe grew rapidly, and in 2005 29 companies were operating in Zimbabwe.<sup>58</sup> Since then, the number has gradually increased, with 42 companies in 2011, 44 in 2012 and 45 in 2013 (see Figure 2),<sup>59</sup> while the most recent (May 2014) figure is 62.<sup>60</sup>

**Figure 2: Chinese companies invested in Zimbabwe, 2002-2013**



Source: Economic and Commercial Counsellor's Office of the Embassy of China in Zimbabwe, <http://zimbabwe.mofcom.gov.cn>, accessed 10 January 2013

**Table 3: Chinese companies in Zimbabwe, 2012**

No	Company name
1	Tian Ze Tobacco Company P/L
2	Zimasco
3	Sogecoa Zimbabwe P/L
4	Sino Zimbabwe Cement Company
5	Zimbabwe Nantong International
6	China National Aero-Technology Import & Export Corporation
7	NORINCO (Zimbabwe Office)
8	Zimbabwe Jiangsu Int. P/L
9	Hualong Construction Ltd
10	Zimbabwe Liaison Office for Huawei Tech. Investment Co., Ltd

No	Company name
11	China Jiangxi Corporation
12	China Shougang International
13	Jingniu Glass
14	ZTE Corporation
15	Number Seventeen Metallurgical Construction P/L
16	China Machinery & Engineering Corporation
17	China CAMC Engineering Co., Ltd
18	MCC
19	Shanxi Road & Bridge International Engineering Company
20	Poly Group
21	Sino-Hydro Corporation Ltd. (Zimbabwe Office)
22	China International Water & Electric Corp
23	Eurostak Electric Co., Ltd
24	Connick Investment (PVT) Ltd
25	China-Zim International Minerals Corporation
26	Chian Nanchang Engineering P/L
27	Jin En International (Zim) (PVT) Ltd
28	Zimbabwe Lian Feng Company P/L Ltd
29	Sinotex United Import and Export Co., Ltd
30	China Jin Bei Li Mining Company
31	FUNO (PVT) Ltd
32	Sino Non Ferrous Resource (PVT) Co., Ltd
33	(Zim-China) Wanjin Agricultural Development Company
34	Hamque Investment Company
35	Timsite Enterprises (PVT) Ltd
36	Gold Diamond Mine Development P/L
37	China Africa Sunlight Energy Ltd
38	San He Mining Zimbabwe P/L
39	Jinding Mining Zimbabwe (PVT) Ltd
40	China Communications Services (Zimbabwe)
41	Zimbabwe Shuangfeng Cotton (Private) Ltd

Source: Economic and Commercial Counsellor's Office of the Embassy of China in Zimbabwe, <http://zimbabwe.mofcom.gov.cn>, accessed 10 January 2013

Chinese investment in Zimbabwe rose by more than 5 000% from 2009 to 2013, with the country now among Africa's largest recipients of foreign direct investment (FDI) from the world's second-largest economy. Annual FDI from China increased from \$11.2 million in 2009 to \$602 million in 2013 as Chinese investors largely focused on mining, agriculture and manufacturing. In total, Chinese companies invested \$1.3 billion over this period. Zimbabwe's portion of Chinese investment in Africa increased from just 0.8% of \$1.43 billion in 2009 to 7.2% of \$3.5 billion in 2013. This made Zimbabwe the top recipient of Chinese investment in 2013.<sup>61</sup>

Initially, Chinese investments were concentrated in the extractive sector, responding to the exponential growth in industrial demand for raw materials and mineral ores. The Chinese diamond mining firm Anjin is in a partnership with Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation, which is operating in the Marange diamond fields, and China International Mining Group is interested in investing \$21.2 million in Bindura Nickel Corporation, a company that had ceased operations due to operational difficulties in Zimbabwe and a sharp decline in the price of nickel.<sup>62</sup> Sino-Zimbabwe Ltd with its subsidiaries Sino-Zimbabwe Cement Company and Sino-Zimbabwe Diamond Ltd (which specialise in cement manufacturing and mining, cotton ginning and spinning, respectively), has invested significantly in Zimbabwe through various ventures. It is reported that in 2011 alone, Zimbabwe signed agreements worth \$700 million with Chinese investors interested in mineral extraction and beneficiation.<sup>63</sup> China Development Bank is also reported to be interested in investing \$10 billion in Zimbabwe's mining and agricultural sectors.<sup>64</sup>

Chinese companies have also become active in Zimbabwe's manufacturing, agricultural, retail, transport and infrastructure sectors. As in other African countries, China is moving beyond merely securing essential inputs to acquiring stakes in potentially productive enterprises in Zimbabwe. The Chinese government donated \$241 million worth of agricultural equipment to Zimbabwe in 2001 and continued to make credit lines available to the sector during the crisis period.<sup>65</sup> In 2007, the Chinese government extended a credit facility of \$200 million in support of Zimbabwe's agricultural sector. The facility was mainly used to acquire farming equipment from China, including 1 000 tractors and an assortment of combine harvesters, irrigation pumps, disc harrows and planters.<sup>66</sup> In 2011, construction of the China-Aid Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centre was completed.

Since independence, Chinese construction companies have been very active in Zimbabwe's infrastructure sector, starting with the successful construction of the National Sports Stadium in the mid-1980s. In order to consolidate its role in Zimbabwe's construction industry, China opened a tile and brick factory in 2004.<sup>67</sup> In contrast with other sectors that suffered during the country's economic crisis, private construction in Zimbabwe did not stop. As Table 4 shows, 2008 and 2012 were the fastest growing years, with project contract turnover doubling in 2008 and tripling in 2011.

**Table 4: Chinese project contracting turnover in Zimbabwe, 2002–2012, \$ million**

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
73.82	45.64	4792	89.32	75.30	86.64	158.88	65.09	138.05	398.91	382.96

Source: National Data, National Bureau of Statistics of China, 20 May 2014, <http://data.stats.gov.cn/workspace/index?m=hgnd>

## Aid

Brautigam<sup>68</sup> points out that China is not focused on giving 'aid' to Zimbabwe, but conducts business with the country. China has provided \$103 million in official development aid from 2004–2013 through grants, concessional loans and contributions to the World Food Programme, and constructed two schools and a hospital. The China Export-Import Bank

(China EXIM Bank) has restructured some loans on terms that are more favourable to Zimbabwe, including reducing the interest rate from 4% and 3% respectively to 2% on two loans totalling \$17.9 million.

China undertook to support the Zimbabwean government by making available moderate amounts of aid, grants, export credits and concessional loans, as well as technical and economic assistance. Grants in this case are defined as non-repayable financial facilities provided to Zimbabwe by China based on economic and technical co-operation between the governments of the two countries. Although there are no statistics on China's development assistance to Zimbabwe, it is believed to be relatively modest.

Although China's recent engagements in African countries have been predominantly aimed at striking strategic deals to advance its own interests in terms of economic growth, Beijing has also been involved in a few humanitarian interventions. The provision of non-refundable grants to the Zimbabwean government represents an important part of this commitment. The first grant went towards the maintenance of the Harare National Sports Stadium in 2006, and the most recent one was CNY<sup>69</sup> 30 million (\$3.5 million) for the refurbishment of the facility in 2002.<sup>70</sup> Other grants awarded were used for office equipment for various government ministries and for agricultural and irrigation equipment. The 2005 grant for buying maize came during a humanitarian emergency in Zimbabwe caused by the country's low maize harvest (the result of the contentious land reform process and compounded by a drought in most parts of Southern Africa that year).

China has also extended a number of loan facilities to the Zimbabwean government. The most common are the low interest loan agreements with a long maturity awarded by the China EXIM Bank.<sup>71</sup> In 2001, China EXIM Bank provided a concessional loan to Zimbabwe's Ministry of Water for infrastructural development.<sup>72</sup> Through this loan the District Development Fund acquired equipment worth \$8 million for the development, maintenance and upgrading of road infrastructure.<sup>73</sup> In 2006, the Zimbabwe Farmers Development Company received a China EXIM Bank concessional loan for agricultural equipment and tools worth \$25 million.<sup>74</sup> The Zimbabwean government was awarded a buyer's credit loan facility by China EXIM Bank valued at \$200 million in August 2006 to buy the necessary inputs for the country's underperforming agricultural sector.<sup>75</sup> These included fertilisers, pesticides, agricultural tools and irrigation equipment that Harare had been unable to buy due to the shortage of foreign currency.

### **Potential currency co-operation**

After hyperinflation rendered Zimbabwean dollars valueless in 2008, Zimbabwe adopted a multi-currency regime on 29 January 2009 with four currencies – the South African rand, the Botswana pula, the British pound sterling and the US dollar. With Zimbabwe facing serious liquidity challenges, in particular lacking funds for the newly initiated Zim Asset, Chinese RMB yuan is increasingly considered to be included in the multi-currency regime. Mujuru first introduced the idea of adopting the Chinese yuan in 2010, saying 'adopting the Chinese yuan would be a logical step and could help solve some of the country's liquidity constraints'.<sup>76</sup> Although there was no official response from the Chinese government, as trade and investment ties with Asian countries continued to grow the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe widened the foreign currency basket to include four more currencies. On 28 January 2014, Zimbabwe's central bank announced that it would allow

the Chinese RMB yuan, Indian rupee, Japanese yen and Australian dollar to be added to the basket of currencies circulated inside the country.<sup>77</sup> However, this unilateral move has still not received an official response from the Chinese government (as of May 2014), and the Zimbabwean government has failed to officially propose its plan to the Chinese government.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

As mentioned earlier, there are contradictory views of China–Zimbabwe relations, with some emphasising the political dimensions of this relationship and others focusing on its economic dimension. It is important to note that there are close social and cultural exchanges between China and Zimbabwe that this paper does not examine due to space constraints. While weaker than the political and economic pillars of the China–Zimbabwe relationship, the historical ties, emotional or ideological, and the social and cultural exchanges between China and Zimbabwe appear to be even greater than that of China–Africa relations in general.<sup>78</sup> Combining the political and economic pillars and taking the social and cultural pillar into account, this paper argues that it is possible to conclude that the China–Zimbabwe relationship is neither a ‘microcosm of China–Africa relations’ nor support for a rogue state or pariah regime. Rather, it is a unique relationship in the China–Africa exchange, with great potential for leading the general transition in China–Africa relations as a whole towards building a new kind of strategic partnership, despite certain paradoxes arising from the crisis-response nature of this relationship.

### **(Negative) two-way momentum**

Firstly, the China–Zimbabwe relationship is unique in that it has a totally different momentum from relations between China and other African countries. In the China–Zimbabwe relationship, the momentum comes from two directions, namely the sanctions imposed by Western countries and China’s re-engagement policy.

Zimbabwe’s adoption of the land reform policy in early 2000 resulted in the souring of its relations with the international community and its being subjected to sanctions by the US and European countries. The US instituted unilateral sanctions against Zimbabwe through the ZDERA of 2001.<sup>79</sup> This legislation obliged US representatives in various international financial and economic institutions to oppose any form of financial and economic assistance to the Zimbabwean government until full democracy had been restored. This piece of legislation places ZANU-PF members and their companies, together with selected government entities, under restrictive economic measures and suggests a raft of other measures against the Mugabe regime. The EU and other NATO countries also imposed various restrictions on Zimbabwe and its leadership, and enforced trade restrictions in February 2002. All these sanctions have had profound negative impacts on Zimbabwe’s economy.

As a result of these measures, the Zimbabwean government realised that China could effectively replace the US and the EU as a trading and diplomatic partner. With relations having been established during the liberation struggle, China responded positively to Zimbabwe’s call for intensified relations through trade opportunities and diplomatic

support at the UN. Under these circumstances, the Zimbabwean government launched its 'Look East' policy in 2003.

The establishment of FOCAC proved to be a symbol of China's re-engagement with Africa after its close ideological ties with the continent during the 1960s and 1970s. China had since shifted its attention to the industrialised developed West for its abundant capital and development experience. Only when this strategy achieved results almost 10 years later, along with political pressure from the West after the end of the Cold War, did China shift its strategic attention back to Africa. Seeking external support for its domestic development, China adopted its Africa Policy in 2006 and held the Beijing FOCAC Summit the same year.<sup>80</sup>

As stated above, the combined effects of these events brought about substantial results for this bilateral relationship. China–Zimbabwe relations grew apace with Zimbabwe's isolation from its traditional Western aid and trading partners. Despite the overwhelming economic crisis, the Zimbabwean government was able to carry on with business – China had thrown a lifeline to the disintegrating Zimbabwean economy, preventing its complete collapse and helping the ZANU-PF government to survive conditions that posed a serious threat to its existence.

However, this combination of factors also poses a potential obstacle to future China–Zimbabwe relations, since both parties lack a coherent national strategy towards the other. While Zimbabwe was forced to snub the West and pursue new economic spheres, some observers believe that its 'Look East' policy was just a political slogan stemming from Mugabe's troubles with the West.<sup>81</sup> Former Zimbabwean Information and Publicity Minister Jonathan Moyo discredited the policy when he said: 'There is no such policy. It's a political slogan. It's typical of the ZANU-PF leadership to parade slogans as policies.'<sup>82</sup> The 'Look East' policy did not appear to be as much a real foreign policy instrument as an attempt by ZANU-PF to ensure its political survival. All 'national interests' had to be interpreted from that standpoint.

The evidence for this can be found in three facts. Firstly, little or no consultation was carried out with the MDC and civil society in designing this policy, let alone the business and private sectors.<sup>83</sup> Secondly, some partners in the GNU have sought to downplay the importance of the 'Look East' policy by declaring that Zimbabwe looked neither East nor West but to all sides to attract investment.<sup>84</sup> Thirdly, the reward for this policy from the Chinese side is more FDI rather than budget aids, which has caused frustration among the Zimbabwean political elite.<sup>85</sup> Thus, it is fair to say that China, to some extent, became a bargaining chip for the Zimbabwean government when dealing with the West, especially when calling for an end to the 'smart' sanctions. A Zimbabwean strategy on China is absent due to the Zimbabwean government's unwillingness to put all its eggs in one basket.

China also lacks a clear national strategy towards Zimbabwe. This is because Zimbabwe is not important enough to warrant a national strategy; China has only a broader Africa strategy.

There is thus a convergence between Chinese and Zimbabwean regional strategies but a divergence between their national strategies. This combination of mismatched national strategies and matched regional strategies may have a positive impact on bilateral relations in the short term, but a negative impact in the long run.

**(Passive) internal balanced development**

The second unusual characteristic of the China–Zimbabwe relationship is its relatively balanced development of the different pillars, specifically the political and economic pillars.

As discussed previously, China–Zimbabwe relations were not particularly good from 1980 to 2000 because the Zimbabwean government still needed the support of the West and neighbouring countries, especially South Africa. Even today, Zimbabwe’s biggest trading partners are South Africa and the EU, with China only in third place. Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, political and strategic considerations are the main driving forces behind Zimbabwe’s desire to develop relations with China. This makes the China–Zimbabwe relationship a relatively balanced development. The political, economic, military, social and cultural dimensions of this bilateral relationship have developed steadily and in tandem and it is this balanced and simultaneous development that has the West worried.

China–Africa relations in general have transformed from a monocycle (political and/or ideological links from the 1950s to mid-1990s) to a bicycle (with an economic dimension added since the mid-1990s) and then to a four-wheeled vehicle (with peace and security, as well as social exchange dimensions, added at the end of the 2000s).<sup>86</sup> Thus, it can be stated that the China–Zimbabwe relationship, in contrast to general China–Africa relations, established its internal balance from the very first day. However, this balance is still at a low level and lacks momentum, which is important for its future development. It is a challenge for both China and Zimbabwe to upgrade their bilateral relationship by giving it new momentum.

**A pioneer but not follower of China–Africa relations**

China–Zimbabwe relations have the potential to be a pioneer but not follower of China–Africa relations.

Given that the development of China–Zimbabwe relations over the past decade took place amid the pressure of the Zimbabwean diplomatic crisis, observers worry about the future of this relationship. It was only when Zimbabwe was isolated by its Western allies that the ‘Look East’ policy came into place with the objective of attracting Chinese investment. Additionally, this policy, although focused on China, also seeks better relations with countries such as Malaysia, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates. Thus there is the danger of a setback in relations following a change in leadership in Zimbabwe. An event that clearly illustrating this issue is the launch of the GNU’s re-engagement committee, which is mandated to persuade the EU to remove sanctions and normalise relations with Zimbabwe. The future leadership change will bring Zimbabwe greater benefits in terms of improving relations with the EU and the US. Currently, Zimbabwe is unable to benefit from the US’ Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, which was introduced in 2000. Once the US–Zimbabwe relationship normalises, Zimbabwe will have greater incentive to engage with the US instead of China. The future of Zimbabwe–China relations is heavily dependent on Zimbabwe’s political situation. The current state of political affairs in the country does not serve the China–Zimbabwe partnership very well, and the chances of the West’s ‘returning’ to Zimbabwe are as great as the chances of China’s ‘retreating’ from Zimbabwe.



Despite its unstable foundation, the future of the China-Zimbabwe relationship is still bright if both parties handle it cleverly, making the two-way approach permanent instead of temporary, and turning the passive internal balance into a positive one. In other words, the current China-Zimbabwe relationship points to the future direction of the China-Africa relationship; while at a low level, it is a comprehensively balanced relationship with high levels of co-operation.

## CONCLUSION AND POLICY SUGGESTIONS

To transform the current China-Zimbabwe relationship into a pioneer for the entire China-Africa relationship, both parties should handle it carefully. In this regard the following points are of relevance.

Firstly, both China and Zimbabwe should build a national strategy regarding the other, upgrading the relationship from one that is party-to-party, to one that is party-to-party, country-to-country and people-to-people. While Zimbabwe is of low priority in China's foreign policy, it is important to consider this relationship from the angle of building China's global strategic partnership network and upgrading its African strategy. As discussed above, while this relationship is a two-way one, and thus much more advanced than other China-Africa relationships, it is important to harness this momentum through a national strategy. China should raise Zimbabwe's strategic importance in its foreign policy in general and its Africa policy in particular. Zimbabwe should set not only a long-term strategy but also a full-hearted one that is neither pragmatic nor instrumental. The majority of the Zimbabwean public believes that the China-Zimbabwe relationship is only a party-to-party relationship. This should be upgraded to a real country-to-country relationship that covers all aspects of a normal bilateral relationship.<sup>87</sup>

Secondly, to move beyond pragmatism, China and Zimbabwe should jointly transform the internal balance. Currently, China views this relationship more in economic terms, while Zimbabwe views it mainly in political terms.<sup>88</sup> This mismatch makes the balance vulnerable and asymmetric; it is important to rebalance the relationship. Both parties should adjust their mindsets and refocus on the long-term political and social basis of the relationship to lay a solid foundation for sustainable development. For China, this would entail contributing more to the sustainable development of the Zimbabwean economy, including investing more in infrastructure, manufacturing, education and related sectors. In particular, it should include Zimbabwe in the 'six projects and three networks' proposal. For Zimbabwe, it calls for treating China as a real friend and not a bargaining chip.

Thirdly, given the low quality of Chinese goods exported to Zimbabwe and the claims of questionable behaviour by Chinese in Zimbabwe, China should consider a comprehensive strategy of domestic education for Chinese migrants. It is important to note that these problems are not limited to Zimbabwe but are widespread within the overseas Chinese community. The difficulty here is 1) the fact that individuals are responsible for the transgressions; and 2) the size of the Chinese community in Africa. China should consider a three-pronged strategy: 1) asking Chinese companies to perform better in terms of corporate social responsibility; 2) instructing Chinese individuals to behave better abroad; and 3) communicating with local communities about Chinese traditions.



Finally, it is important that China and Zimbabwe insist on traditional international relations principles, such as the five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence,<sup>89</sup> the non-intervention principle, etc. Given the hesitation shown by Mugabe's government, China should keep some distance from Zimbabwe's domestic politics, especially the succession battle that is bound to heat up in the future. Considering the chances of Zimbabwe's shifting towards the West after Mugabe, China should consider ways to avoid the risks resultant from that potential shift.

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