

Zambia and China: Workers' Protest, Civil Society and the Role of Opposition Politics in Elevating State Engagement

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Abstract: This paper examines the role of civic protest and opposition politics in changing the dynamics of the relationship between Zambia and China at the top leadership and working class levels. It looks specifically at how the workers' plight became elevated to the top agenda and became a major issue for the two countries' diplomatic and strategic engagement. It takes the view that China does not always play the dominant role, but is at times compelled to engage in strategic negotiations to maintain a satisfactory relationship with African governments, suggesting that African countries have resources they can use to strengthen their bargaining positions at the negotiating table. The paper concludes that contrary to much scholarship, China does not always play the dominant role with African countries. It suggests that African governments, leaders and communities can and do actively engage in political and community actions that influence their relationships with China. The paper looks specifically at the role that workers' protest, opposition politics and civil society have played in changing the dynamics of the relationship between Zambia and China, at both the leadership and working class levels. On the basis of the Zambian case, it suggests that African countries have significant resources that they can leverage to bargain and advance their national priorities when negotiating with China and to exercise leadership in that relationship.

Introduction

Most analyses of China's foreign relations dwell on its strength and dominance in that domain, especially with regard to African politics. However, China is flexible and dynamic in its relationships with African states. Pádraig Carmody and Ian Taylor use the term "flexigemony" to capture the more dynamic interactions between China and a differentiated landscape of African politics.¹ Flexigemony denotes how "Chinese actors adapt their strategies to suit the particular histories and geographies of the African states with which they engage."² Corkin, using Angola as a case study, has shown how some African countries have been able to use China's involvement to grow their economies and bolster their political capital. Mohan and Lampert have revealed African agency beyond state actors.³ Large's work on China-Sudan engagement and Haglund's treatise both explicate in detail the dynamics of that relationship.⁴

Zambia has also been able to utilize China's engagement to strengthen its political status and elevate the plight of its workers. This paper looks at the role of Zambian workers and opposition politics in safeguarding workers' rights. The paper is divided into three parts: first, a

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brief history of China's relationship with Zambia and why Zambia makes an important case study in China-Africa relations; second, the role of opposition politics and the framework for analyzing Zambian workers' protest; and third, how the opposition party in Zambia succeeded in framing the workers' conditions as unjust, making them a central focus in the China-Zambia relations. This paper provides a historical framework for understanding the workers' protest and the role of opposition politics in elevating and improving workers' conditions. Rather than portraying the workers' response as weak and exclusively anti-China or anti-foreign domination, it provides a historical and theoretic understanding of both protest and framing concepts. The paper illustrates how the opposition party utilized the problem of workers' rights to its advantage by portraying the issue in a manner that threatened the relationship between China and Zambia. It framed workers' grievances and Chinese investments in a way that elevated them to the national stage, compelling the Chinese and Zambian leadership to recognize them as a threat to their long-standing relationship. The opposition used the workers' protests plight both to gain political power and elevate its own negotiating status.

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A Brief History of Zambia-China Relationship

An appreciation of the relationship between China and Zambia is essential to understand the threat posed by the opposition politics and the issue of workers' conditions. Zambia has had a long relationship with China that dates back to its independence in 1964. Zambia established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) on October 29, 1964, five days after gaining independence from Britain but the partnership became manifest after 1967. In 1971, China faced a major foreign policy challenge as it sought to be admitted to the United Nations. African countries played a critical role in the debate and in China being admitted. Zambia was one of the countries that supported the seating of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations. Zambia supported Beijing's "One China" policy and co-sponsored the UN General Assembly resolution to restore Mainland China's seat on the Security Council. From this early stage the two countries demonstrated a strategic relationship.

The relationship between the countries has fluctuated from warm to lukewarm. Whatever the current conditions, China has maintained contact and the relationship has been one of the strongest in Africa. Zambia has been the beneficiary of one of the biggest Chinese projects on the continent, the Tanzania-Zambia railway line, which was built between 1970 and 1976 with an interest free loan from China of \$406 million.⁵ Even at the time of considering building the railway line, Zambia wanted to select who would build it. Zambia approached western lenders for financial support before approaching China. From the outset, China was eager to provide funding for the project, which, according to the major western lenders, was "uneconomical and unnecessary."⁶ However, Kaunda was deeply suspicious when the Chinese showed interest in assisting to build the railway.⁷ His suspicion stemmed from the Western assertions that communists only helped other countries in order to subvert existing regimes, and this was substantiated by Chinese Premier Chou en Lai's statement that "Africa was ripe for revolution."⁸ Kaunda knew that China had its own strategic objectives for assisting Zambia. China saw the building of the railway as an opportunity to assert its presence on the continent

and its status as a development partner. The railway line was a strategic and political project for both countries. Zambia needed the railway line to lessen its dependence on apartheid South Africa and China wanted to assert its presence in Africa.

During President Kaunda's tenure the Chinese government maintained high visibility in Zambia. China and Zambia enjoyed a warm relationship even during the Cultural Revolution when China's relations with other countries waned. Kaunda is quoted many times as referring to China as "all weather friend." China was attracted to Zambia because of the country's position and the leadership of Kenneth Kaunda.⁹ Zambia played a central role in the African countries' liberation movement and was in turn greatly impacted by other liberation movements. Having Kaunda, a well-respected world statesman, at the center was attractive to the Chinese government because of his stand on non-alignment and his personal philosophy of humanism. In 1967, Kaunda visited China, a trip that heralded the beginning of several personal trips and many by Zambian leaders. By 1990, President Kaunda had visited China four times and several leading government and party members from both countries had paid each other formal visits. These included high-ranking officials in government, military, and trade, plus students who studied in China. In the 1980s, Africa's importance to China declined due to the change in the Cold War politics and China's modernization period and so did its relationship with Zambia. China's policy towards Africa was reinvigorated after the June 4th 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, which provoked criticism against China's human rights record. China again sought Africa's friendship and the depiction after 1989 as being "the 'all weather' friends."¹⁰

Frederick Chiluba became the second Zambian president after defeating Kaunda in the 1991 election. Initially Chiluba campaigned to develop a relationship with Taiwan but he reversed his stance after the election when he realized how costly the move could be considering the large amount of money Zambia owed China. Chiluba's era emphasized privatization and economic liberalization, which corresponded to China's policy which had evolved from simply providing assistance to private economic engagement. From 1991, individual Chinese arrived in Zambia to set up private firms. In 1991, an estimated three hundred Chinese lived in Zambia.¹¹ Chiluba maintained strong ties with the Chinese government. He first visited China in 1993 as part of his Asian tour. In June 1996, the Chinese Deputy Minister for Commerce, Trade and Economic Cooperation, Liu Shanzai announced that China had given Zambia unconditional aid amounting to US\$21.6 million, including US\$18 million as a soft loan for rehabilitation and recapitalization of the Mulungushi Textiles joint venture in Kabwe. China also gave US\$3.6 million in non-project aid to Zambia.

In 1997, the Bank of China (Zambia) Ltd, a subsidiary of the Bank of China, became the first Chinese financial institution to be established in Africa. In another demonstration of the growing trade with Zambia, the Lusaka branch of the Bank of China in 2011 became the first in Africa to offer renminbi banking services, which means customers can conduct their transactions including deposits or withdrawals in the Chinese "people's currency" yuan (a unit of the renminbi). Chinese businesses operating in Zambia can use the currency amongst themselves to reduce the amount of commission paid when changing from the Zambian kwacha via the US dollar. The service was aimed at Chinese investors working in Zambia, but also Zambians importing goods from China. Following the strengthening of economic ties, the

Chambeshi Zambia–China Cooperation Zone (ZCCZ) was established in 2007 and became the first Chinese economic and trade co-operation zone in Africa. This was followed by the East Lusaka Multi-Facility Economic Zone that was inaugurated in 2009.

The Zambia-China negotiated relationship has yielded positive fruits and increased economic activity between the two countries. In 2016, China named Zambia as one of its major partners in Africa. Chinese ambassador to Zambia, Yang Yauming, attributed this status to the result of a cordial economic relationship developed through several years.¹² Meanwhile, China's status also rose to become Zambia's top investor in 2015. China became the main provider of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the country with more than \$5.3 billion worth of projects and counting more than 280 companies.¹³ In the same year Zambia-China bilateral trade reached \$3.8 billion.¹⁴ Trade between the two has risen steadily from \$100 million in 2000 to \$1.45 billion in 2009 and doubled to \$2.8 billion in 2010. In 2010 Zambia's exports to China were \$1.46 billion and its imports were \$289.66 million.¹⁵ In 2011, Chinese investments in Zambia were expected to exceed \$2.4 billion. In 2012, China exported between \$600 million and \$700 million worth of goods to Zambia. Zambia exported about \$3.2 billion in goods to China, with copper as the major export product. The wide range of Chinese investments in Zambia include mining, infrastructure construction, agriculture and energy. For instance, a Chinese company launched the construction of the Kafue Gorge Lower Hydro-power project in December 2015. The 750 megawatts hydro-power station to be situated in Zambia's Chikankata district, about ninety kilometers from the capital Lusaka, is the largest investment in the country's energy infrastructure in forty years and will be the third largest power plant in the country.

Anti-Chinese Investments Protests in Zambia

While Zambia and China's economic and political relationship has grown stronger at the same time Zambia has been the scene of several workers' riots arising from poor working conditions and accidents, some fatal, in Chinese-owned companies. Among the most serious incidents was the explosion in April 2005 in which fifty-two Zambian workers were killed at Beijing General Research Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (BGRIMM), an explosive manufacturing factory near Chambeshi Mine. The explosion was a result of poor safety conditions. All the people killed were Zambians. None of the Chinese managers were hurt.

In a study published by Frazer and Lungu in 2007, out of 2,100 workers only fifty-two Zambian workers were permanent employees and unionized at Chambeshi Copper Mine which reflects only 2.4 percent of the Zambian workforce at the mine. The rest of the workers had neither medical nor pension benefits. However, all the 180 Chinese employees were on permanent contract. Also, only one Zambian was a part of the eleven-person senior management team.¹⁶ In March 2008, five hundred workers at Chambeshi Copper Smelter rioted over poor wages. Reports stated that the workers were earning as little as K291.00 (US\$78) per month and that Chinese management was allegedly not following Zambian labor laws. After two days of strikes resulting in two Zambians and one Chinese worker being injured, the Chinese management fired hundreds of workers.¹⁷

In October 2010, Chinese managers at the Collum Coal Mine in the Southern Province shot and wounded eleven Zambian workers over protest of low wages and poor working conditions. The wounded workers were hospitalized. The incident, which attracted global

attention, led to further concerns about the Chinese working in Zambia. President Rupiah Banda was drawn into the controversy and was caught in the middle. While he condemned the shooting and urged investors to follow the country's labor laws, he also warned against politicizing the labor issues. In direct reference to the Chinese, he said: "Let's be careful that we do not single out people. Everyday people are shot by Zambians, whites, Americans... we should not create a phobia against people."¹⁸ The Chinese embassy in Lusaka directed the Collum Coal Mine management to pay the medical bills for the wounded workers. The embassy also issued a statement saying that it expected Chinese nationals to strictly comply with the laws and regulation of the host country and to promote the social and economic development of the local community. The Chinese embassy also supported the Zambian side in investigating and dealing with the Collum Coal Mine managers, including helping to negotiate fair and decent salaries for the workers.¹⁹ The two governments attempted to hold the Collum management accountable for its acts and ensure workers' rights. However, problems continued at the coal mine. In 2012 workers at the mine protested when they were paid lower wages than the new minimum wage of \$220.²⁰ The incident resulted in the death of one Chinese manager. In 2013 the Zambian government revoked the three licenses of the Collum Coal Mine due to poor safety and environmental conditions, as well as a failure to pay mineral royalties and the mine was shut down. The mine only resumed operations in 2015 after promising to improve the safety measures.

Other protests took place in Chinese managed mines resulting in dismissals. In October 2011, Non-Ferrous Corporation Africa Mining (NFCA) and JCHX Mine Construction Zambia, Ltd, summarily dismissed 2,000 mine workers for going on strike and refusing to resume work. The workers had been protesting for two weeks asking for across the board pay rise and improvements in their conditions of service. They were asking for a pay raise between US\$200 to US\$400 monthly. The management said they would give the workers an increase of US\$40. The government stepped in the day after the dismissal and ordered the company to immediately reinstate the fired workers. The minister for mines, Wylbur Simuusa, also met the Non-Ferrous China Africa (NFCA) management and employees to iron out the differences.²¹

Although the Zambian government through the Ministry of Labor and Social Services has attempted to inspect foreign factories regularly, it is hampered by a shortage of transport and personnel. Nonetheless, it tried to investigate the conditions that have provoked worker protests and strikes. In 2006, Southern Province Minister Alice Simango visited a Chinese coal mine where workers had protested against poor conditions. She was shocked at the deplorable and unsafe conditions of the mine and recommended that that the mine be closed to protect human life.²² When conditions did not improve, the Zambian government suspended the licenses and the government took operation of the mine.

There have been other cases in which the Ministry of Labor decided to close businesses due to lack of safety and improper treatment of workers. An official of the Ministry of Labor reported that in July 2009 his department was forced to close a Chinese operation because of its "dangerous conditions." The ministry officials visited a lime-making factory, 27 km north of Lusaka, off Kabwe Road. "The structure was like a 'cave' of 35 meters long and 10 meters high. The people working inside the lime-making factory were exposed to high heat temperatures of 55-60°C (131-140°F) and noxious gases. There were about 405 people working in this extremely

hot environment, exposed to the gases. The workers looked ‘white’ (from the lime).²³ There was no floor in the factory. Our department had no choice but to close down the operation,” said the director of the Occupational Safety and Health Services (OSHS) department in the Ministry of Labor and Social Services, Kakoma Chivunda in an interview. He added, “The firm was deemed to be harmful for the people to work there.”²⁴ Thus, we can see that workers’ protests compelled the government to act and advocate for better and safer working conditions and better compensation for workers. The Ministry of Labor and Social Services at times closed factories due to non-compliance of the safety and environmental laws and poor labor conditions.

In November 2011, the first comprehensive study since Chinese operations began in Zambia in 2003 revealed that the worst human rights violations were committed by some Chinese-owned mining companies. The 2011 Human Rights Watch report entitled “You’ll Be Fired if You Refuse: Labor Abuses in Zambia’s Chinese State-owned Copper Mines” chronicles abuses in Chinese-run mines, including poor health and safety conditions, regular twelve-hour and even eighteen-hour shifts involving arduous labor, and anti-union activities, which violate Zambia’s national laws or international labor standards.²⁵

Workers Demonstrate Against Chinese President

Although the catalogue of workers’ rights violation is long, the Zambian workers, leadership and citizens have diligently sought to remedy the situation. There have been numerous protests against some Chinese investments and exploitation of workers, backed by the Zambian leadership’s defense of workers’ rights, challenging the prevailing assumption that workers are powerless, replacing it with the recognition that African workers can prod African government leaders to defend their rights.

The Zambian population demonstrated its most pronounced anti-Chinese sentiment when President Hu Jintao paid a state visit to Zambia in 2007. Although there had been protests against specific Chinese investments, the demonstration against President Hu was the most significant because it was against a foreign head of state and it was a national protest. Zambians in different parts of the country accused Chinese firms of exploiting local workers, exploiting the country’s mineral wealth, and exercising poor environmental standards. Zambian workers planned protests throughout the country to express their displeasure at the way some Chinese entrepreneurs were ill-treating Zambians and having a negative impact on the society. Demonstrations included mounting road blocks to bar Hu’s visit and showing placards to denounce the Chinese government. The Zambian government was compelled to cancel the Chinese premier’s trip to the two provinces where heavy demonstrations were planned. Hu also faced protests on the Copperbelt where the fifty-two Zambian miners were killed in the Chambeshi explosion in 2005.²⁶

The Chinese president had previously dismissed the accusations that China was exploiting Zambian labor and resources saying: “China is happy to have Zambia as a good friend, good partner, and a good brother.”²⁷ However the demonstrations Hu faced belied that notion. As Fraser and Lungu reported in a study of mining companies on the Copperbelt in Zambia, all the people interviewed, including residents, workers, commuters, government officials, trade unionists, and even the other mining companies complained that the Chinese investors were

paying very low wages.²⁸ The impact of the protests was to elevate the persistent workers' issues to the national and international levels. It forced the Chinese and Zambian government into a dialogue on the need for the two governments to be involved in ensuring workers' safety and appropriate compensation.

The Role of Opposition Politics

The classic view of the opposition's role in a democracy is that it should be a watchdog—and inevitably a critic—of government, checking the activities of public officials and holding them politically accountable.²⁹ Political parties sometimes achieve their objectives by being engaged in a fighting spirit and a readiness for political action and confrontation. It is the only avenue to institutionally organize around different views of society. In modern society, political parties in opposition have a crucial function in the state and future of governance in any particular nation.³⁰ In this case Zambia's opposition parties have at times played roles that favored improved workers' and citizens' rights. This section will provide a brief history of the workers' protest and opposition parties' roles in elevating workers' rights.

Historic Dimension of Workers' Protest in Zambia

This section provides a historic dimension to workers' demands for their rights starting from the early stages of industrialization in Zambia at the onset of colonialism. It demonstrates that workers' protest is not unique to the contemporary situation with Chinese investments. It also lays the ground for the utilization of protest theory and social movement as a framework to analyze the contemporary relationship between Zambian workers and Chinese investors. It includes the analysis of the role of leadership in protest. In this case it looks at the role that candidate Michael Sata, who later became president, played in the workers' protest.

Protest has long been utilized as a way of expanding democratic spaces and claiming rights in Zambia and other African countries. The Zambian population has been known to publicly protest when they felt that their rights were threatened. Workers as well as students at higher learning institutions have frequently taken to the streets to fight for their rights or to make known their stand on a particular issue. Public protests go back to the colonial era. The growth of nationalism in then Northern Rhodesia can be traced to the villagers' anti-colonial protests due to unfair working conditions and low wages. The Southern Province was the first area of friction between European and African farmers in the late 1920s.³¹ African farmers expressed their displeasure against Europeans who took their land for cash cropping and denied the local people's use of their traditional land, a situation that led to hunger. A few years later, the Copperbelt was the source of anti-colonial protest and labor grievances that fostered the country's nationalism.³² The grievances leading to the strikes included low wages, inferior housing, poor conditions and ill treatment of Africans by European workers. This led to the protest movements of the 1960's popularly known as the "Cha Cha Cha" movement, which engulfed most of the country until its independence in 1964. But even after the country's independence protests continued as a way of people affirming their rights and expanding their democratic space. More recently in 1990, the general population protested against the rise in mealie-meal prices after President Kaunda was compelled to remove state subsidies by the International Monetary Fund.³³ The protests led to calls for the president to step down and a

return to a multi-party system.³⁴ When Zambia's second president, Frederick Chiluba, attempted to change the constitution to allow him to run for a third term of office, people protested daily in the streets until he abandoned that attempt. At one time more than 15,000 people from different political parties, churches, law association and civil society marched in protest in the capital city.³⁵

Framing Analysis and Workers' Protest

Social movement and protest theory is useful in analyzing the relationship between Chinese investors and the general working population in Zambia. Within social movement theory, framing has been recognized as a way that people identify and understand a given situation. It allows people to define a situation or a problem and it also gives people a sense that something can be done. Framing also plays a critical role in elevating the issue. Framing attempts to understand the way in which social movement actors create and use meaning or how events and ideas are framed. Frames are "action oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement."³⁶ The importance of framing is its ability to shape the discourse around an issue. Successful social movements use three kinds of frames to further their goals.³⁷ The first type, diagnostic framing, states the problem in a clear and easy to understand manner; the second, prognostic framing, offers a solution and how it would be implemented; the third type is motivational framing or a call to action.³⁸

In the Zambian case, opposition presidential candidate Michael Sata's diagnostic framing defined the legitimacy of the Zambian workers cause versus Chinese investors and elevated the issue to the national level. He emphasized in his campaign the poor treatment of workers and the need to regulate foreign investments. In his diagnosis candidate Sata claimed that the Chinese investors were exploiting Zambians and the prognosis would be to elect him to control them. By emphasizing the nature of the exploitation and labeling investors in harsh terms, such as "infestors," he raised the issue beyond national boundaries. In terms of motivation framing, his call for action was for the Zambian citizens to vote for him as president. His slogans included "putting more money in your pockets" and a promise to control Chinese investors. Sata ran a long campaign for president starting in 2006, 2008 and 2011 when he was finally elected as Zambia's president. As Chinese investments and workers' rights became controversial issues he made them his central rallying issues. As president of the main opposition party, the Patriotic Front party (PF), Sata became the most vocal critic of Chinese investments. Throughout his campaign, he emphasized his opposition to China's investments because of their negative labor rights record, poor conditions of service, lack of adherence to environmental standards, and the fact that Chinese investors engaged in petty trade which eliminated the market for Zambian small businessmen. Although at times his criticism was undiplomatic and controversial he succeeded in getting the issue of workers' rights on the agenda of the Chinese government and Chinese employers.

As a result of his framing of the issues, China's relationship with Zambia was tested during his campaign and after his election in 2011. He managed to mobilize workers and engage a discourse related to anti-Chinese investments. Sata exploited the country's prevailing anti-Chinese climate that was arising from the frequent reports of accidents and poor Chinese labor relations. The areas that were more heavily penetrated with Chinese investments tended to

respond more favorably to Sata's anti-China campaign. "They're areas that are heavily penetrated by Chinese investment, which in turn generated nationalism and xenophobia that Sata has managed to exploit politically," said Laurence Caromba, of the Centre for International Political Studies in South Africa.³⁹ Although Sata lost the 2006 election against Levy Mwanawasa and the 2008 election against president Rupiah Banda, he got the highest number of votes in Lusaka and the Copperbelt, the urban areas which had been most affected by Chinese investments. In the 2006 election, Sata campaigned to force foreign companies to set aside 25 percent ownership for local investors. In his campaign Sata threatened to deport a large number of Chinese traders and casual workers for taking jobs which should be held by Zambians. He also called for the deportation of Chinese investors who were exploiting Zambian workers by paying them poor wages.⁴⁰ The result of the 2006 general election suggests that discontent among Zambians regarding the Chinese investments in Zambia led the majority of the voters in the major cities to reject President Mwanawasa in favor of Michael Sata who was opposed to China and Chinese investments. The election outcome showed that despite the cordial relations that exist between China and Zambia, resentment towards Chinese business people was widespread among Zambians.

Two years later in 2008, Sata campaigned again in a special presidential election after President Mwanawasa's death. Sata vowed to deport Chinese investors and to recognize rival Taiwan instead of the government in Beijing. Sata also referred to Taiwan as a sovereign state. Ironically, although China emphasizes a non-interference policy in the affairs of other nations, it interfered in the Zambian politics when Sata said that he would establish relations with Taiwan if elected as president. The Chinese ambassador to Zambia, Li Baodong, responded to Sata's pronouncements by threatening to cut diplomatic relations with Zambia if Sata was elected president. "We shall have nothing to do with Zambia if Sata wins the elections and goes ahead to recognize Taiwan," ambassador Li said.⁴¹ He also alleged that Sata had signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Taiwan authorities to recognize them as a sovereign state if he won the election.⁴² The Chinese embassy also alleged that Taiwan had given Sata funding for his campaign. Sata denied the allegation and denounced China for meddling in Zambia's election. "China should not dictate to us who we should deal with."⁴³ Sata lost to Rupiah Banda.

Sata, however, campaigned again in Zambia's 2011 general election. For the first time in the two countries' relationship, China was unsure of its status when Michael Sata, its most vocal critic won the election. China had backed the incumbent president, Banda, who had promoted the Zambia-China relationship that had resulted in increased trade and direct investments between the two counties. However, in the 2011 Zambian presidential election, three major issues dominated the agenda: (1) ensuring the growth of the economy, (2) creating more jobs, and (3) dealing effectively with the Chinese investments to ensure local workers' rights and job security. Sata campaigned on curtailing Chinese investments and safeguarding jobs for Zambians. He also promised to "put more money in people's pockets."⁴⁴ Sata was elected into office largely due to his stand on anti-Chinese investment. He projected himself as the defender of workers' rights and that the MMD government was not standing up for the Zambian people and workers' rights. Sata handily won the election.

Zambian-China Strategic Partnership

China was so concerned about the relationship that the Chinese ambassador to Zambia, Zhou Yuxiao became the first person to formally visit President Sata at the State House immediately after assuming the office. The Chinese ambassador who feared for the fate of his country's relationship with Zambia, read a congratulatory message from the Chinese President, Hu Jintao, who also stated that Zambia and China needed to continue with the good bilateral relations they had had for many years. President Hu emphasized that Zambia and China were involved in a "win-win co-operation" and he invited President Sata for a state visit China.

At the first meeting President Sata maintained his campaign stand but reassured the ambassador that Chinese investors were welcome in Zambia as long as they upheld the Zambian labor laws. He also called on Chinese investors to limit the number of expatriate workers they brought into the country along with their investments, as many Zambians feared that the Chinese citizens were taking over their jobs and their land. The Chinese ambassador promised that the Chinese investors would abide by all local labor laws; "It is my job to make sure that Chinese companies follow the law."⁴⁵ He also agreed with the president that hiring local workers was in the best interest for the country as well as being cost effective for Chinese investors.⁴⁶

The initial icy relationship between Sata and China began to thaw as the latter persisted and continued to negotiate China's position by promising the country goodwill and a "win-win" relationship between the two countries. President Hu continued to assure President Sata of his country's support and a more equitable economic solution for the two countries. According to Ambassador Yuxiao, President Hu wrote to Sata twice in thirty days to congratulate him and assure him that Hu's government was ready to work closely with the new Zambian government to promote friendly relations and cooperation between the two nations.⁴⁷ On behalf of the investors who had been at the center of the controversy, the Chinese ambassador pledged that they would be held accountable and that they would abide by the country's laws. The ambassador met the new president on September 25, 2011. One month later, on October 29, President Sata held a luncheon for Chinese investors at State House. This was a historic event, never been done before at such a grand level for Chinese investors by any previous Zambian president. It was even more surprising and shocking coming from a previously strong open critic of Chinese investors. The event was also held amid Zambian workers' protest of Chinese companies' working conditions. One week prior to the event, Chinese-owned NFCA Mining fired at least 1,000 miners at Chambeshi Copper Mines for participating in a strike protesting wages after about 2,000 Zambian miners had gone on strike a week earlier when the company reneged on a promise to raise their pay.⁴⁸ Some criticized Sata for "developing a soft spot for Chinese investors in the country whom he criticized vehemently during his time as an opposition leader."⁴⁹

The Chinese ambassador, Zhou Yuxiao, regarded the special luncheon as an indication of the high importance President Sata and the new Zambian government attached to China-Zambia relations. He used the opportunity to call on the Chinese business community to observe the country's laws and treat and pay the local employees fairly and decently. He stressed the need for them to actively undertake corporate and social responsibilities.⁵⁰ He also took advantage of the opportunity to highlight China's generosity to Zambia and promise more

needed assistance: “We shall use our development assistance, loans and investments to repair railway lines, build roads, bridges, schools, hydropower stations, power transmission lines, solar-powered and biogas facilities. We shall also provide more medicines and medical facilities, vehicles and scholarships.”⁵¹ In 2013, when President Sata made his first official visit to China, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for more favorable conditions for businesses and referenced the social responsibility role of Chinese investors, thus showing the need to talk about the critical issues between the two countries.⁵²

Perhaps the most significant individual action of President Sata’s government, however, was the increased minimum wage for workers who were not represented by unions such as domestic workers, shop employees and general workers. The government also increased salaries for civil servants with some getting as much as a 200 percent increase in their pay. The minimum wage for domestic workers was increased from K250,000 to K522,400 (\$50–\$100) including transport allowance. The minister of labor and social security, Fackson Shamenda, emphasized that the increases were only for non-unionized workers and were a fulfillment of the Patriotic Front’s government manifesto of “putting more money in people’s pockets.”⁵³

Conclusion

Protest theorists avoid a “success,” “failure,” or “outcome” orientation when it comes to the impact of the event but instead they focus on the aspect of consequences.⁵⁴ In this case, the Zambian workers’ protest actions led to national and international recognition of the need to ensure their rights. The immediate consequence of the protest activities was the change in the relationship between the Chinese investors and the Zambian workers. Candidate Michael Sata played a leading role in framing the issue and elevating it and keeping it constant. Although critics assert that President Sata became less vocal in his stand and took on a conciliatory tone towards Chinese investments when he became president, his earlier pronouncements changed the relationship between Chinese investors and Zambian workers. Protest theorists may view his later stand as establishment with the mainstream or co-optation.

However, even before he increased the minimum wage for workers, some companies had raised their workers’ salaries.⁵⁵ As an unintended consequence parliament took up the issue of foreign investments and the role of government in monitoring and regulating those investments.⁵⁶ Little discussion about Chinese and foreign investments was held in parliament before the protests by the workers and anti-Chinese statements of presidential candidate Sata. Framing the China-workers’ issue and taking it as his campaign platform made the opposition leader connect with the workers and defined his stand and his election.

Contrary to the belief that Zambia’s relationship with China would be weakened with Sata’s election, the two were drawn closer. The relationship between the Chinese and Zambian leaders was strengthened as they each recognized their strategic and economic dependence. This analysis illustrates China’s “flexigemony” and its strategy in dealing with a country according to its status. Although China has been branded as standing for non-interference in the affairs of other countries, it has in the case of Sudan, for instance, sent Chinese peace-keeping forces to the country. So in general, other African countries can take advantage of the Chinese flexigemony to negotiate for more attractive conditions for their people, knowing that China’s relationship with

Africa is also need driven. They can leverage their political and organizational resources to elevate their status at the international negotiation table. President Sata died in 2014, leaving China-Zambia relations in another tenuous situation. But when Edgar Lungu was elected president the Chinese leadership moved quickly to engage him. Less than two months after his election, the Chinese government invited him for a formal visit to China to address Asian leaders at the Boao forum. This is the same high recognition accorded to President Sata demonstrating the value the Chinese place on their relationship with Zambia. It is up to the Zambian government and other African countries to have clear objectives and strategies as they engage with China, to ensure that the engagement is indeed a 'win-win' relationship.

Endnotes

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- 3 Corkin 2013; Mohan and Lampert 2012.
- 4 Large 2009; Haglund 2009.
- 5 Mwase 1983.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Hatch 1976, p. 232.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Chan, 1992.
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