

Are Sino-Africa Relations Mutually Beneficial for Africa?: The Case of South Africa and Zambia

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Abstract

Throughout the years, China has managed to acquire enormous political and economic growth. Through these efforts China gained global recognition from then world superpowers (Britain, France, and United States of America), and was introduced to the United Nations Security Council as a permanent member in 1971. In order to maintain this position in the international arena, China focused on strengthening her rapidly developing economy by entering the African diaspora where she would acquire much needed raw minerals and varying sources of energy to sustain and further bolster her developing but competitive economy. These relations resulted in strengthened political and economic relations between China and African countries. The purpose of this paper is to determine whether Sino-Africa relations are mutually beneficial, and not lopsided in favor of Chinese interests. To determine this, the paper will be assigned with four task; (1) analyzing diplomatic and economic interactions between China and African nations (vice versa); (2) addressing the common perceptions and misconceptions associated with China's activities in Africa; (3) to determine whether indeed Sino-Africa relationships are based on mutual gains or if they are lopsided and in favor of China's interests; (4) to determine whether or not these relations and interactions have a promising future.

Keywords: Africa, South Africa, Zambia, China, Diplomacy, Economic Cooperation

Introduction

Fifty-two out of the Fifty-four diverse Africa countries still maintain relations with their former colonial masters (Belgium, Britain, France, Germany and Portugal), who still exert political and economic influence over their former colonies, through their varied resource extraction multinational cooperations and debt exacerbating international financial institutions (IFIs). As newly independent states, each with its own respective style of governance and varied levels of development, they have gone on to establish diplomatic and economic relations with other countries. One of these countries is China, which has managed to infiltrate the African diaspora, and challenge former colonial masters and Russia (the USSR) to solidify its contemporary position in Africa, as one of Africa's leading diplomatic and economic partners. China's position, influence, and interactions with independent and contemporary Africa, has brewed mixed reactions as it either compliments, clashes, or competes, with the legacies and interests of the former colonial masters and other actors (the USSR). However, Sino-Africa diplomatic and political engagements have provided the continent's economies, societies, and environment, with both negative impacts and positive outcomes. The latter serves as the basis for this chapter, which is to evaluate the economic interactions between Sino-South Africa and Zambia and examine the impact of these engagements.

Skepticism about Chinese activities in Africa

It is noteworthy, that this chapter provides a section to discuss and evaluate Africa's reception of Chinese activities, by highlighting and making a distinction towards what's constitutes as a

perception or reality. Alden (2005: 158) and Sautman and Hairong (2009) concur that addressing the common perceptions and misconceptions by Africans towards Chinese activities, is mostly influenced by the Western propaganda discourse, which to some extent of skepticism and pessimism China had continuously been portrayed as neocolonial or neo-imperial. Lumumba-Kasongo (2011: 236) repudiates this western perspective and argues that if this western portrayal of China were true, then China would have established a monopolistic ruling class rooted in Chinese language and culture, and imposed governing programs developed according to the Chinese model. Zondi from (Prah & Gumede, 2018: 24) also notes that these western perceptions did not arise because China's unforeseen and subtle growth leading to its Asian hegemony status but because China is rising in a manner that brings ambiguity to the western hegemony. Therefore, most of the writings from the west regard China's role in Africa as a rise of a colonial empire intent on plundering Africa's resources for its own national interests and placing Africa under its global wing as it plans (Prah & Gumede, 2018: 31)

Furthermore, Lumumba-Kasongo (2011: 258-263) stresses that it would only be possible through the ignorance, willingness, and collaboration with African political forces, which will enable China to become neo-colonialist or imperialist power in Africa. In support of the latter, Sautman and Hairong (2009) provide a survey report conduct across various African countries, aimed at determining whether the existing African perspectives about China are indeed western influenced and reflect western narratives. The findings from this survey discovered that, western propaganda has frequently exaggerated the negativity of African perceptions about the Chinese (Sautman and Hairong, 2009: 728-736). Although Sautman and Hairong provide a valuable body of research to a large shortage of research surveys on Sino-Africa relations, it has limitations due to its methodology, sample selection, and results, because the surveys were not conducted within South African or Zambian communities where locals reside and work alongside the Chinese. If the surveys by Sautman and Hairong were comprehensive enough and did not exclude these types of social settings and communities, the outcome of the results would have been very different, and through this point one of the major negative impacts of Sino-Africa economic activities has been introduced.

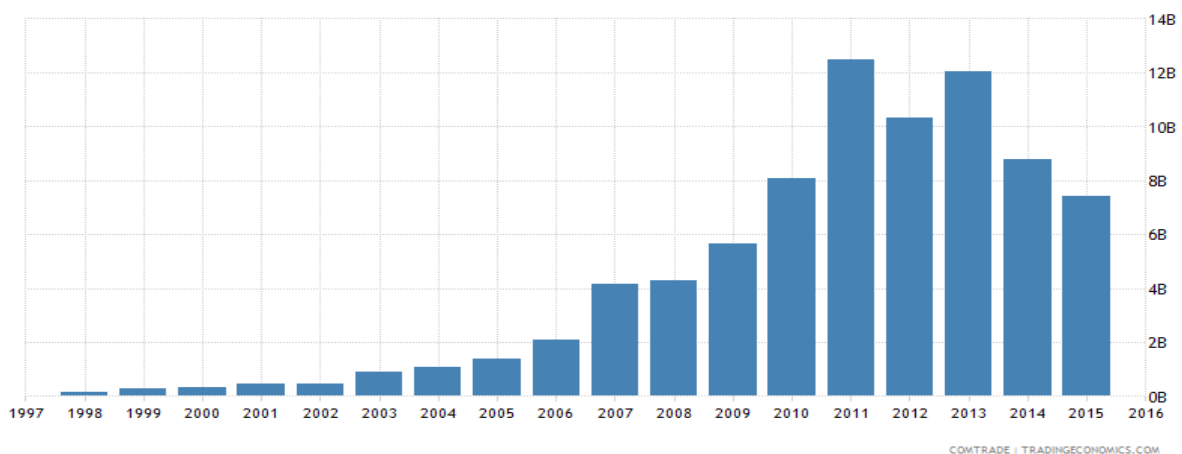
Application of Mercantilism

The Mercantilist perspective can be utilized to study and explain trade patterns between two countries. As mentioned above (chapter 2) Mercantilists believe that wealth is equal to power (vice versa) and that markets should be protected at all costs. Furthermore, they are also of the belief that the role of the state should be an active one which will help it in steering a mixed economy and promoting capital accumulation and national industries (Guzzini, 1994: 5-7). However, a neo-mercantilist lens will be utilized for this chapter, which is rooted in the application of economic nationalism, which is pre-dominantly utilized by global powers. Secondly, it believes in the relationship of openness, foreign capital, and accessing foreign markets, which is also attributed by the governments active role (Holslag, 2007: 136).

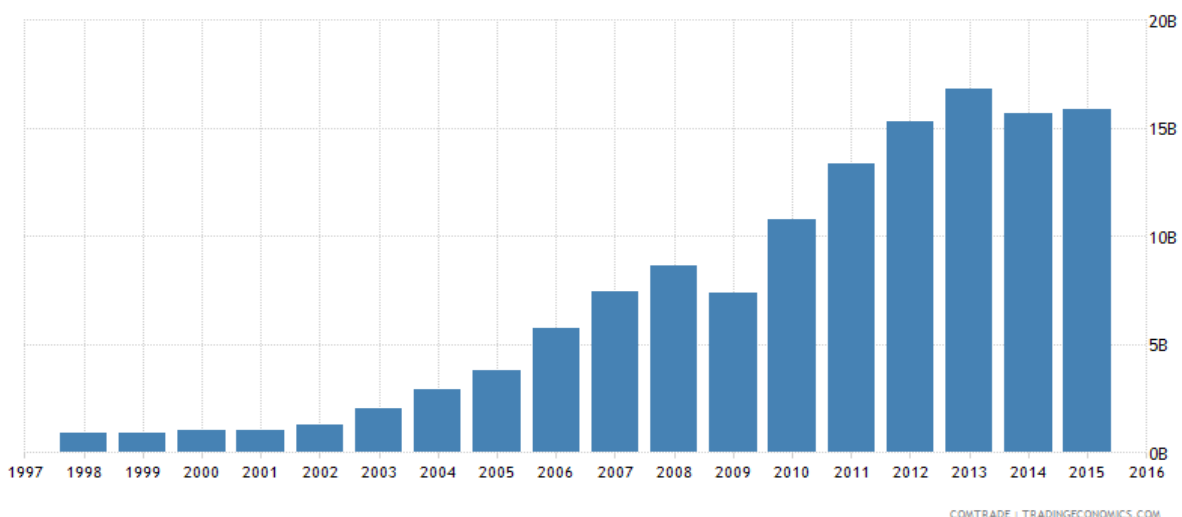
In terms of state-to-state economic relations, neo-mercantilism believes that these can never be equal, and will mostly turn out to be lopsided. Furthermore, it also notes that states need to capitalize on their comparative advantage within international markets, by seeking dominant strategic sectors within international markets, which will contribute positively towards a state's wealth and power (Ziegler and Menon, 2014: 17-29). Lastly, neo-mercantilism just as classical mercantilism, also approves of trade deficits only if it is through raw minerals and natural resources, because in return they will expand the states manufacturing sector. However, they also advocate for investments (Holslag, 2007: 137-139).

Mercantilism in Sino-South Africa economic relationship

Trade relations between South Africa and China can be traced back to the 1990s. Before formal diplomatic ties in 1991 the two countries engaged in a two-way trade ranging at only \$14 million, which increased to almost \$1 billion within six years (Shelton, 2001: 110-117). By 2002 two-way trade had increased to almost \$1.5 billion (Shelton, 2001: 110-117). Raw minerals are the dominating regular South African exports to China. Whereas China usually exports to South Africa manufactured products such as textiles, clothes, household appliances and materials, communication and network devices, machinery parts, transmission equipment, and plastic products. Zondi (Prah & Gumede, 2018: 18) notes that for China to remain as a dominant economic superpower during its supposed peaceful emergence it cannot afford to do without relations with African countries such as South Africa, which possess most of the natural resources it needs, and as consumer of its goods.



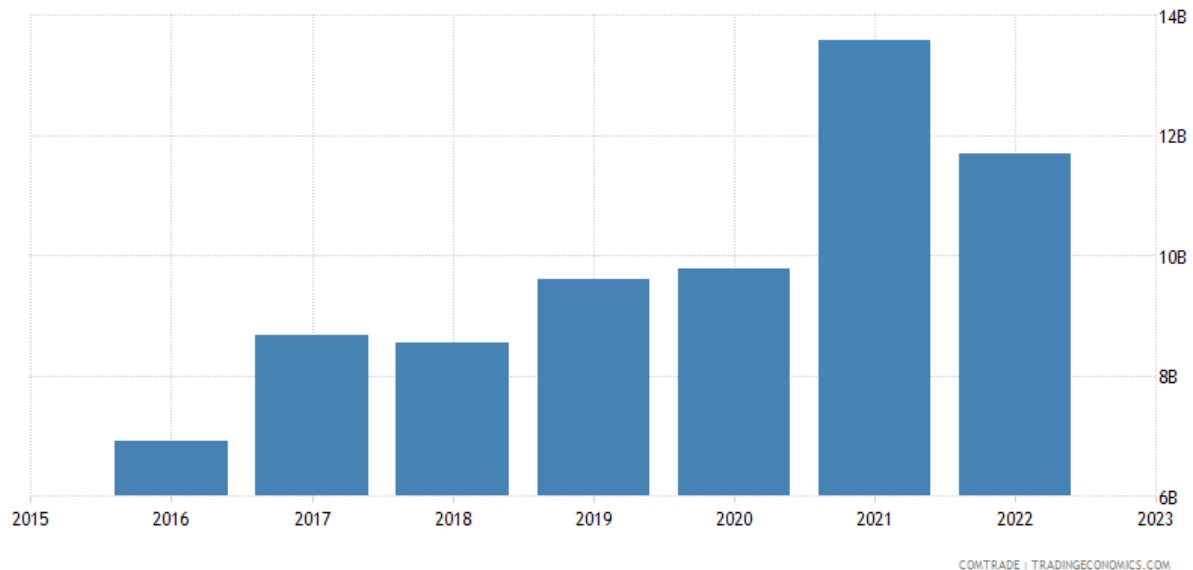
Graph 1: South African exports to China 1998-2015



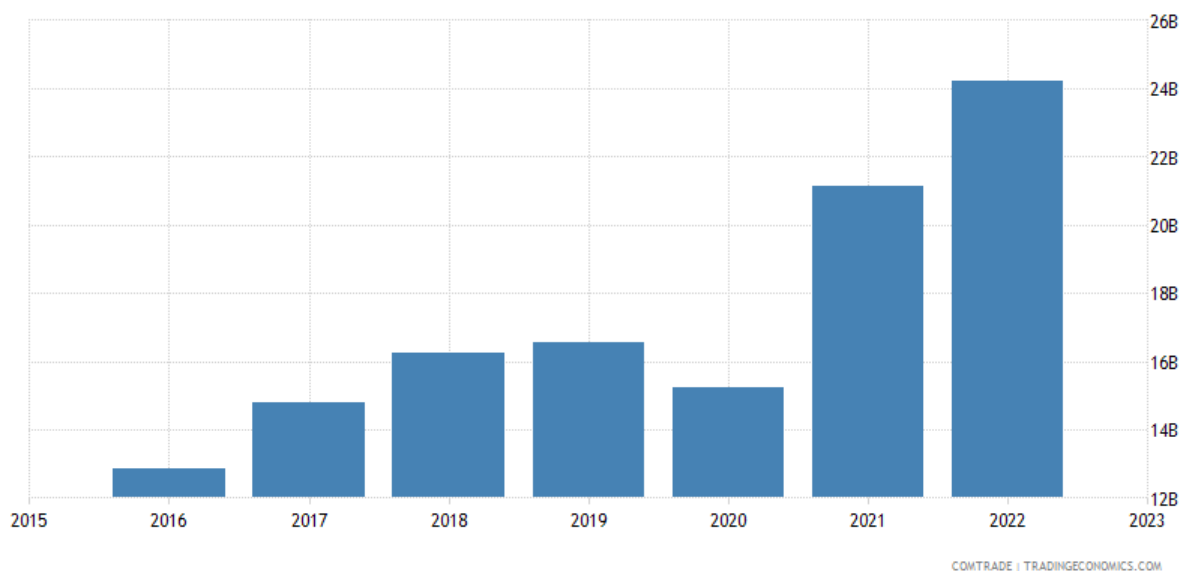
Graph 2: Chinese exports to South Africa 1998-2015

Graph 1 and 2, depict the exports from South Africa to China and vice versa from 1998 to 2015. Graph 1's data points out that there was a continuous increase in exports to China from 1998 till 2011 when exports reached over \$12 billion, and thereafter there was a decline to \$10.5 billion in 2012. A subsequent increase followed in 2013 when exports reached \$12 billion, but again exports would decline in 2014 and 2015, reaching at \$8.8 and 7.4 billion respectively. Graph 2's data on exports from China to South Africa depicts that as of 1998 exports remained at \$1 billion until 2001, and

they slightly increased in 2002. However, exponential growth in exports to South Africa only took place in 2003 till 2008, when exports increased from \$2 billion in 2003 and up to \$7.5-8 billion in 2008. The first decline in exports would take place in 2009, when exports decreased to \$6.5-7 billion. Another period of exponential growth took place from 2010 until 2013, when exports increased from between \$10.5-11 billion up to \$17-17.5 billion. These two graphs have proven to be in support of the abovementioned that two-way trade between the two countries increased post-1998, with the establishment of formal diplomatic relation.



Graph 3: South African exports to China 2016-2022



Graph 4: Chinese exports to South Africa 2016-2022

Graph 3 and 4, depict the exports from South Africa to China and vice versa from 2016 up to 2022. The data from graph 3 points out that in 2016 and 2017, South African exports increased from \$7 billion in 2016 to \$8.8 billion in 2017. However, this growth slightly dropped to \$8.7 billion in 2018, but exponential growth was experienced from 2019 until 2021 when exports increased from \$9.7 billion in 2019 to \$13.7 billion in 2021, and would decline in 2022 to \$11.8 billion.

Whereas according to the data depicted in graph 4 Chinese exports to South Africa as depicted in graph 4, points out that Chinese exports had a constant growth from 2016 until 2019, increasing from \$12.8 billion to \$16.9 billion. However, they experienced a decline to just over \$15 billion in 2020, but would increase again in 2021 and 2022 reaching up to \$21 billion and \$24 billion in both respective years.

As espoused by the Mercantilist perspective, that states usually prefer to export products which they have in abundance (comparative advantage) (Appleyard, 2010: 18-21, 39-40; Markusen, 2005: 3-5). Which in the case of South African exports, the country mostly exports raw unprocessed minerals and commodities (gold, diamonds, iron, copper, and manganese ores, etc.) therefore signifying that its comparative advantage lies in natural resources. Whereas for China, its comparative advantage lies in its abundance of skilled labour, manufactured products, and lower tariffs (Shelton, 2004: 59-67). However, thorough analysis through a Mercantilist lens, South Africa's comparative advantage is flawed and lacks longevity, in that the South African export strategy has failed to place value on South African exports, and these raw minerals being exported will eventually run out. This is proven by the data provided in graph 3 and 4 on exports between the two countries from 2016 to 2022, China has profitted way more than South Africa on exports with the average difference between China to South Africa exports and vice versa, amounting to \$40.64 billion.

FDI between China and South Africa

South Africa's political and social climate are the major causes for its poor investment conditions. According to Liberalist FDI conditionalities countries with a higher degree of political and social stability tend to exhibit positive economic growth which attracts FDI. Furthermore, for liberals attracting FDI depends on the liberalization of its trade policies (Bengoa and Sanchez-Robles, 2003: 529-533). Social factors such as high crime rates, unemployment, and low education together with the abovementioned conditionalities are part of the reasons why South Africa has a low FDI average. However, despite these factors China and South Africa still continue to invest in each other. This has been visible with Chinese investments in South Africa's mining sector, with investments exceeding \$90 million in mining deals such as the Limpopo Province Development Corporation which established ASA Minerals, based on chrome mining (Shelton, 2001: 118-119; 122-125).

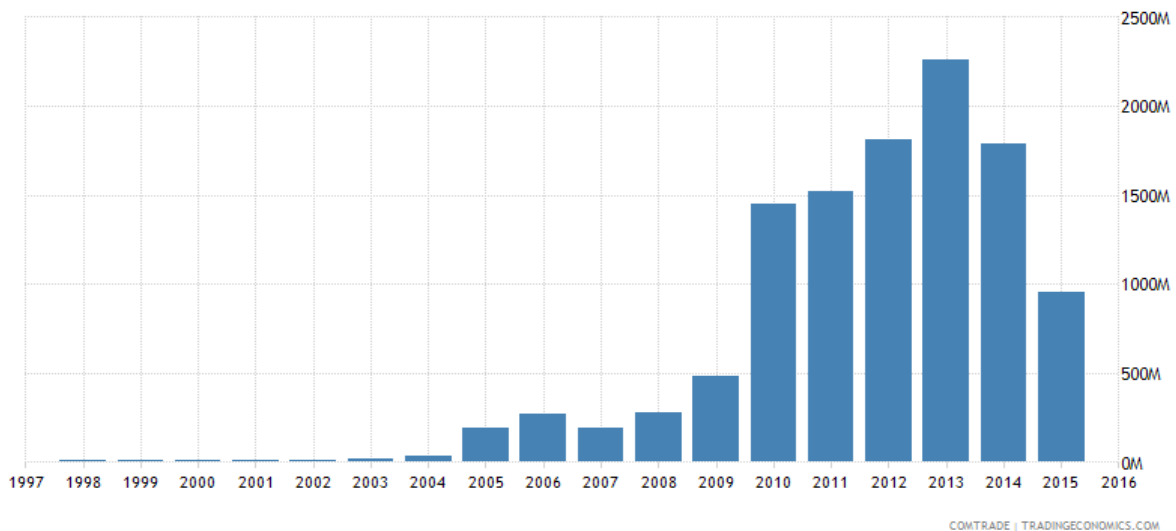
South Africa mining sector is responsible for the continuation of Chinese FDI's as China's industrialization period has created a great demand for natural resources. However, South African companies have capitalized on China's rapidly growing economy and global prominence, and entered into China. South African companies who have invested in China are SAB-Miller brewers who have managed to expand themselves throughout China through joint partnerships with local brewers across China (Anon, 2006). Sasol also managed to secure two investments, the Sasol Polymer located nearby Shanghai, and joint venture with the Chinese government to build \$6 billion coal to fuel plants (Anon, 2006).

Mercantilism in Sino-Zambia economic relationship

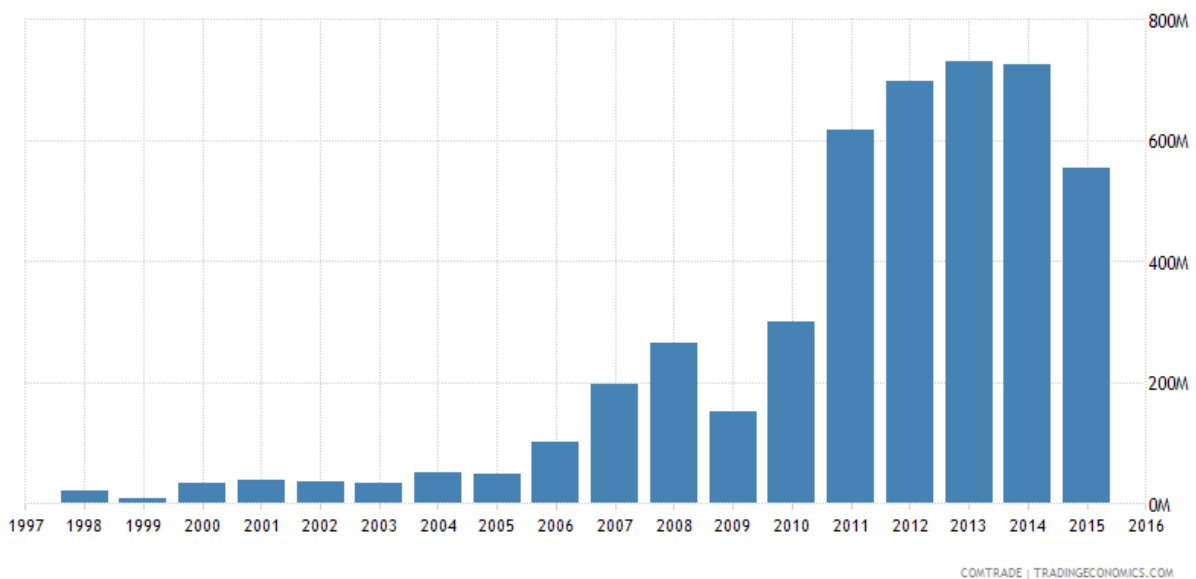
Unlike with South Africa, economic relations between China and Zambia did not begin on a high after Zambia's independence, and as abovementioned that interactions between Zambia and China unfolded in three periodical stages. During the first stage economic interactions had not been established, and it was only during the second stage in the 1990s, which were ignited by the Chinese *going-out* policy that was implemented in 1990 (Mwanawina, 2008:1). The implementation of this policy, saw the gradual surge in economic engagements between China and Zambia. In the third stage, Mubita (2013: 3-6) notes that economic engagements propelled during this period as both

focused on sustainable economic development, as Zambia believed that the success of the latter would also help achieve the first MDG goal (eradication of extreme poverty and hunger).

Mubita (2013) and Qiang (2007: 7-16) note that another important contributor to the economic relationship between China and Zambia was the formation of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000. In the context of Sino-Zambia economic relations FOCAC has been the cornerstone for China's increased development of its interests in Zambia (Mwanawina, 2018: 2).



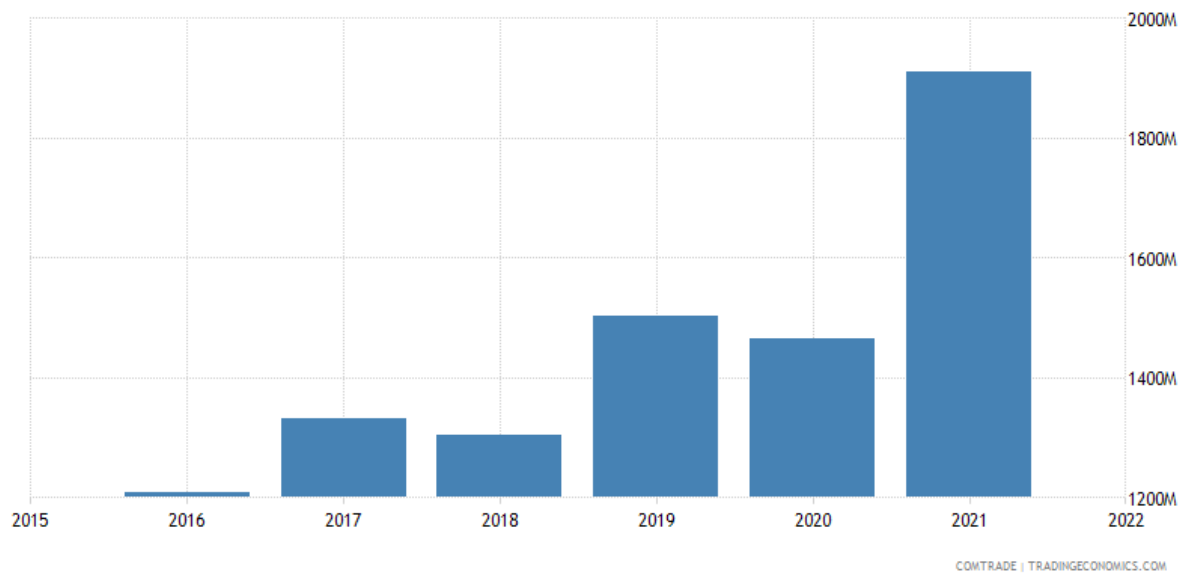
Graph 5: Zambian exports to China 1998-2015



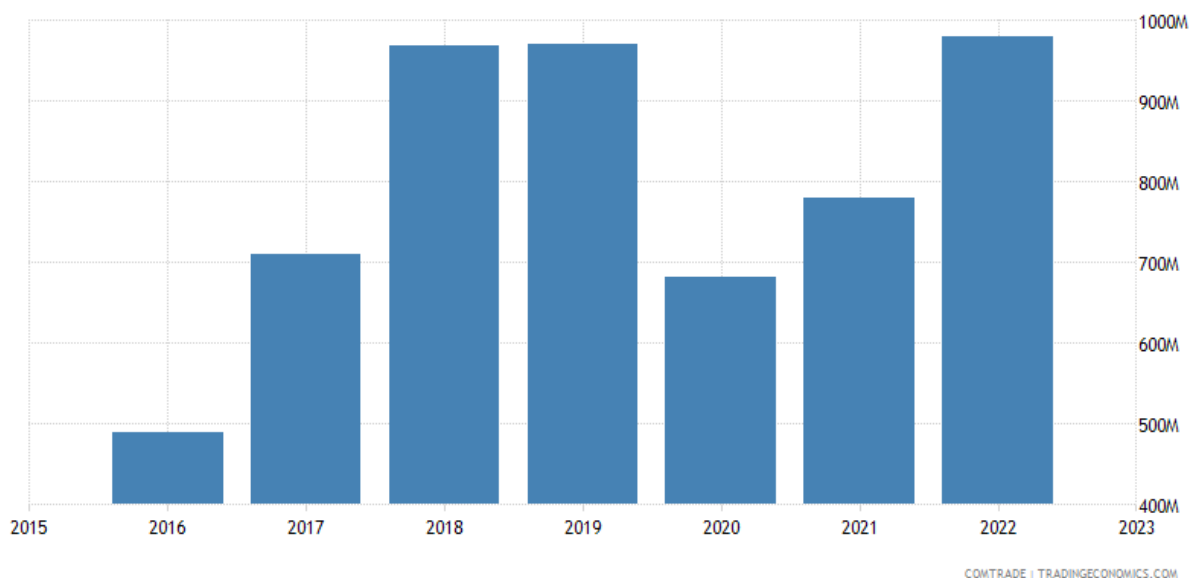
Graph 6: Chinese exports to Zambia 1998-2015

Graph 5 and 6, depict the exports from China to Zambia and vice versa from 1998 to 2015. The data portrayed in graph 5 points out that exports from Zambia to China in 1998 until 2002 were very low, amounting to less than \$100 million. However, from 2003 until 2006 exports increased from over \$50 million in 2003 to \$250 million in 2006. Exports in 2007 would decrease to \$200 million, but 2008 until 2013 exponential growth in exports increased from \$260 million in 2008 to \$2025 million in 2013, but 2014 and 2015 exports decreased to \$1750 million and \$900 million respectively.

Whereas data from graph 6 points out that exports from China to Zambia in 1998 were also low amounting to only \$30 million, and further decreased to below \$30 million in 1999. In 2000 and 2001 respectively, exports gradually increased from just over \$45 million to over \$50 million, and in 2002 and 2003 respectively exports decreased and ranged between US\$40 million and \$45 million. A four-year (2004-2008) period of exponential growth increased exports from over \$60 million to over \$200 million, but decreased in 2009 to below \$200 million. Another four-year (2010-2014) period of exponential growth increased exports from +/- \$250 million to over US\$600 million, but decreased again in 2015 to below \$600 million.



Graph 7: Zambian export to China 2016-2021



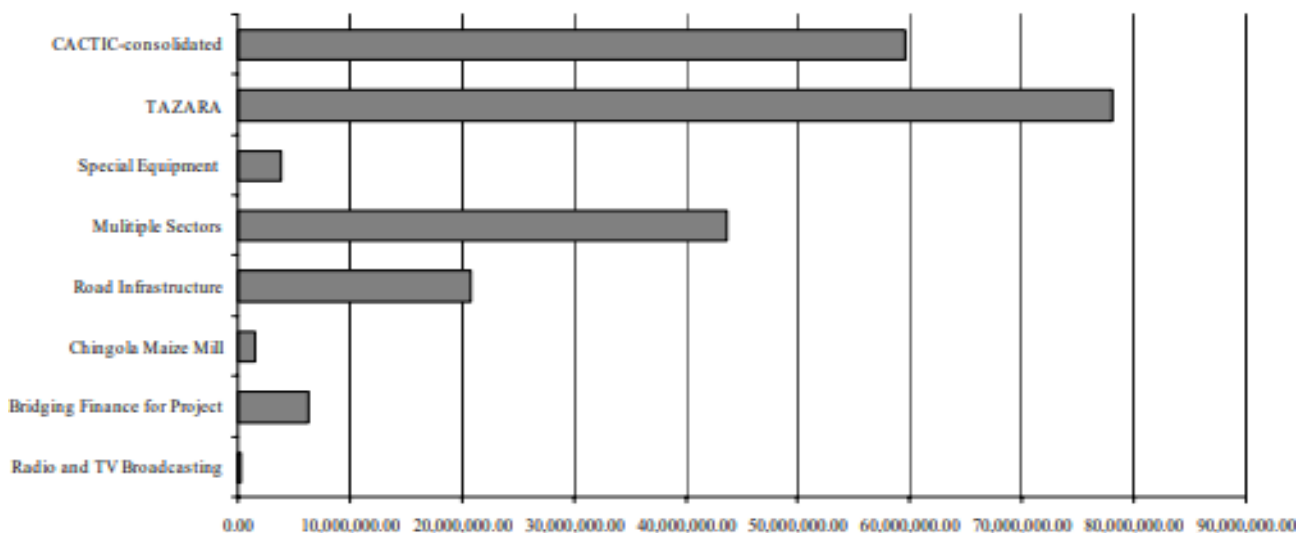
Graph 8: Chinese export to Zambia 2016-2022

Data from graph 7, depicts the exports from Zambia to China from 2016 until 2021, and that in graph 8 depicts exports from China to Zambia from 2016 until 2022. Exports from Zambia as portrayed in the data from graph 7 shows that from 2016 until 2018 exports remained below 1400 million and only went above 1400 million in 2019 and 2020, and by 2021 they had increased to over 1800 million.

Whereas, China to Zambia exports between 2016 and 2019 increased from 490 million to 950 million, and decreased in 2020 to below 700 million but would increase again in 2021 and 2022, amounting to over 750 million in 2021 and 950 million in 2022.

Chinese financial assistance to Zambia

China has been Zambia's financial ally going back as far as the 1960s. However, even though Chinese aid does not come with any extreme conditionalities, China is very strategic in its aid offerings. Mwanawina (2008: 18-19) concurs that the majority of Chinese aid is directed into strategic sectors such as economic and technical cooperations, and a lesser amount is made available through grants (either cash or materials). According to Mwanawina (2008) by 2006 Zambia's loans from China amounted to US\$409.4 million and grants amounted to US\$5.4 million, which has also been attributed by the increased Chinese Economic and Technical Assistance, and from these loans and grants owed, Zambia had only managed to repay US\$197,8 million to China, leaving its debt owed to US\$217 million. Rupp (2008: 65-76) concurs that these forms of Chinese aid and investment programs are not so different than those offered by the West, in that Chinese investments in particular are attached with Foreign Development Assistance (FDA).



Graph 9: Zambia's debt to China in US\$

Above graph 10, is a layout of sectors which responsible for Zambia's debt to China. However, despite these debt figures China continues to engage economically with Zambia as its integral country to its demanding industrial country, as espoused by Zondi (Prah & Gumede, 2018: 18). Mwanawina (2008: 20-21) notes that the continuation of economic engagement between Zambia and China is beneficial to the latter, as it refuses to scrap the debt owed by Zambia, and instead reschedules it debt, reduction of interest rates. Furthermore, based on the nature and structure of the economic relationship shared by the two countries, in the longterm it stands to be in favour of China.

FDI between China and Zambia

Unlike South Africa, Zambia has a relatively higher degree of political and social stability, and its mining sector is one of the sectors where the majority of FDI's are directed and located. Zambia posses a widescale copper mining sector, and it has become infested with Chinese state owned enterprises (SOEs) and private investments. Mwanawina (2008: 8-9) notes that the mining sector experienced a investment boom in 2007, due to Chinese companies investing up to US\$900 million.

Other sectors which have been responsible for attracting FDI's for Zambia are manufacturing, construction, communications and transport, and health (Mwanawina, 2008: 9-14).

Sino-Africa engagements: conclusions

It cannot be denied that Chinese diplomatic and economic engagements with both South Africa and Zambia have resulted in both positive and negative outcomes. The positive gains which have resulted from these relationships can be witnessed from the infrastructural developments in the transport sector (ports and railways) and financial assistance through various loans aid. China has also produced positive outcomes in agricultural and rural development (Brautigam and Xiaoyang, 2009: 686). Longstanding diplomatic relations with China have benefited South Africa and Zambia, in that they are usually protected from the powers of the western countries, and it also provides them with international bargaining power. These relations may not be entirely negative, but China is the one who continues to benefit more from these relations, which makes these relations to be lopsided. Lumumba-Kasongo (2011: 238-259) notes that for this to change African states need to work on creating new and advance ways and policies which will produce mutual beneficiation during these engagements. However, the possibility of this happening is dependent on the leaders of the respective countries.

The negative factor about Chinese engagements is that unlike the conditionalities attached to western aid, China has utilized a different approach to secure its global prominence and survival, by offering huge loans which will be difficult for developing countries to repay in time, as a way of ensuring that it continues to have access to natural resources of these countries which simultaneously exploits their economic growth. Alden (2005: 148) concurs that China's Africa policy is not necessarily about improving south-south cooperation and mutual beneficiation deals but is strategically meant to further secure its economic and security interests in both countries.

However, moving forward this can be gradually corrected by ensuring that political leaders are also held accountable for irresponsibly agreeing to compromising deals. Secondly, they need to implement policies and deal that will allow for mutual beneficiation on more infrastructure deals, which will then ensure that African workers are protected. Political leaders need to urgently amend and strengthen their foreign policies or produce a separate policy on China which will act as a directive when engaging and negotiating with China to ensure that Africa states actually acquire more beneficial deals.

In conclusion this essay has managed to briefly discuss both the diplomatic and economic relationship between China and the subject nations. This was done by offering detailed backgrounds on each of the relations separately, and how the relations have developed. It has also provided the finding from these relations and provided solutions for the way forward.

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