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China's Influence on the Autocratization of Hybrid Regimes in Africa

Dissertation thesis

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After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the "third wave" of democratization, many political leaders and researchers believed that the days of liberal democracy competing with non-democratic alternatives were over. This euphoria about the triumph and normative superiority of liberal democracy as the only legitimate form of governance gradually experienced its first cracks as many states' democratic progress stalled or began to slip. After the new millennium, the international balance of power gradually began to tip away from established democracies towards authoritarianism, and discussions of a third wave of autocratization gained momentum. Research examining this transformation has only relatively recently begun to emerge in the field of comparative autocratization, and research specifically addressing the role of international factors in autocratization is still only a matter of the last few years. Growing international authoritarian influence is seen among scholars as an important factor that has the potential to explain the current autocratization wave. It is precisely the rise in power and prestige of authoritarian powers that have led to the current situation where the already weakened idea of democracy as an international norm is further undermined by the offer of possible alternatives for economic development and political governance by states that have not democratized, yet have managed to develop economically and at the same time are considered to be at least regional powers. In this respect, it is referred in particular to Russia and China. These authoritarian powers are influential in restricting and hindering democratic progress, either through direct active support for other non-democratic governments or indirectly as a result of cooperation with them. China, in particular, has then become a model of development worthy of emulation, and thus an inspiration for a number of political leaders, mostly in the developing world, who want to achieve rapid economic progress, but at the same time have ambitions to stay in power, politically not liberalize and more effectively counter external democratizing pressures from the West. This research responds to such a debate to complement it with an understanding of external influences (in this case China) on the autocratization of hybrid regimes in the hitherto little-studied Africa, as a region significantly affected by the current autocratization trend. Specifically, it aims to explore how the People's Republic of China influences the autocratization of hybrid regimes in Africa. The thesis employs mixed methods research (MMR), which combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The thesis then draws on available statistical data that capture the most diverse forms of China's engagement in Africa, as well as data collected during field research in Zambia.

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Declaration

I declare that I have carried out the dissertation thesis on my own under the supervision of Mgr. Jan Prouza, Ph.D., and have presented all the sources and literature utilized.

In Prague, November 21, 2023

Iva Sojková

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Annotation

SOJKOVÁ, IVA. *China's Influence on the Autocratization of Hybrid Regimes in Africa*: Philosophical Faculty, China's Influence on the Autocratization of Hybrid Regimes in Africa, University of Hradec Králové, 2023, 334 pp. Dissertation Thesis.

The international dimension of autocratization is a largely unexplored area in contemporary research devoted to explaining the “third wave of autocratization” in the world. The literature examining the international influence of authoritarian states on autocratization emerged rather recently and mostly focused on countries such as Russia, China, and Venezuela and their activities in their immediate neighborhood. The question of whether and how these states undermine democratic progress in distant regions has received little attention. With the use of mixed methods research, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, the author seeks to determine whether the People's Republic of China influences the autocratization of African hybrid regimes. To avoid conceptual and theoretical ambiguities, the author divides the research into active (autocracy promotion, democracy resistance) and passive influences (autocratic linkage, emulation, extraversion) from the external power standpoint. Findings show that cooperation with China influences the autocratization of African hybrid regimes. However, this differs across the influences and mechanisms Chinese and African actors employ. Overall, the international authoritarian influence examined in this thesis can be described as an *autocratic synergy* between African states and China. Thus, on one side is the authoritarian power, China, actively seeking to influence African elites ideologically and through responding to incentives that possibly threaten the regime abroad. On the other side, African elites welcome Chinese alternative finance free from political conditionalities, presenting opportunities for their own enrichment, distribution of patronage, and control and financial advantages over the opposition.

Keywords: China, Africa, Sino-African relations, Zambia, autocratization, hybrid regimes, gray zone, electoral authoritarianism

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
The Objective and Research Questions	5
Theoretical Framework and Key Concepts.....	5
Delimitation of Research	11
State of Research.....	13
Methods and Data	21
Structure of the Work.....	26
1. Theoretical Background and Key Concepts.....	27
1.1. Autocratization	27
1.2. In the Gray Zone of Hybrid Regimes.....	30
1.2.1. Electoral Authoritarianism and Electoral Democracy.....	33
1.3. International Dimension of Autocracy	36
1.3.1. Active Influences – Autocratic Sponsorship	41
1.3.1.1. Autocracy Promotion.....	41
1.3.1.2. Democracy Resistance.....	43
1.3.2. Passive Influences – Authoritarian Diffusion.....	45
1.3.2.1. Autocratic Linkage	48
1.3.2.2. Emulation.....	54
1.3.2.3. Extraversion.....	58
2. China as an Autocratic Sponsor	62
2.1. Autocracy Promotion	62
2.1.1. Results – China’s Autocracy Promotion Limited (yet)	64
2.1.2. CCP’s Relations with African Political Parties	67
2.1.2.1. CCP’s Relations with Zambian Ruling Parties.....	72
2.2. Democracy Resistance	77
2.2.1. Findings	83
2.2.1.1. Chinese Aid versus Democratic Aid.....	83
2.2.1.2. Chinese Aid versus Western Sanctions.....	87
2.2.1.3. Chinese Aid versus Mobilization for Democracy..	91
2.2.1.3.1. Resisting Mobilization for Democracy in Zambia	95
2.2.1.4. Chinese Military Support versus Democratic Aid.	99
2.2.1.5. Chinese Military Support versus Western Sanctions	107

2.2.1.6. Military Support versus Mobilization for Democracy.....	111
2.3. Chapter Conclusion.....	117
3. China as an Authoritarian Diffuser	121
3.1. Autocratic Linkage to the “East”	129
3.1.1. Economic Linkage to China.....	132
3.1.2. Intergovernmental Linkage to China.....	135
3.1.3. Technocratic and Social Linkage to China.....	137
3.1.4. Information Linkage to China	139
3.1.5. Zambian Autocratic Linkage to China	141
3.1.5.1. Economic Ties to China.....	144
3.1.5.1.1. Chinese SOEs in the Mining Sector	145
3.1.5.1.2. On Paved Roads to Debt Default.....	148
3.1.5.1.3. China as a Development Partner and Exploiter in the Zambian media	158
3.1.5.2. Intergovernmental Linkage.....	167
3.1.5.2.1. Material Support to the Government and Defense Sector	175
3.1.5.2.2. China as a Political Partner in the Zambian Newspapers.....	176
3.1.5.3. Technocratic and Social Linkage.....	180
3.1.5.3.1. Encountering the Chinese migrants in Zambian media	186
3.1.5.3.1.1. Chinese Nationals in Zambia as Criminals and Victims	186
3.1.5.3.1.2. Chinese Nationals in Zambia as Competitors	188
3.1.5.3.1.3. Encountering the Chinese as Culturally Different Actors	192
3.1.5.4. Information Linkage.....	196
3.1.5.4.1. Cooperation in the ICT Sector.....	197
3.1.5.4.2. China in Zambian Media Space.....	198
3.1.5.4.2.1. Cooperation between China and Zambian Newspapers	201
3.2. Emulating China Model	210
3.2.1. China as a Model of Development in the Zambian Press	218
3.2.1.1. Zambian Portrayal of China Model.....	221

3.2.1.2. Chinese Influence on the Presentation of the China Model.....	229
3.2.1.2.1. Touring and Learning from China	234
3.3. Extraversion – Roads for Votes	245
3.3.1. Instrumentalizing Chinese-Funded Projects in Zambia ...	249
3.3.1.1. The Instrumentalization of Chinese Infrastructural Projects in Zambian Media.....	257
3.4. Chapter Conclusion	264
Conclusion	269
References.....	281
Appendix.....	1

List of Tables

Table 1: Regression models of the influence of the CCP delegations and cadres visits on autocratization

Table 2: China's reaction (aid, commitments) to external incentives (Western democratic aid, disbursement)

Table 3: China's reaction (aid, commitment) to external incentives (Western democratic aid, commitment)

Table 4: China's reaction (aid) to external incentives (Western sanctions)

Table 5: China's reaction (aid) to domestic incentives (mobilization for democracy)

Table 6: China's reaction (military support, trade) to external incentives (Western democratic aid, disbursement)

Table 7: China's reaction (military support, projects) to external incentives (Western democratic aid, disbursement)

Table 8: China's reaction (military support, trade) to external incentives (Western democratic aid, commitments)

Table 9: China's reaction (military support, projects) to external incentives (Western democratic aid, commitments)

Table 10: China's reaction (military support, trade) to external incentives (sanctions)

Table 11: China's reaction (military support, projects) to external incentives (sanctions)

Table 12: China's reaction (military support, trade) to domestic incentives (mobilization for democracy)

Table 13: China's reaction (military support, projects) to domestic incentives (mobilization for democracy)

Table 14: The frames identified in the ZDML (number and share; 2003 – 2019)

Table 15: The frames identified in The Post/The Mast (number and share; 2003 – 2019)

Table 16: Number of sources and share of their appearances (%) in the dominant frames (ZDML, 2003 – 2019, 1,234 articles)

Table 17: Number of sources and share of their appearances (%) in the dominant frames (The Post/The Mast, 2003 – 2019, 740 articles)

Table 18: Linkage to China (economic) and its influence on autocratization

Table 19: Linkage to China (intergovernmental) and its influence on autocratization

Table 20: Linkage to China (technocratic and social) and its influence on autocratization

Table 21: Linkage to China (information) and its influence on autocratization

Table 22: Regression models of the influence of the Chinese loans (transportation and power sectors) on alternation in power

List of Figures

Figure 1: Autocratization as democratization in reverse

Figure 2: The spectrum of political regimes

Figure 3: Typology of external influences on autocracy

Figure 4: Supplemented division of international influences on autocracy

Figure 5: Examined active international influences

Figure 6: Mobilization for democracy in Zambia (2000 – 2022) and the years of general elections

Figure 7: Examined Passive International Influences

Figure 8: The share frame categories identified in the ZDML (%; 2003 – 2019)

Figure 9: The share frame categories identified in The Post/The Mast (%; 2003 – 2019)

Figure 10: Autocratization in Zambia

Figure 11: Trade between China and Zambia (2000 – 2019)

Figure 12: Zambia's external debt stocks (% of GNI)

Figure 13: Chinese loans to Zambia (commitments; 2000 – 2019)

Figure 14: Chinese loans to Zambia by sector (commitments; 2000 – 2019)

Figure 15: Copper prices and Chinese loans to Zambia (commitments; 2000 – 2019)

Figure 16: Number of stories in the “DP” category over time in the ZDML and The Post/The Mast (2003 – 2019)

Figure 17: Number of stories in the “Expl” category over time in the ZDML and The Post/The Mast (2003 – 2019)

Figure 18: Number of stories in the “PP” category over time in the ZDML and The Post/The Mast (2003 – 2019)

Figure 19: Number of Chinese workers in Zambia (2009 – 2019)

Figure 20: Number of stories in the “Crim” category over time in the ZDML and The Post/The Mast (2003 – 2019)

Figure 21: Number of stories in the “Comp” category over time in the ZDML and The Post/The Mast (2003 – 2019)

Figure 22: Number of stories in the “Cult” category over time in the ZDML and The Post/The Mast (2003 – 2019)

Figure 23: Foreign articles about China printed in the ZDML (number; 2003 – 2019)

Figure 24: Foreign articles about China printed in The Post/The Mast (number; 2003 – 2019)

Figure 25: China framed as MoD in the ZDML (total n. of articles and trips to China articles) (2003 – 2019)

Figure 26: China framed as MoD in The Post/The Mast (total n. of articles and trips to China articles) (2003 – 2019)

Figure 27: Chinese loans to Zambia in transportation and power sectors (commitments; USD mn; 2000 – 2019)

Figure 28: China framed as Instr in the ZDML (total n. of articles) (2003 – 2019)

Figure 29: Inflation, consumer prices in Zambia (annual %; 2000 – 2022)

Figure 30: Chinese lending to Africa (commitments; USD mn; 2000 – 2022)

List of Abbreviations

ACJA – All-China Journalists Association
AfDB – African Development Bank
ANC – African National Congress
AVIC – Aviation Industry Corporation of China
BC – Beijing Consensus
BRI – Belt and Road Initiative
BRNN – Belt and Road News Network
CARI – China Africa Research Initiative
CCM – Collum Coal Mine
CCP – Chinese Communist Party
CCTV – China Central Television
CGTN – China Global Television Network
CIDCA – China International Development Cooperation Agency
CM – China Model
CNMC – China Nonferrous Metal Mining Group
CPC – Communist Party of China
CRI – China Radio International
CRS – Creditor Reporting System
DfID – Department for International Development
EA – electoral authoritarianism
ED – electoral democracy
EM-DAT – The international disaster database
EPRDF – Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EU – European Union
FDI – Foreign Direct Investment
FOCAC – Forum on China–Africa Cooperation
FRELIMO – Frente de Libertação de Moçambique
GSDB – Global Sanctions Database
HIPC – Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
HRW – Human Rights Watch
ICT – Information and communications technology
ID-CCP – International Department of the Chinese Communist Party

IMF – International Monetary Fund
JICA – Japan International Cooperation Agency
JSIQ – Jinagsu Inspection and Quarantine Institute of Quality
MCTI – Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry
MDGs – Millennium Development Goals
MDRI – Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative
MFEZ – Multi-Facility Economic Zone
MMD – Movement for Multi-Party Democracy
MMR – Mixed Methods Research
MOAZ – Media Owners Association of Zambia
MPLA – Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola
NCP – National Congress Party
NDC – National Democratic Congress
NELDA – National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy
NFCA – Non-Ferrous China Africa Corporation
ODA – Official Development Aid
ODF – Official Development Finance
OOF – Other Official Flows
OECD-DAC – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s –
Development Assistance Committee
PF – Patriotic Front
PPP – Public-Private Partnership
PRC – People’s Republic of China
RDA – Road Development Agency
ROC – Republic of China
SACP – South African Communist Party
SAP – Structural Adjustment Programs
SAPPRFT – State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television
of the People’s Republic of China
SEZ – Special Economic Zone
SIPRI – Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SOEs – State-owned enterprises
SWAPO – South West Africa People's Organisation
TAZARA – Tanzania-Zambia Railway Authority

UCDP-PRIO – Uppsala Conflict Data Program-Peace Research Institute Oslo

UNIP – United National Independence Party

UNZA – University of Zambia

UPND – United Party for National Development

V-Dem – Varieties of Democracy

WB – World Bank

WTO – World Trade Organization

ZAMTEL – Zambia Telecommunications Company Limited

ZANIS – Zambia News and Information Services

ZAF – Zambia Air Force

ZANU-PF – Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front

ZCA – Zambia China Association

ZCCZ – Zambia-China Economic and Trade Cooperation zone

ZDF – Zambia Defense Forces

ZDML – Zambia Daily Mail Limited

ZESCO – Zambia Electricity Supply Corporation

ZICTA – Zambia Information & Communications Technology Authority

ZIIMA – Zambia Independent Media Association

ZNBC – Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation

ZTE – Zhong Xing Telecommunication Equipment Corporation

Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the “third wave” of democratization (Huntington, 1991), it was believed that the days of liberal democracy competing with non-democratic alternatives were over and, with it, the whole of history (Fukuyama, 1992). Liberal democracy was to remain *the only game in town*. The collapse of authoritarian regimes in Africa and the post-Soviet space, the democratization of Central and Eastern Europe culminating with the unprecedented expansion of the European Union, and massive Western democratic support directed at developing regions further favored such assumptions. The rise in the prominence of democracy in the world was demonstrated in particular by the fact that almost all states introduced national elections and allowed multiple parties to compete (Hyde, 2020). Democracy thus became a global norm or a “universal value” (Sen, 1999).

However, the euphoria from victory and the normative superiority of democracy were already showing the first cracks in the late 1990s. Many states stalled or began to deteriorate in their democratic progress, often finding themselves in a “gray zone” (Carothers, 2002) between democracy and authoritarianism instead of democratizing. This has created a group of countries whose regimes can be described as “hybrid” (Diamond, 2002) and which many scholars started recognizing as a distinctive regime category standing side by side with democracy and authoritarianism (e.g., Cassani, 2014; Gilbert & Mohseni, 2011; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Schedler, 2013).

After the new millennium, the international balance of power gradually began to tip away from established democracies towards authoritarianism, and the discussion about the democratic recession started to emerge (Diamond, 2008; Puddington, 2008). The long-term erosion of the democratic *Zeitgeist* was also noticed by international organizations concerned with the quality of democracy. According to Freedom House, 2019 was the 14th consecutive year during which *democratic backsliding* has been observed globally. At the same time, since 2006, the number of countries experiencing democratic progress has been lower than those backsliding (Repucci, 2020). Lührmann and Lindberg (2019) of *Varieties of Democracy* (V-Dem) arrived at similar conclusions when they described the current

trend as a “third wave of autocratization,” which, however, differs in many respects from the previous waves (Bermeo, 2016) and whose very existence became disputed among scholars due to its specific attributes (Levitsky & Way, 2015).

The question of democratic backsliding (Bermeo, 2016; 2022; Rakner, 2021; Hyde, 2020; Lust & Waldner, 2015), a phenomenon that has received many similar designations among scholars, such as “authoritarian backsliding” (Dresden and Howard, 2016), “democratic breakdown” (Brownlee, 2017), “democratic erosion” (Kneuer, 2021; Laebens & Lührmann, 2021) or “autocratization” used in this work (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019; Cassani & Tomini, 2019), has started to emerge in the field of comparative autocratization relatively recently. Research explicitly addressing the role of international factors in autocratization is still only a matter of the last few years (see Yakouchyk’s 2019 summary). Scholars are thus lagging behind the empirical reality when, as had been the case of examining the causes of democratization, research on external factors in the transition of political regimes has long been outside their interests. Under the influence of the international environment, where democracy has become the generally accepted norm, democratic declines have also long been examined and explained through the lens of theories of democratization. Autocratization was thus seen as a failure on the “normal” path to democracy. Stagnation in democratic progress, or even taking the opposite course on this trajectory, have been explained as exceptions and outliers to the otherwise generally accepted rule of regimes shifting towards democracy (Bader, Grävingholt, & Kästner, 2012, p. 83; Hall & Ambrosio, 2017, p. 144; Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 3).¹

After 2001, in the context of the global war on terrorism, Western democratic governments began to lose normative power and interest in promoting democracy abroad. These goals were replaced by those primarily considering security and economic issues. Indeed, as Hyde (2020, p. 1192) points out, the “international norms and Western support for democracy have declined more in the past 4 years than in the prior 40.” This trend has been further compounded by the post-2008 economic crisis period, questioning the sustainability of the neoliberal economic

¹ In this context, Hall and Ambrosio (2017) also point to the titles of leading journals in comparative political science that demonstrate this bias, such as the *Journal of Democracy*, *Democratization*, and *Demokratizatsiya*.

model. Growing divisions among Western democratic actors and a decline in the quality of democracy in Europe and the United States further fueled these doubts.

However, the disillusionment with democratic development in the world went beyond the Western democracies. In the cases of India, Brazil, Turkey, Indonesia, and South Africa, it was also anticipated in the early 2000s that, as emerging democracies, these countries would set an example for other developing states. Yet, in these instances, it is possible to speak of examples of democratic erosion rather than democratic progress (Carothers, 2020, p. 116). In these states, democratic norms have been gradually replaced by those emphasizing sovereignty, state security, civilizational diversity, and traditional values. These values today enjoy great support among autocrats and leaders of some democracies and are gradually reshaping the international environment. In this respect, both elites from Western democracies and autocratic elites are finding common ground. Or, in Carothers words referring to Trump's administration – "For decades, courageous democratic activists and struggling democratic governments looked to the White House for solidarity and support, but today it is more common for illiberal politicians and authoritarian regimes to do so." (ibid., p. 115).

It is precisely the rise in power and prestige of authoritarian powers that have led to the current situation where the already weakened idea of democracy as the "only game in town" (Shin & Wells, 2005) and international norms are further undermined by the offer of possible alternatives for economic development and political governance by states that have not democratized. Such actors have been given various normatively biased labels in contemporary literature. Tolstrup (2009), for example, calls them "negative external actors," Yakouchyk (2016) "promoters of autocracy," and Levitsky and Way (2010) refer to such states as "black knights" whose role is to undermine democratically elected governments and, in turn, keep the authoritarian ones in power. In this respect, it is referred in particular to Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC), but also to Saudi Arabia, Iran, or Venezuela.² These authoritarian powers are influential in restricting and hindering

² As some scholars have noted, even democratic states can in some cases be labelled as "black knights" for their support for non-democratic regimes and their survival (Ambrosio, 2014). Leaving aside the Cold War era, in recent history, we can speak in this context of the United States' relationship with Egypt (Brownlee, 2012), the British role in the survival of the regime in Bahrain

democratic progress, either by actively and directly supporting other non-democratic governments or indirectly through cooperation. China, in particular, has become a model of development (Ambrosio, 2012; 2010; Demiryol, 2022; Benabdallah, 2020; Breslin, 2011; Fourie, 2015; Halper, 2010; Huang, 2010; Kennedy, 2010; Kurlantzick, 2007; MacKinnon, 2011; McCauley, Pearson & Wang, 2022; Ramo, 2004; Sojková, 2017; 2018) offering inspiration for developing countries whose leaders want to achieve rapid economic progress, but at the same time have ambitions to stay in power and effectively counter democratizing pressures.

This thesis builds on this trend in comparative autocratization research. It complements it with an understanding of external influences (in this case, China) on the autocratization of hybrid regimes in the hitherto understudied Africa, as a region significantly affected by the current autocratization trend (Boese et al., 2022, p. 988; Cassani & Tomini, 2019, pp. 130–136; Hackenesch, 2019; Obiagu, 2021; Rakner, 2019; 2021). Besides China's neighbors in Asia, it is Africa where Beijing's growing influence is felt most intensely. Yet, little research has so far addressed questions of its effects on the nature of political regimes and the quality of democracy in the region (e.g., Bader, 2015a; 2015b; Dreher et al., 2019; Hartmann & Noesselt, 2019; Hess & Aidoo, 2019). Such a state of research is due to both the interest of scholars in geographically closer regions in the neighborhood of authoritarian powers, as well as the long-term unavailability of good-quality data or the sheer difficulty and limited possibilities of conducting research on such a sensitive topic often in the context of non-democratic and autocratizing regimes (Hall & Ambrosio, 2017; Ambrosio & Tolstrup, 2019). In addition, the situation in comparative autocratization research has long been undermined by enormous theoretical and conceptual fragmentation concerning both the definition of mechanisms of international influence and the concept of autocratization itself.

during the Arab Spring (Willis, 2012), or France's support for the non-democratic regime in Cameroon (Emmanuel, 2013).

The Objective and Research Questions

This dissertation aims to determine *whether the People's Republic of China influences the autocratization of African hybrid regimes*. In light of the state of research and the theoretical background, the author poses the following research questions:

1. *How does cooperation with the PRC affect the autocratization of hybrid regimes in Africa?*
2. *What mechanisms does the PRC utilize to project its influence on hybrid regimes in Africa?*
3. *How do African political elites employ the PRC engagement to consolidate their power?*
4. *In Zambia, is the Chinese political model of development perceived and presented as worth emulating? Who refers to China as a model? What elements of the model are seen as (un)worthy of emulation?*

Theoretical Framework and Key Concepts

Among the key concepts employed, *autocratization* should be mentioned first. As suggested earlier, autocratization is just one of several concepts scholars have used to describe the current decline in the quality of democracy worldwide. In many ways, contemporary autocratization differs from that seen during the Cold War. It is more gradual; there is a backsliding within the category of regimes rather than regime breakdown or collapse, and likewise, the repressive strategies are more innovative and not so visible (Bermeo, 2016; Morgenbesser, 2020). The concept is defined based on the work of Lührmann and Lindberg (2019), who understand autocratization as the opposite of democratization and a process involving any shift away from democracy. It covers gradual democratic backsliding as well as sudden breakdown, thus including any decline in the democratic values of any regime. Autocratization then results in less democratic and more autocratic situations.

Hybrid regimes, within which autocratization is examined in this work, are understood as a distinct category of political regimes. They are conceptualized broadly as a “gray zone” that encompasses a variety of countries “falling in between outright dictatorship and well-established liberal democracy.” (Carothers, 2002, p.

10). Due to the operationalization of the concept using the Episodes of Regime Transformation (ERT) dataset (Maerz et al., 2021), the “zone” is further divided into two sub-types of regimes falling “in-between” – electoral democracies and electoral authoritarianism, based on Schedler’s definition (2006; 2013). *Electoral democracies* are defined as those regimes that “lack some attributes of liberal democracy (such as checks and balances, bureaucratic integrity, and an impartial judiciary) but do conduct free and fair elections, which electoral autocracies don’t.” (Schedler, 2013, p. 78). *Electoral authoritarianism*, on the other hand, encompasses those regimes that play the game of multiparty elections by holding regular elections for the general executive and national legislative assembly. Yet they violate the liberal-democratic principles of freedom and fairness so profoundly and systematically that the elections should be seen as “instruments of authoritarianism” rather than democracy. Under electoral authoritarianism, elections are characterized by broad inclusiveness and minimal plurality, competition, and openness. Electoral competition cannot qualify as democratic because of the state’s serious, widespread, and systematic manipulative interference (Schedler, 2006, p. 3).

This work employs two broad categories of international influences – *active* and *passive* – classifying each according to the external power’s agenda, intentionality, and motivations. Such a division is necessary to deal with the chaotic conceptualization of forms of external influence on the political regimes. The division allows for avoiding the frequent conceptual stretching as is the case of “autocracy promotion,” wherein some researchers include passive influences alongside active ones (see conceptualization by Burnell, 2010; Melnykovska, Plamper, & Schweickert, 2012; Vanderhill, 2013). While it can be argued that each of these international influences has the potential to reinforce authoritarian rule, they simultaneously operate in different ways and may employ different mechanisms. Thus, in an attempt to avoid conceptual stretching, the active dimension of the influences is linked exclusively to the deliberate autocratic sponsorship from the perspective of the external actor who takes on the role of a promoter, enforcer of autocracy, or/and active democracy resister. On the contrary, the forms of autocratic influence that fall into the passive dimension are understood as an indirect and unintended diffusion of authoritarianism abroad. The eventual

autocratization is then a by-product of cooperation with external non-democratic power or the intended result of the agenda of domestic elites in a recipient state.

Regarding the individual concepts falling under each dimension of international influences, the work loosely follows Oisín Tansey's (2016a; 2016b) typology and conceptualization. Like Tansey, the author categorizes active influences according to intentions and motivations. Specifically, this work further associates a group of active influences with the concept of "autocratic sponsorship," defined as "an external actor's intentional assistance to autocratic elites to help them gain or maintain political power." (Tansey 2016a, p. 15). Tansey further divides the concept by sponsor's motives – ideological "autocracy promotion" and reactive, more strategic, and instrumentally motivated "democracy resistance." The latter is further subdivided in the thesis with respect to the impetus of the reaction of the external non-democratic actor – i.e., whether it comes from outside, in the form of democratic support from democracy promoters, or inside the recipient state, as a reaction to domestic democratizing and regime survival threatening developments.

Autocracy promotion is defined strictly ideologically. This form of autocratic sponsorship has been described as outdated and irrelevant today (Tansey, 2016a; 2016b; Weyland, 2017). Autocracy promotion as an ideologically or normatively motivated external influence was present especially in the 20th century, during the proliferation of fascism and communism. Going further back in history, one may include, for example, absolutist monarchies and republican regimes in the 19th century. After the end of the Cold War, however, other forms of sponsorship are more likely to emerge – "While there is much evidence to suggest that many countries actively work with and support autocratic incumbents, there is much less evidence that these actions have been motivated by any normative or ideological project to further the spread of autocracy in the world." (Tansey, 2016a, p. 53). Despite criticisms of the concept's applicability to today's context, it is employed in the thesis. This decision is due to the lack of research conducted on the topic and the absence of evidence that such a form of influence does not occur. The curiosity in examining the concept is also driven by the non-transparency that pertains to China's engagements (not only) in Africa. Many agreements, contracts signed, and visits realized between African elites and their Chinese counterparts entail secrecy and take place behind the closed doors of the presidential palace. Thus, it is unclear

what is promised or withheld from China in exchange for regime sponsorship and how much pressure China may exert on the recipient state, even in normative terms. Likewise, it is vital to consider changes within the regime in the sponsor country itself. China has become even more autocratic under President Xi, projecting a far more assertive foreign policy, which entails a greater emphasis on the normative dimension of influence in the world (Bader & Hackenesch, 2019; Beckley & Brands, 2023; Hackenesch & Bader, 2020; Eisenman, 2023a).

As a reactive form of autocratic sponsorship, democracy resistance (e.g., Nodia, 2014; Risse & Babayan, 2015; von Soest, 2015) is also classified as an active form of international influence. It is subdivided according to the different impetus that triggers the reaction of the external actor. Democracy resistance is defined as “policies designed to support autocratic regimes abroad as a means to avoid negative externalities that come with transitions to democracy.” (Tansey, 2016a, pp. 37–38). For example, Nodia (2014) understands democracy resistance as an activity that is seen as resistance to democracy promotion efforts by the West. In this regard, Nodia argues that “what is being called autocracy promotion is really nothing but anti-Americanism and anti-Europeanism,” and the concept should be rather understood as a resistance to the “liberal democracy’s status as the ‘hegemonic discourse’ of our time.” (Nodia, 2014, pp. 142–143). Nodia thereby links democracy promotion with global rivalry and competition, where traditional democracy promoters must face democracy resisters. Resisters and promoters then target the same states regarding regime type, as “they dwell in a no man’s land of hybrid regimes.” (ibid., p. 140).

In the literature, one may also encounter a reactive form with a different impetus for reaction. In these cases, the threat does not come from outside from democracy promoters but from developments within the state menacing the survival of the regime through, for example, anti-government protests. Despite different triggers, the motives of the external sponsor are similar. The foreign actor may fear both a possible contagion (Sarotte, 2012), which could ultimately lead to the regime destabilization in the sponsor’s country, but also the loss of a non-democratic ally, and with it, strategic cooperation on national security and economic issues (Tansey, 2016a, p. 37). In both cases, projecting the sponsor’s self-interest into foreign policy

toward the recipient may not carry an ideological dimension like autocracy promotion. It can “only” reflect pragmatic considerations of external power.

The international passive influences on autocratization encompass those forms not dependent on the external authoritarian actor’s active efforts to disseminate authoritarianism or/and prevent democratization in other states. As a concept, diffusion faces the same problem as autocracy promotion – conceptual stretching. While it is possible to come across studies that understand diffusion purely as a passive influence (Kneuer & Demmelhuber, 2016; Obydenkova & Libman, 2016; Tansey, 2016a; 2016b; Weyland, 2017), at the same time one may mention those using it to describe forms of influence that also fit into the active category (Ambrosio & Tolstrup, 2019; Lankina, Libman, & Obydenkova, 2016). In this work, diffusion is associated exclusively with passive forms. As explained above, the active influences are conceptualized following Tansey’s division (Tansey, 2016a; 2016b). However, although Tansey mentions the existence of passive influences, he does not pay nearly as much attention to them as to the well-elaborated active dimension. Thus, the author works with her own division that certainly cannot be considered exhaustive, which is not the aim of this dissertation. In this work, the passive influence is investigated through *autocratic linkage*, *emulation*, and *extraversion* concepts.

First, for *autocratic linkage*, the author employs the conceptualization introduced by Tansey, Koehler, and Schmotz (2016) and Schmotz and Tansey (2018). They build on Levitsky and Way’s (2010) study examining “linkage to the West” using the density of democratic ties to explain variation in the democratization of political regimes after the end of the Cold War. The autocratic linkage then works with the density of ties facilitating the process of learning and emulation among non-democratic elites, ultimately enabling the resistance of non-democratic regimes to external and internal democratization threats, and thus their survival (Tansey, Koehler, & Schmotz, 2016, pp. 6–7). This conceptualization explains variation in the quality of democracy through structural factors, drawing criticism from some scholars (Hartmann, 2016; Tolstrup, 2013; 2014; Slater, 2011) for the inability to explain variation within regions. In this sense, Tolstrup (2013; 2014), in particular, arrives with a modification of the conceptualization of ties, underscoring the critical role of gatekeepers (political and non-political elites) in building, shaping, or

canceling these ties. Thus, structural variables do not necessarily play the crucial role ascribed to them by Levitsky and Way, especially when examining intra-regional variation in the quality of democracy, as in this work.

Second, emulation works with the idea that the recipient state may perceive the external power as an example or model worthy of emulation and learning from. In this respect, the author takes a constructivist standpoint, where the question is not whether the concept under study (China model/Beijing Consensus in this case) has a real basis, i.e., whether there is a set of policies and practices leading to successful development, but rather whether the recipient of authoritarian influence interprets it as such (Ambrosio, 2012; Fourie, 2015). At the same time, emulating a foreign model is not a question of adopting all the characteristics of the non-democratic regime since, as some scholars point out (Bennett, 1991; Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Fourie, 2015; 2014; Rose, 1991; Weyland, 2017), only those elements are selected for emulation considering the specific environment of the importer.

Third, the last form examined is *extraversion* (Bayart, 1993; Bayart & Ellis, 2000; Clapham, 1996; 2007; Peiffer & Englebort, 2012; Tull, 2011). The concept rests on the assumption of the dependence of African ruling elites on the outside world for resources and authority to build and strengthen their power over domestic competitors. Historically, in the African context, such domestic instrumentalization of external influence by elites has involved slavery, colonization, development aid, commodity exports, or even development policies toward African states by international financial institutions and foreign governments (Bayart & Ellis, 2000). In this regard, the employment of such a strategy may also be expected in the context of cooperation with an authoritarian power such as China. As some scholars note (Clapham, 2007; Hartmann, 2019; Peiffer & Englebort, 2012), China can potentially strengthen the portfolio of some regimes vulnerable to pressures from Western governments and donors. Indeed, as the limited empirical evidence has demonstrated (Alves & Chichava, 2018; Corkin, 2013; 2019; Hartmann, 2019; Hess, 2019; Roessler, 2013; Wang, 2022), some African regimes have used cooperation with China to consolidate their legitimacy and power to protect themselves against democratic pressures. From the perspective of the recipient of influence, such cooperation can be described as the active pursuit of a non-democratic agenda. However, from the standpoint of the external authoritarian

power, it is “just” a by-product of such cooperation, which varies according to the agencies and interests of the recipients’ ruling elites.

Delimitation of Research

The time range within which Chinese influence in Africa is examined covers the period from 2000 to 2019. Nevertheless, this period varies according to data availability. The time delimitation also considers the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 as a factor that negatively impacted the quality of democracy worldwide (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022). The qualitative part of the dissertation, oriented on China’s engagement in Zambia, makes use of the data collected for the time frame from 2003 to 2019 for the content analysis of media frames in the Zambian press due to limited access to newspapers in archives. All semi-structured interviews in Zambia were conducted from July to October 2020, and thus, they may reflect developments during this period.

Geographically, the research is limited to the African continent due to China’s immense influence in the region, where it can be considered the largest bilateral economic partner (Yuan Sun, Jayaram, & Kassiri, 2017). At the same time, however, it is a region that has been largely neglected in the research on international autocratic influence. The case study of Zambia is selected because of its long-standing and unbroken partnership with China since the 1960s. It is also an example of the rapidly intensifying relationship after 2000. At the same time, it is a state heavily dependent on Beijing for trade and the flow of development aid and loans. The extensive provision of Chinese credit has made the country one of the most indebted states to China in the region, and it has taken center stage in the debate over the issue of unsustainable debt to China and the potential materialization of the *debt-trap diplomacy*³ (Ofstad & Tjønneland, 2019). At the same time, it is a country whose regime falls in the “gray zone.” According to the ERT dataset, Zambia was an electoral democracy until 2014 and, since then,

³ The debt-trap narrative is highly controversial in the literature on Chinese lending to (not only) African countries. So far, the most progress in revealing unsustainable lending has been made by researchers at the *China Africa Research Initiative* (CARI). They have repeatedly pointed out the unsubstantiated nature of such arguments, even as they acknowledge that Chinese lending is still quite risky and highly problematic (for a debate on the debt-trap diplomacy narrative see e.g., Brautigam, 2020; Carmody, 2020; Singh, 2020).

electoral authoritarianism (Schedler, 2013). During this time, it became the second fastest autocratizing in Africa (after Mali) and the tenth globally (Lührmann et al., 2020, p. 16).

Hybrid regimes, where China's influence is examined, are understood in this work as those finding themselves in the "gray zone" (Carothers, 2002) between democracy and authoritarianism and are further split into two in-between types – electoral democracies and electoral authoritarianism (Schedler, 2013). This type of regime, the most numerous in Africa (Levitsky & Way, 2020), is then selected because of the assumption that this is where China's influence on the quality of democracy should be most evident, as some authors have argued (Bader, 2015a; 2015b; Nodia, 2014). This is also where the PRC's influence should be most felt because of the regimes' internal instability (Dresden & Howard, 2016; Goldstone et al., 2010; Lust & Waldner, 2015, p. 32; Vanderhill, 2013, pp. 18–19; Weyland, 2016, p. 558), forcing their leaders to seek cooperation with external powers to secure and maintain control in the country and resist democratic pressures from outside and within it. At the same time, an external autocratic regime may also seek cooperation to secure greater stability in the recipient state of its influence (Bader, Grävingholt, & Kästner, 2012, p. 90).

Carothers's (2002) "gray zone" of hybrid regimes and Schedler's (2013) conceptualization of electoral democracies and electoral authoritarianism were selected because they offer a clear operationalization and, thus, transparency in the process of selection of observations. Schedler's conceptualization of regime types, distinguishing between liberal democracies, electoral democracies, electoral authoritarianism, and closed autocracy, was introduced in the V-Dem ERT dataset (Maerz et al., 2021). This dataset is used to identify the regimes falling in the gray zone where Chinese influence is examined – electoral authoritarianism is denoted as "1" and electoral democracy as "2" in the ERT dataset. Following Schedler's (2013, p. 190) operationalization, only those cases where the value for hybrid regimes was reached in at least four consecutive years are counted to avoid any short-term outliers or possibly miscoding of the regime by the coders. Thus, based on these criteria, the thesis analyzes 45 African countries and 847 regime years.

State of Research

The influence of non-democratic external actors on the quality of democracy abroad is still largely understudied. Fueled by the euphoria of the third wave of democratization, for a long time, much attention has been focused on the dissemination of democracy and the influence of international actors on this process (e.g., Brinks & Coppedge, 2006; Finkel, Pérez-Liñán, & Seligson, 2007; Knack, 2004; Levitsky & Way, 2006; 2010). Although the situation in comparative autocratization research is gradually improving, and the number of studies addressing international factors is growing, it remains an under-researched area and still lacks conceptual and theoretical clarity. Similarly, there is virtually no consensus over the types of international influences or the causal mechanisms by which they influence domestic politics abroad, whether in autocracies or democracies. Moreover, as Tansey (2016a, 29) points out, individual scholars are not responding to each other; thus, the state of the art lacks deeper integration and remains fragmented. Although some studies have examined international autocratic influences on democracy, few have debated their nature. In contrast to research on democratization, most research that addresses the effects of autocracies are qualitative case studies that often result in empirical descriptions of various forms of cooperation with a non-democratic power. Attempts to approach the issue quantitatively offered only descriptive statistical methods (e.g., Brownlee, 2017; Hess & Aidoo, 2019) or suffered from the unavailability of good-quality data regarding Chinese financing (Bader, 2015a; 2015b).

Moreover, a strong regional bias prevails in research on the international dimension of autocratization. Most studies concentrate on the influence of authoritarian powers in their immediate neighboring region, i.e., mainly on Russia in the post-Soviet space (e.g., Bader, 2014; Delcour & Wolczuk, 2015; Hall & Ambrosio, 2017; Lankina, Libman, & Obydenkova, 2016; Melnykovska, Plamper, & Schweickert, 2012; Silitski, 2010; Tolstrup, 2009; Tolstrup, 2015; Obydenkova & Libman, 2016; Vanderhill, 2013, 2014; Way, 2015; Yakouchyk, 2016), Venezuela in Latin America (e.g., de la Torre, 2017; Kneuer, 2022; Vanderhill, 2013; Zúquete, 2008), and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East and North Africa (e.g., Bamert, Gilardi, & Wasserfallen, 2015; Odinius & Knutz, 2015; Wehrey, 2015). Studies that examine China's influence on regimes also focus on its neighboring region of Southeast and Central

Asia or China's claimed areas (e.g., Chen & Kinzelbach, 2015; Chou, Pan, & Poole, 2017; Fong, 2021; Melnykovska, Plamper, & Schweickert, 2012). However, there has been a shift and expansion of interest in recent years to other regions outside the PRC's immediate neighborhood. This can be put in the context of Xi's more assertive foreign policy and the availability of data that would allow for better measuring and, thus, understanding China's projection of influence.

AidData's initiative (Strange et al., 2013), which commenced providing long-absent data on China's official financial flows (aid and loans), has become a landmark in research on Beijing's influence (not only) in Africa. Detailed data available down to the project level has significantly helped to expand the understanding of Chinese motivations behind funding allocation and Beijing's influence on good governance in Africa and the world. These new data are categorized according to the standards of traditional donors (OECD-DAC members), allowing for comparison with their development finance flows. Such a welcomed classification, for example, has led scholars to the findings that emerging and traditional donors behave similarly regarding determinants for allocating finance at the national level (Dreher et al., 2018)⁴⁵. Consequently, these recent findings helped to challenge some widespread claims about Chinese aid in earlier studies, with some scholars describing it as detrimental, providing *rogue aid* (Naím, 2007), prioritizing Beijing's interests while supporting corrupt governments and disregarding the needs of recipient states and their populations (e.g., Collier, 2007; Halper, 2010; Tull, 2006). In addition, the new opportunities to explore the distribution of Chinese development finance have also expanded the knowledge about the political motives behind it. There is, for example, a consensus among researchers over the link between the role of

⁴According to these authors, the Chinese development aid is not influenced by the nature of recipients' political regimes or the presence of mineral resources. Beijing's aid is directed to poor and more populous states, i.e. according to their development needs.

⁵ However, Broich (2017) and Guillon and Mathonnat (2020) contradict some of these conclusions finding that African countries with more mineral resources receive more development aid. The latter specifically show that Beijing tends to favor countries with weak institutions when disseminating aid to the economic and production sectors. Such findings are rather the outcomes of studies dealing with the determinants of the allocation of commercial financial flows. For flows, such as FDI or loans, incentives are determined primarily by the presence of natural resources and the return on investment, thereby the economic condition of the recipient country. In this context, Mourao (2018) finds that recipients with poorer-quality regulatory institutions tend to attract more commercial financial flows from the PRC. Dreher et al. (2018) then confirmed that less concessional finance from China are more likely allocated in countries with higher corruption levels.

recipients' voting in the UN General Assembly in concert with Beijing, alongside their recognition of the PRC and the distribution of Chinese aid (Struver, 2016; Dreher et al., 2018; Dreher & Fuchs, 2015; Guillon & Mathonnat, 2020).

While there is a consensus that Chinese development funding is not disproportionately directed to authoritarian regimes, there is also recognition that the impact of such aid may have negative consequences for the quality of governance and democracy. Kersting and Kilby (2014) illustrate the negative changes in Freedom House democracy index scores associated with development aid provided by non-traditional autocratic donors (Arab donors and China) between 1974 and 2011. They conclude that such adverse changes do not occur for traditional bilateral donors (OECD-DAC donors). In contrast, aid from Arab donors and China is associated with subsequent decreases in democracy in the recipient country. Julia Bader (2015a) examines China's influence on the stability of autocracies from 1993 to 2008 in 155 countries. She concludes that the influence on autocratic longevity is weak and finds no significant effect for most bilateral interactions between Beijing and autocracies. Only the trade exports from autocracies to China seem to enhance the political survival of autocratic leaders.⁶ Bader (2015b), again using global observations between 1998 and 2008, examines the effect of economic cooperation with the PRC on the survival of different types of authoritarianism. She finds that while such cooperation stabilizes party-based regimes, in non-party regimes, it has a destabilizing effect and is linked to their transition to democracy.

Interestingly, Bader and Daxecker (2015) found that oil exports to China do not undermine human rights, while oil exports to the US undermine them in the exporting country. While still staying with quantitative research at the state level, it

⁶ However, the findings by Bader (2015a) and Kersting and Kilby (2014) suffer from the unavailability of quality data on which the scholars could rely for such a research. Bader, for example, limits the time period within which the economic and development cooperation with Beijing is examined up to 2005. At the same time, she traces Chinese influence since the mid-1990s, but the PRC's more assertive policies and cooperation can be noticed mainly in the 2000s, in the context of China's entry into the WTO and its "go-out" policy implementation, encouraging the expansion of Chinese enterprises and investors abroad. Similarly, it is in 2000 when the Chinese engagement in Africa became institutionalized into regular tri-annual FOCAC meetings. Moreover, specifically with focus on Africa, some authors (Dreher & Fuchs, 2015, p. 989) point to 2006 as a milestone, when the third FOCAC was held and doubled China's official development finance (ODF) commitments to the continent.

is pertinent to mention a study by Hess and Aidoo (2019), considering the objective of this work. The scholars examine the impact of Beijing's development funding on democratic backsliding in 19 hybrid regimes in sub-Saharan Africa. They find that the greatest influence is due to the absence of Western leverage, which is reduced by the availability of alternative financial flows (specifically development aid) from Beijing. The weakness of this study is the descriptive nature of the statistical method employed, limiting the explanatory potential of their analysis.

Research examining China's impact on the quality of governance at the *substate level*, which has recently emerged, shows a somewhat negative impact stemming from China's engagement in Africa. For example, Chinese-implemented development aid projects lead to more corrupt behavior in the area of implementation, while at the same time, such a negative effect on local corruption does not for projects implemented by the World Bank (see Brazys, Elkink, & Kelly, 2017; Cha, 2020; Isaksson & Kotsadam, 2018a). In their research, Isaksson and Kotsadam (2018b) highlight the negative impact of Chinese projects on the emergence of unions near implementation sites. Gehring et al. (2018) demonstrate that Chinese aid and loans do not increase the likelihood of local conflict in Africa, nor do they lead to an increase in protests. They are, however, associated with higher levels of government repression and a decrease in democratic norms while raising a greater concern among citizens about holding the government more accountable.

The link between the PRC's financed development projects and *recipient state leaders' agenda* is demonstrated by Dreher et al. (2019) in a study examining the strategic geographic allocation of Chinese development projects within African countries. In their research, they conclude that Beijing's official development finance flows are directed to a greater extent to the birthplace of the incumbents. With these findings, the authors demonstrate that Beijing's demand-driven approach to development finance provision makes its financial flows more vulnerable to political capture. At the same time, this regional bias is stronger in the year leading up to executive elections and when the executive elections are more competitive. When they compare this behavior with the WB's project allocation, they conclude that such strategic behavior by recipient elites does not occur. In other words, Chinese ODF is more easily manipulated by ruling elites to whom it may

serve to maintain political power. However, the expected impact of such strategic allocation, i.e., electoral support, is questioned by other scholars who show reduced support for the incumbent in project construction sites, regardless of whether the donor is democratic or non-democratic. In other words, development projects may undermine the legitimacy of the political leaders in power (Briggs, 2019). In this context, Blair and Roessler (2018) find that announcing Chinese development projects improves public opinion about China. However, a negative perception of China is associated with the implementation phase, which, in turn, may also reflect negatively on supporting domestic political leaders.⁷

The impact of autocratic financing in Africa on the democracy promotion efforts by the West is, as some authors show, also reflected in the negotiations of traditional donors over democratic reforms in the recipient states. In this context, some studies (Hernandez, 2017; Li, 2017) conclude that the number of conditions attached to Western development aid is fewer in those states receiving aid from Beijing. Kalima (2016) then shows that traditional donors, in response to Beijing's presence, are shifting their focus from supporting the social sector to the production sector, where they may compete with Beijing.^{8,9} Such recent findings suggest that PRC finance is altering the development approach of the traditional donors and has the potential to

⁷ However, these results are contradicted by a recent study by Wellner et al. (2022). Measuring the effectiveness of the Chinese soft power globally, they show that in terms of development aid, the completion of one additional development project in a recipient country increases public support for the Chinese government by more than 3 percentage points in the short run and by 0.2 percentage points in the long run. Importantly, the effect is not limited to individuals in communities near projects; it applies broadly to individuals in the recipient country. Although the effect was not uniform in the Global South, Beijing managed to influence public sentiment in important states. These include African countries, 'swing states' in the UN General Assembly that neither favor the US nor China but tend to switch sides, and countries with higher baseline levels of public support for the Chinese government.

⁸ This is not a revolutionary reorientation towards other sectors, though. As some scholars point out (Frot & Santiso, 2010; Tierney et al., 2011), this shift in attention towards the social sector has been taking place since the 1990s and was reinforced by the introduction of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000. Because of this long-term focus by traditional donors, the PRC gained a competitive advantage for its willingness to fund projects in the neglected sectors of economic infrastructure when its engagement in Africa increased.

⁹ This is also demonstrated by the transformation of the institutions that are responsible for development financial flows management. Examples include reorganizations and transformations in countries like Canada, Australia and Norway, which have integrated their development agencies into their foreign ministries over the last decade. Similarly, more recently, the UK did so when it integrated its development agency, DfID, with the Foreign Office in September 2020 (McVeigh, 2020).

undermine the reform efforts they sought. On the other hand, as some qualitative studies show (Hackenesch, 2016), the PRC has had only a limited effect on EU and US initiatives to promote democracy, human rights, and good governance. Rather, the low impact of Western efforts to promote such policies and values is due to the West's inability to effectively employ the instruments to promote them and a misunderstanding of the dynamics of domestic politics in recipient states. Similarly, as Grimm and Hackenesch (2016) show, a major weakness of the EU is the low willingness among member states to coordinate their activities in developing states and, thus, to counter Beijing's presence more effectively. Moreover, the EU does not have much to offer, and therefore, to influence countries such as Angola or Mozambique, which have mineral resources and are not as dependent on the EU funding. This is not due to China's presence but the EU's inflexible policy. Although research on the responsiveness of the West on the emergence of new actors in Africa is still rather rare, there are even fewer studies looking at China's response to democracy-promoting initiatives and pressures from Western governments (Dreher et al., 2018).¹⁰

As for the issue of emulating the political dimension of the Chinese development model, this area is again under-researched. Many studies address the issue at a theoretical level when debating what is and what is not the Chinese model or the "Beijing Consensus" (e.g., Breslin, 2011; Halper, 2010; Huang, 2010; Kennedy, 2010; Kurlantzick, 2007; Ramo, 2004; Rebol, 2010; Williamson, 2012; Zhao, 2010). Empirical studies are limited to the examination of the economic domain of China's developmental experience and devoted exclusively to China's policy towards African recipients implemented through the provision of Chinese ODF (e.g., Sojková 2017; 2018) or the focus on specific elements of the (Asian) model, namely Special Economic Zones (SEZs) (e.g., Brautigam & Tang, 2011; Davies, 2008; Farole & Moberg, 2014) and recently also "digital authoritarianism"¹¹ (e.g.,

¹⁰ Dreher et al. (2018, p. 9) show that China has been increasing its ODF encompassing both concessional (ODA) and less concessional (OOF) financial flows in response to the size of Western development assistance. Which, they argue, is evidence of the competition between China and the West.

¹¹ Amy Hawkins (2018), for example, illustrates the emulation efforts with the examples of Zimbabwe and Tanzania. The latter country has passed a law regulating online content that appears to be considerably influenced by the Chinese model. This law prohibits the posting of "false content," similar to the Chinese law's prohibition on "making falsehoods." Likewise, the vaguely worded idea of "content that causes annoyance" is similar to the Chinese version of "destroying the

Gravett, 2021; Hawkins, 2018; Lin, 2023; Nkwanyana, 2021; Polyakova & Meserole, 2019; Wright, 2021). Elsje Fourie (2015) explains the absence of more elaborated empirical knowledge by the focus that prevails in the literature devoted to discussing the nature of the Chinese model itself. The concept (whether the China model or the Beijing Consensus) became heavily criticized by skeptics among scholars. Consequently, few researchers have paid attention to whether the model is emulated and how it is perceived outside of China, especially in developing countries.

However, recent years have shown some increased interest in this topic, not only in Africa. This progress may be fueled by the improved availability of data on China's various forms of engagement abroad, as well as Xi's assertive foreign policy more openly referring to China as a development model (Demiryol, 2022). In this respect, one may refer to the study by McCauley, Pearson, and Wang (2022), who connected thousands of georeferenced surveys to Chinese FDI projects in 21 African countries to demonstrate how these projects influence the perceived attractiveness of the model. They conclude that Chinese investment does not bolster local support for the development model as the respondents living near these projects are less inclined to view it as the best path for their country's future development. Kerry Ratigan (2021) then examines how Peruvians view China and whether it is seen as a model for their country. Based on a public opinion survey coupled with data on Chinese investment, Ratigan concludes that many Peruvians are not interested in adopting a Chinese economic or political model for their country. Moreover, those Peruvians who strongly value democracy are less likely to choose China as a model. This may become an obstacle to authoritarian diffusion in the country, as a high proportion of the population prefers democracy.

However, two earlier studies are critical for this work – one by Thomas Ambrosio (2012) and one by Elsje Fourie (2015). Ambrosio (2012) seeks to determine whether the China model or the Beijing Consensus is gaining attention as an alternative to the liberal democratic model of the West through a content analysis of the global media. Ambrosio's findings show the predominantly economic perception of the model in developing countries, where the PRC is portrayed as an

order of society.” The Tanzanian government then justifies the law as a tool to combat “moral decadence,” while China has similarly countered “decadent” material on social media.

economic and diplomatic partner. However, the conclusions of his research should be taken cautiously due to its methodological limitations and the time constraints of the study from 2004 to 2011. More assertive policies under Xi's rule and a greater emphasis on the promotion and, thus, reflection of the model abroad can be anticipated, which is understandably not reflected by Ambrosio. Also, from Ambrosio's conclusion, the share of the media sources from specific regions, let alone individual countries, is not clearly demonstrated, as he divides the media items only into American and non-American categories. Consequently, this limits understanding of to what extent China's model has taken hold in examined Africa. Elsje Fourie (2015) offers a far more advanced understanding of how China's model is seen and emulated in Africa by examining perceptions of the model based on interviews with the Ethiopian political and non-political elites. Fourie shows that Ethiopian elites draw on the Chinese experience in their efforts to navigate the development in the globalizing world and face the demands of liberalization. Geographical distance, language barriers, and cultural differences do not significantly hinder the transfer of this experience (Fourie, 2015, pp. 298–300). This thesis builds on these studies to explore how China's model was perceived in Zambia by examining its portrayal in the local press, thus further filling research gaps.

In general, the strategy of extraversion (Bayart, 1993; Ellis & Bayart, 2000) pursued by the African elites has rarely been examined in the democratization literature. Even though it has been recognized that China's engagement has the potential to reinforce elites' agenda and their role in domestic political competition, this has rather been discussed theoretically (Clapham, 2007; Peiffer & Englebert, 2012; Tull, 2011) and for a long time not thoroughly investigated. The empirical studies on this issue are still limited and are a matter of only recent years. In particular, one may refer to the scholars examining the implementation of large Chinese infrastructure projects serving the African rulers to gain advantages over their competitors and sustain their rule by rewarding their loyal networks of clients and boosting their legitimacy through the semblance of governance performance. In this regard, Lucy Corkin's research on Angola (2013; 2019) demonstrates how political leaders in the aftermath of a civil war used Chinese-built and oil-paid economic infrastructure to strengthen their position of power. Similarly, recent research by

Wang (2022) shows, in the cases of Kenya and yet again Angola, how ruling elites instrumentalized Chinese-built infrastructure to gain advantages on the eve of general elections, rewarding their loyal supporters and, conversely, disadvantaging disloyal and opposition groups in society.

The Sino-Zambian relations examined in this work have also received some attention in the literature emphasizing the role of local elites' agenda vis a vis China, although the extraversion strategy remains relatively unexplored. In this context, it is possible to mention studies that address the agenda of local elites by examining the anti-Chinese populism that emerged in Zambia, particularly during the political campaigns of the country's late President, Michael Sata (Aidoo, 2019; Hess & Aidoo, 2015). This work builds on such research and demonstrates through data collected in the country how the strategy of extraversion has been deployed, particularly during the rule of the Patriotic Front (PF) and Edgar Lungu's presidency (see overview of the Zambian Presidents in Appendix 1) when cooperation with Beijing and dependence on the PRC reached unprecedented levels.¹²

Methods and Data

Given the aim of the thesis and the research questions set out, mixed methods research (MMR) is employed (e.g., Greene, 2006; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This work thus combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches. To define the mixed methods, one may refer to Creswell and Creswell (2018, pp. 41–42), who

¹² When looking beyond Africa, in the debate on China's influence on the agenda of domestic ruling elites, Yilmaz and Yildirim (2020) examined how the Turkey's ruling elite benefits politically from increasing linkage to China. The ruling AKP consolidated its power through giant infrastructure projects implemented and financed by Chinese companies that provided the government with legitimacy while helping to resist democratizing pressures from the West through accessing alternative financial and diplomatic support. For China, Turkey is a strategically important partner that is part of the BRI, and in return, this cooperation helps to lend legitimacy to the Xi's rule. Similarly, Bader's (2013) qualitative research of Cambodia, Myanmar and Mongolia, fits into the debate on the strategic allocation of PRC projects and buying political support for the political elites. This strategy, however, varies by regime, and with that also the distributional patterns different regimes rely on for their survival. Bader's findings are important to this work in highlighting the importance of researching PRC's influence in hybrid regimes. These regimes are more easily exploited because they rely on broader domestic coalition for their survival and Beijing may therefore exert more of its efforts by means of the economic cooperation. At the same time, hybrid regimes are recognized internationally as more legitimate, so Beijing does not have to face international criticism for cooperating with them.

understand it as “an approach to inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. The core assumption of this form of inquiry is that the integration of qualitative and quantitative data yields additional insight beyond the information provided by either the quantitative or qualitative data alone.” The MMR approach adopted here helps capture the complexity, acquire a deeper understanding of the researched issue, and increase the potential of the work to contribute to the current state of the art.

From *quantitative methods*, multiple linear regression analysis of statistical data is employed (used to examine all active influences and the autocratic linkage in the passive influences) across time and countries, and logistic regression (employed only to examine extraversion) across time and countries. In both types of regressions, the standard robust errors are clustered by the state, which accounts for the basic assumption of linear regression analysis, i.e., independence of observations. The *qualitative methods* used then help to add a deeper context to the issues under study through the specific case of Zambia. In this regard, several case studies are employed. For the part of the work examining the active influence, the regression analyses are complemented by brief anecdotal evidence and illustrative case studies to provide examples of applying a theoretical argument and demonstrate the empirical relevance of a hypothetical proposition on relevant cases (Levy, 2008, p. 7). Regarding the passive forms, an explanatory case study of Zambia is employed in the cases of linkage and extraversion to examine how China contributed to the autocratization of the regime in Zambia (Yin, 2009, p. 9). Emulation is then examined in an exploratory case study of Zambia, where it is investigated with media data whether the emulation of China’s development experience is suggested, and if so, by whom and what elements are seen as emulations worthy. This issue is thus approached as an uncharted area of research to understand “the conceptual terrain” in the case of Zambia. (Hamel, Dufour & Fortin, p. v).

Also, content analysis of media frames is used to examine the large corpus of media articles. Entman’s (1993) conceptualization and operationalization of media frames are employed to identify how China was presented in the Zambian press. The

information gathered from the analysis is then mainly used in the chapter that deals with passive influences, as it helps identify both the strengths of the linkages, whether China was presented as a model of development (and by whom), and how its presence and dependence on Beijing became utilized by the ruling elites to maintain their power. Apart from the identified frames, the sources were also coded, which helped draw distinctions between the frame categories and identify the main agents in the relationship between the two countries. In general, for this work, the information gathered from the press became an invaluable insight into China's engagement in Zambia.

The quantitative part draws data from several databases. First and foremost, the work relies on the *Varieties of Democracy* (V-Dem) that provide data on various dimensions related to the measuring quality of democracy in the world. V-Dem data is used to understand the Chinese influence on the variation in the quality of democracy in Africa's hybrid regimes. For this research, crucial China's official data that would allow the author to quantify Beijing's influence in Africa has long been unavailable. The PRC maintains an approach lacking transparency when providing information related to official development finance statistics (loans and aid data). However, during the last decade, it has been possible to encounter initiatives that attempt to address this opaque situation. About the availability of data on development finance, the *AidData*, *China Africa Research Initiative* (CARI), and, more recently, the *Boston University Global Development Policy Center* have gone the furthest. Beyond the official development financial flows, AidData has also recently released data on various people-to-people exchanges between (not only) African states and China. This includes information on mutual political elites' visits, as well as China's Communist Party (CCP) visits, student exchange, and other dimensions of cooperation useful for operationalizing some of the concepts examined in this work (especially autocracy promotion, autocratic linkage, and extraversion). Data on trade and migration from the PRC to Africa are drawn from the CARI database. Data concerning Chinese military projects and trade are then taken from AidData and the *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute* (SIPRI).

To examine Beijing's reactionary activities to democracy-promoting incentives, the author employs V-Dem data on mobilization for democracy to measure unrest

potentially menacing the regime. The actions of international actors supporting democratization, and thereby triggering Beijing's response against it, are examined in the dissertation using data on democratic aid provision from traditional donors drawn from the *OECD-DAC's Creditor Reporting System (CRS)* and the sanctions imposed *Global Sanctions Database (GSDB)*. The control variables used by the author rely on the socioeconomic data provided by the *World Bank* (e.g., to measure economic growth or the dependency on natural resources), as well as draw on the information provided by *The International Disaster Dataset (EM-DAT)* or the *UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset*.

The case study of China's influence in Zambia builds on secondary and primary data. Specifically, it uses data collected by the author in Zambia by conducting *21 semi-structured interviews*. Given the information-demanding nature of the topic, respondents were selected based on their anticipated insight into the topic of China's engagement in the country's politics and economy while covering a broad spectrum of views. This selection was made based on the author's previous readings and inquiries during her stay in Zambia. The respondents were then asked about recommending their contacts for the interviews, thus relying on interviewees' social networks and social capital (Noy, 2008). In other words, the author employed both purposive and snowball sampling methods.¹³ All the respondents were informed about the purpose of the interview and how the author will use the information gathered. All interviewees were anonymized, and the numbers replaced their names, i.e., "Respondent 1, 2, 3..." and so on. Most interviews were conducted in person from July to October 2020 in Lusaka. Eight were done only on the phone due to the pandemic situation and the busy schedule of some respondents (see the list of respondents in Appendix 2). All interviews were digitally recorded,

¹³ In this context, it should be noted that the author was not able to conduct interviews with any Chinese nationals in the country. The situation was complicated not only by the sensitivity of the topic itself (see e.g., Lee's 2017 research describing the difficulties of conducting research in Zambia in Chinese companies) as some of the potential interviewees contacted declined to be interviewed, but also by the timing of the research as the data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis made it difficult to obtain contacts and conduct interviews in general, and, in particular, with China's representatives, as the Chinese community retreated into privacy, both by choice and, according to information obtained by the author, at the behest of Beijing. The pandemic context is then also partly explained by the small number of international donor interviewees, who had largely returned to their countries of origin and thus could not be interviewed, along with the strong unwillingness of those staying in Zambia despite the pandemic.

transcribed, and then manually analyzed by the author. The interviews conducted varied from 30 to 70 minutes.

Besides the interviews, the qualitative part relies on the large corpus of *media articles* collected in Zambia and published in three newspapers between 2003 and 2019. Those were collected manually in several archives.¹⁴ The availability of the newspapers in archives determines the period from 2003 to 2019. *The Zambia Daily Mail Limited* (ZDML) is one of Zambia's leading print media, with copies ranging from 18,000 to 25,000 per day on average in 2015 (Sinyangwe & Phiri, 2017, p. 159). *The Post* was selected as the major private daily newspaper with a print run of 60,000 copies daily (Chama, 2017, p. 69). However, in 2016, the media house was closed on the pretext of allegedly unpaid VAT receipts and employee income tax remittances, just a few months before the general elections in August 2016. The step was perceived as politically motivated as the newspaper became a critical watchdog over the activities of the ruling parties and the opposition actors (Muchena, 2016). The data used from this newspaper is thus only available until June 2016. *The Mast* was selected for two reasons: first, the availability of copies in the archives; second, for the newspaper's ownership by Fred M'membe, making *The Mast* the direct successor of *The Post*. The first editions of *The Mast* were printed in late 2016 (Lusakatimes.com, 2016). It took the newspapers several months to start circulating daily, resulting in a significant drop in the number of articles collected for 2016 and 2017.

Articles were selected based on the appearance of *keywords* implying the content related to China – China, Chinese, Sino-, names of Chinese cities and provinces (e.g., Beijing, Nanking, Shanghai, Henan), names of the politicians and ambassadors (e.g., Mao, Xi, Hu, Li, Zhao), Chinese companies and investors (e.g., CNMC, Huawei, ZTE, StarTimes, AVIC, China Jiangxi Corporation) as well as the projects implemented by Chinese companies in the country (e.g., TAZARA, Mulungushi Textile, Mongu-Kalabo road, Kenneth Kaunda International Airport, Lusaka-Ndola Dual Carriageway, Kafue Gorge hydroelectric dam, Levy Mwanawasa Stadium). Overall, 3,582 media items were collected from all three

¹⁴ The bulk of the newspapers were photocopied at the University of Zambia library archives, the Confucius Institute, the ZDML archives and the National Archives.

newspapers that were printed in English¹⁵ in the delimited timeframe. Specifically, 1,603 articles were collected from the ZDML and 1,979 from The Post/The Mast. However, this number was further reduced to items not taken over from foreign media and news agencies (e.g., Reuters, BBC, Financial Times, Xinhua, Al Jazeera) but were specifically written to target Zambian readers. Thus, the number of items examined was reduced to 1,974 stories – specifically, 1,234 articles from the ZDML and 740 from The Post/The Mast.

Structure of the Work

The thesis is divided into chapters as follows. The first chapter introduces the theoretical framework along with the concepts through which China's influence in Africa is examined. The various concepts are defined and delineated so they can be operationalized and analyzed in the following parts of the work. In examining China's influence on the quality of democracy in African hybrid regimes, attention is first paid to the active autocratic sponsorship, which is divided into ideologically motivated autocracy promotion and more pragmatic democracy resistance. Both subtypes of the active forms are examined quantitatively and qualitatively, using multiple linear regression, short illustrative case studies, and anecdotal evidence. The following chapter is then devoted to the PRC's passive influences. In this part, the concepts of autocratic linkage and the strategy of extraversion are explored with quantitative and qualitative methods, including multiple linear and logistic regressions, and an explanatory case study of Zambia. Emulation is then examined in the exploratory case of Zambia. The results are summarized in the conclusive chapter of the work.

¹⁵ The English language criteria is mentioned especially with the reference to the articles printed in The Post, which began publishing stories in the Chinese language for a short period of time in 2014.

1. Theoretical Background and Key Concepts

1.1. Autocratization

When the 2006 Freedom House report (Puddington, 2007) warned about the stagnation of democracies and the growing “pushback against democracy” worldwide, it was only a precursor of a trend that would grow in intensity and scope in the following period. In 2007 and 2008, the same organization had already referred in its annual reports to the “decline” of democracy in the world (Puddington, 2009), and despite a temporary glimmer of hope for improvement during the Arab Spring in 2011 (Puddington, 2012), it continued in the following decade. The pre-pandemic year of 2019 was the 14th consecutive year of decline (Repucci, 2020), and it was certainly not the last (Boese et al., 2022; Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022). Lührmann and Lindberg (2019) conclude that what we may observe in decline in the quality of democracy can be called the *third wave of autocratization*.¹⁶ Thus, in 2017, this third wave dominated the democratic drops, outnumbering the countries that experienced democratic progress. This is a phenomenon that has not occurred in the world since the 1940s and affects the entire world, including Africa (Boese et al., 2022, 988; Cassani & Tomini, 2019, pp. 130–136; Hackenesch, 2019; Obiagu, 2021; Rakner, 2019; 2021).

At the same time, this trend differs from previous autocratization waves. Lührmann and Lindberg (2019) emphasize the more gradual nature of these processes, with autogolpes, foreign invasions, and, to a large extent, military coups being replaced by “democratic erosion,” in which incumbents come to power legally and then gradually but significantly undermine democratic norms without entirely destroying critical democratic institutions. In her study, Nancy Bermeo (2016) similarly highlights the different characteristics of the current trend of democratic

¹⁶ Similarly negative predictions about the survival of democracy have been reflected over time in the *Journal of Democracy*. Here, one may observe a transformation of expectations about the development of democracy from the optimism to a progressively more pessimistic vision of the future of democracy in an autocratizing world. Thus, for its 25th birthday in 2015, the Journal “gifted” itself with a pessimistic issue named – *Is Democracy in Decline?*, which “For a journal that is unabashedly in favor of democracy, this obviously is not the kind of celebratory theme that might be preferred for marking a historic milestone.” (Plattner, 2015, p. 5). For the 30th anniversary in 2020, it continued riding this wave of pessimism with an issue entitled *Democracy Embattled*, arguing that liberal democracy, despite some rays of hope in the form of pro-democracy protests, “is under greater threat today than at any time since the Second World War.” (Plattner, 2020, p. 5).

backsliding when compared to the Cold War period. According to Bermeo, it is mainly long-term strategic intimidation and manipulation that can be observed nowadays, rather than the previously more dominant and visible forms of autocratization, i.e., coups d'état, autogolpes, or blatant frauds on election day. Lee Morgenbesser (2020) also discusses the transformations of contemporary authoritarianism, presenting a “menu of autocratic innovation” to demonstrate how today’s autocrats use new sophisticated techniques of manipulation that transform the very nature of authoritarian regimes. These new techniques are designed to help authoritarians maintain a façade of accountability while not practicing it in reality at the same time.¹⁷ Thus, according to Morgenbesser (2020, p. 3), “the most sophisticated form of autocratic rule now encourages laws to be bent, not broken; institutions to be managed, not made meaningless; political opponents to be circumscribed, not eliminated; citizens to be disempowered, not indoctrinated; economic gains to be distributed, not concentrated; and foreign engagement to be self-reinforcing, not self-defeating.”

Although some scholars refer to this “unwelcome change” (Waldner & Lust, 2018) in the quality of democracy around the world as a “myth” (Levitsky & Way, 2015)¹⁸ and as “the specter of democratic collapse now haunts a new century” stemming from exaggerated “alarmism” (Brownlee & Miao, 2022, 133)¹⁹, it can also be

¹⁷ Morgenbesser (2020) classifies these innovative techniques into *five broad forms* – informational, legal, political, reputational and technological. The targets of these techniques can be *four different actors* – citizens, civil society activists, opposition members or foreign policymakers.

¹⁸ In this context, Levitsky and Way (2015) criticize that there is little evidence that a decline in the quality of democracy is actually occurring. They attribute this “exaggerated pessimism and gloom” (ibid., p. 46) mainly to a misunderstanding of democratization processes in the early 1990s after the end of the Cold War, which led to expectations of the outcomes of these transitions being unrealistic. Rather, the last decade has been characterized by stability, within which democratic collapses as well as surges have occurred, while democracy has proved rather resilient and its collapse may be considered a rarity. If there were declines in the qualities of democratic indicators, these were regimes that had been incorrectly considered as democracies for their short-lived democratic moments, so even this trend cannot be seen as democratic recession (ibid., pp. 52–54). In other words, what we may observe is rather the consolidation of authoritarianism in non-democratic regimes, which had been mistaken for democracies.

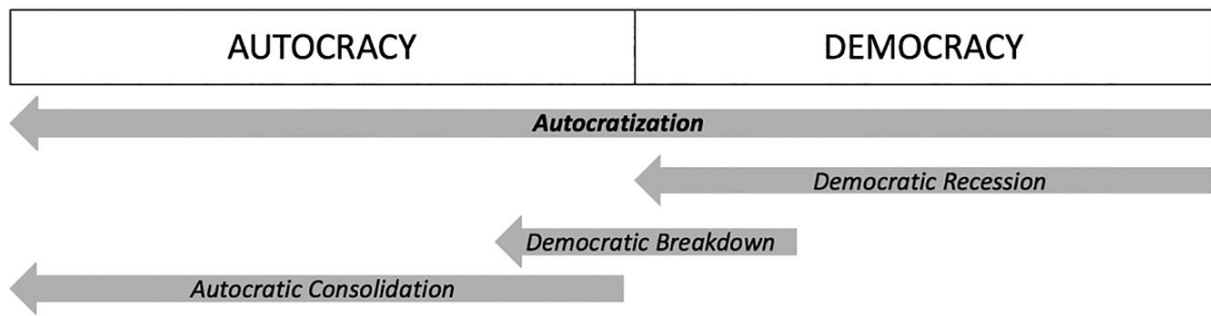
¹⁹ In their recent analysis in the *Journal of Democracy*, Brownlee and Miao (2022) argue that today’s wealthy and consolidated democracies are more robust than they may appear. While acknowledging that these regimes face various challenges today, they also argue that the prognosis is positive for their survival. They base their analysis mainly on economic growth and wealth levels, which are key variables for the survival and resilience of democracies. They see cases of democratic decline, such as the US under Donald Trump, Hungary under Viktor Orbán, and Poland under the Law and Justice Party (PiS) rule, as exceptions and temporary challenges that democracies may face and withstand.

argued that there is an overall consensus among scholars that democratic decline is happening. However, this consensus no longer prevails when labeling these changes. Contemporary research exhibits extraordinary conceptual fragmentation and offers a plethora of concepts that seek to describe the process of the decline of democratic qualities in political regimes in the world. Thus, in the literature, one may encounter terms like “democratic backsliding” (Bermeo, 2016; 2022; Rakner, 2021; Hyde, 2020; Waldner & Lust, 2018), “authoritarian backsliding” (Dresden & Howard, 2016), “democratic breakdown” (Brownlee, 2017), “democratic erosion” (Kneuer, 2021; Laebens & Lührmann, 2021), “democratic regression” (Diamond, 2021; Gerschewski, 2021; Tomini & Wagemann, 2018), “democratic recession” (Diamond, 2015; Magen, 2015), “democratic rollback” (Diamond, 2008; Merkel, 2010; Rakner, 2019), “de-democratization” (Bogaards, 2018), or “regime change” (Vanderhill, 2013).

In light of the conceptual fragmentation, “autocratization” is employed in this work (Cassani & Tomini, 2019; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). This allows the decline in the quality of democracy to be understood broadly across regimes (see Figure 1) while avoiding potentially problematic labels such as “democratic breakdown.” In this work, autocratization is conceptualized based on the study of Lührmann and Lindberg (2019) as the “antipode of democratization” (*ibid.*, p. 1098) and as “any move away from full democracy” (*ibid.*, p. 1099). This conceptualization essentially covers any shift towards autocracy, which may include changes within a specific category of the political regime without changing the regime. At the same time, it may also include the transition to a different regime type. This notion does not address the point at which such changes occur, and the outcome of this shift is then less democratic and more autocratic situations (*ibid.*).

These arguments have been sharply criticized by Mounk (2022), who underscores the naivety of these forecasts based on unconvincing analysis, both in the empirical and normative sense. Mounk argues that what is really serious and disturbing about the current trend of the decline is that it is occurring exactly in these wealthy and consolidated democracies, where such processes of “deconsolidation” should not be occurring in the first place (*ibid.*, p. 151).

Figure 1: Autocratization as democratization in reverse



Source: Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019, p. 1100

Although other scholars attempt to define the decline in democratic qualities in a similarly inclusive manner while using different concepts (Waldner & Lust, 2018) autocratization is used here in part because it avoids shortcomings such as conceptual stretching. In this respect, it is the broadly used democratic backsliding (Bermeo, 2016; 2022; Rakner, 2021; Hyde, 2020) that implies by its very definition that the regime was democratic at the beginning of the process and that there is a decline in democratic qualities *from* and *within* (Cassani & Tomini, 2019, p. 21; Lührmann & Lindbergh, 2019, p. 1099) this regime type. Even the very part *-sliding* suggests that it may be an involuntary and unconscious process, thus overlooking that the decline may result from deliberate actions by political actors and their agenda. Similarly, the *back-* part can be problematic, implying that a country returns to the original non-democratic type of political regime it had been becoming more democratic. However, this does not necessarily correspond to reality if the new regime is a different non-democratic regime type than before (ibid.). In contrast to regime “breakdown,” autocratization encompasses a process of decline in the qualities of democratic governance that is more in line with developments since the end of the Cold War – a gradual decline in democratic qualities rather than sudden changes or even regime collapses, as was the case during the Cold War and the first half of the 20th century (Bermeo, 2016; Diamond, 2015; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019; Morgenbesser, 2020; Rakner, 2019).

1.2. In the Gray Zone of Hybrid Regimes

In the wake of the third wave of democratization, a number of new political regimes have emerged. While these became more democratic, they also differed from each other and Western democracies. To varying degrees, they combine democratic

features with authoritarian practices and find themselves in what Thomas Carothers (2002) calls the “gray zone” between closed authoritarianism and liberal democracy. Endeavors to conceptualize these regimes have had to contend with extraordinary theoretical and conceptual fragmentation over the past quarter century. During this period, Bílek (2015) argues, scholars overlooked the shortcomings of their assumptions, and “the entire research endeavor often resembled a competition to see who could come up with the most groundbreaking concept first, rather than an effort to solve existing research problems.” (ibid., p. 213). Thus, even three decades after the beginning of the third wave of democratization, the result has been the existence of a multitude of subtypes of democracy and authoritarianism, lacking common ground in terms of definitions and empirical measurements. Likewise, an overarching theoretical framework has not clarified the relationship between types and subtypes (Bogaards, 2009, p. 400).

The *first generation* of the hybrid regimes conceptualizations (e.g., Merkel, 2004; Merkel & Croissant, 2004; O’Donnell, 1998; Zakaria, 1997) can be assigned to the *optimistic* and *realistic phase*²⁰ of research (Merkel, 2010). This generation of scholars worked with a dichotomous understanding of hybrid regimes and derived them from democracy. It emerged from the efforts of researchers “to hurriedly extinguish the fire in which democratization research found itself after the end of its idealistic phase” (Bílek, 2015, p. 216) when it became apparent that many regimes that had been called democracies were not democratic. Such derivation was reflected in the notion of hybrid regimes as democracies that were not complete, i.e., “democracies with adjectives” (Collier & Levitsky, 1997), such as “illiberal democracies” (Zakaria, 1997), “delegative democracies” (O’Donnell, 1994), and “defective democracies” (Merkel, 2004). The result of such conceptions has been

²⁰ Wolfgang Merkel (2010) describes as the *optimistic phase* a period under the euphoria of the “end of history” idea. Scholars paid attention mainly to successful cases of transition while believing that democracy could be promoted and even imposed by an external actor. In the 1990s, the notion of democracy was reduced to its minimalist conception, focusing on the role of elections and political elites, who were ascribed a crucial role in democratization. Conversely, the structural impediment’s role in maintaining democratic rule was underestimated (ibid., pp. 18–19). The *realist phase*, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, considers the role of structural factors, which became a central part of the research. Similarly, minimalist theories of democracy in this period came to be seen as inadequate to describe the different variants of newly emerged democratic regimes. More sophisticated conceptualizations of democratic regimes then led to a decline in the number of democracies and with it a decline in optimism (ibid., p. 20).

an unclear boundary between democracy and hybrid regimes. Heidrun Zinecker (2009), in a critique of this approach, then posed a question about “how many defects may a democracy have and still be considered a democracy? In other words, is a car without tires, engine, or steering wheel that is fit for the scrap yard — in short, lacking all parts that define it as a car—still a car, or just a chassis? How many parts can fail while it remains a car that is fit to drive: the tires, the engine, or only the steering wheel?”, arguing then that “if democracy is not established in all its constituent parts and lacks the ‘tires’ or the ‘engine,’ it is not a democracy, even if it has a ‘steering wheel’— such as universal suffrage.” (ibid., p. 306).

In this work, hybrid regimes are conceptualized based on a trichotomous perception of political regimes, i.e., as an independent category of regimes (e.g., Gilbert & Mohseni, 2011; Karl, 1995; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Cassani, 2014; Schedler, 2013; Wigell, 2008). Such an understanding refers to the *second generation* of conceptualizations and the *pessimistic phase*²¹ of research on hybrid regimes (Merkel, 2010). This phase emerged as a critical reaction to the limits of the first generation’s conceptualization, whereby “instead of emphasizing the existence of democratic institutions in hybrid regimes, the aim of this wave became to emphasize their authoritarian elements.” (Bilek, 2015, p. 216).

According to some authors, the current wave of autocratization affects hybrid regimes the most (Cassani & Tomini, 2019, p. 129). In the debate about external authoritarian influences on the quality of democracy, then, it is the regimes in the gray zone between democracy and authoritarianism that should be more amenable to the influence of the external actors due to their low degree of institutionalization and the uncertainty arising from competitive and pluralistic elections (Dresden & Howard, 2016; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Lust & Waldner, 2015, p. 30; Vanderhill, 2013, pp. 10–11; von Soest, 2015, p. 627). Thus, in these regimes, foreign non-democratic powers should be able to increase the capacity of domestic elites to deal

²¹ *The pessimistic phase* refers to the post-2000 period and emphasizes the role of structural factors and historical institutionalism in the consolidation of democracy. During this phase, the research evaluates efforts in democracy promotion, while beginning to question their positive impact. At the same time, we are already talking about a period when non-democratic actors that may have a negative impact on the desired democratization and donor efforts to support it are beginning to come under the attention of scholars (Merkel, 2010, pp. 20–21).

with the threat of regime change and shift towards democracy (Nodia, 2014; Vanderhill, 2013, pp. 18–21; Tolstrup, 2015).

1.2.1. *Electoral Authoritarianism and Electoral Democracy*

This work draws on the research of Thomas Carothers (2002) and Andreas Schedler (2006; 2013; 2015). First, Carothers's (2002) Gray Zone encompasses the majority of the third-wave countries that "have not achieved relatively well-functioning democracy or do not seem to be deepening or advancing whatever democratic progress they have made" (Carothers, 2002, p. 9). Most of these "transitional countries" are "neither dictatorial nor clearly headed toward democracy. They have entered a political gray zone." (ibid.). Carothers argues that although they have some attributes of democracies, at the same time, they suffer from serious democratic deficits. These may include poor representation of citizens' interests, low levels of political participation beyond voting, frequent abuse of the law by government officials, elections of uncertain legitimacy, very low levels of public confidence in state institutions, and persistently poor institutional performance by the state (ibid., pp. 9–10). The in-between area is characterized by a vast "diversity of political patterns" (ibid., p. 10) with many possible subtypes. These have some characteristics in common, yet they may differ in crucial ways and become mutually exclusive.

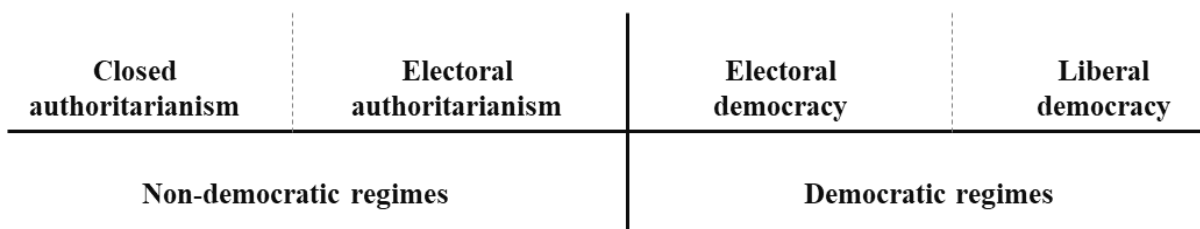
With this conceptualization, Carothers calls into question the transition paradigm and assumption that any country moving away from dictatorship was transitioning to democracy, which has proven inaccurate and misleading. He argues that the most common political patterns among these "transitional countries" became *feckless pluralism* and *dominant-power politics*.²² These then include elements of

²² Carothers (2002) defines several syndromes marking the political life of the "patterns" in the zone. *First*, he refers to "feckless pluralism," which includes countries with significant amount of political freedom, regular elections, and alternation of power between different political groupings, yet their democracy remains shallow and troubled with political participation that extends only a little beyond voting. In these countries, political elites from major parties are seen as corrupt, self-interested, and dishonest. *Second*, Carothers refers to "dominant-power politics" that includes those countries with "limited but still real political space, some political contestation by opposition groups, and at least most of the basic institutional forms of democracy." (ibid., p. 11). Yet, at the same time, one political grouping dominates the system in such a way that there seems to be only a little prospect of alternation of power. The dominant-power countries then exhibit a blurred line between the state and the ruling party. Apart from these two broad groups, Carothers also assumes *another one*, that

democracy but “should be understood as alternative directions, not way stations to liberal democracy.” (ibid., p. 14).

In this work, two regimes are included in the Gray Zone – *electoral democracy* and *electoral authoritarianism*, as defined by Andreas Schedler (2013; 2006). These regimes occupy a “foggy zone” (Schedler, 2002, p. 37) or an *intermediate position in a spectrum of political regimes* with liberal democracies and closed autocracies forming the two poles of it, as indicated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The spectrum of political regimes



Source: Schedler, 2013, p. 78

Electoral democracies, as defined by Schedler, are those regimes that “lack some attributed of liberal democracy (such as checks and balances, bureaucratic integrity, and an impartial judiciary), but do conduct free and fair elections, which electoral autocracies don’t.” (Schedler, 2013, p. 78). Thus, as Schedler argues (2002, p. 37), while liberal democracies go beyond the electoral minimum, electoral democracies manage to “get elections right” yet fail to institutionalize other dimensions of democratic institutionalism. In the context of multiparty electoral regimes, electoral democracies comply with all essential conditions of *democratic choice*,²³ which differs them from electoral autocracies that systematically violate at least one of them (Schedler, 2013, pp. 101–102).

includes those states where it is yet difficult to recognize their trajectory, but that are “definitely not on a path of democratization.” (ibid., p. 14).

²³ Schedler understands democratic elections as mechanisms of social choice under conditions of freedom and equality. Elections must offer an effective choice of political authorities among a community of free and equal citizens, to be qualified as democratic. Schedler then delineates seven conditions that must exist to denote regular elections as an “effective democratic choice” (Schedler, 2002, p. 40). These conditions include *empowerment* of citizens, *free supply* of alternatives, *free demand*, *inclusion* of voters without any restrictions, *insulation* of free election from pressure, *bureaucratic integrity*, and *irreversibility* of consequences. Gross violation of any of these conditions then invalidates the fulfillment of all others. (ibid., pp. 40–41).

According to Schedler, *electoral authoritarianism* has become the world's most common form of non-democratic government since the end of the Cold War. These regimes “practice authoritarianism behind the institutional facades of representative democracy. They hold regular multi-party elections at the national level, yet violate liberal–democratic minimum standards in systematic and profound ways.” (Schedler, 2013, p. 1). Schedler distinguishes electoral authoritarianism from all other dictatorships, which, although they defy the democratic spirit of plurality elections, simultaneously change their internal dynamics by organizing them (ibid.). The elections that these regimes hold are, on the one hand, broadly *inclusive* (they are held based on universal suffrage), *minimally pluralistic* (opposition parties can run), *minimally competitive* (parties and candidates outside the ruling coalition cannot win, but may win votes and seats), and *minimally open* (dissent is not subject to massive but often selective and occasional repression), but on the other hand, they *are not minimally democratic*. Governments in these regimes subject elections to various forms of authoritarian manipulation that violate liberal-democratic principles of freedom, justice, and integrity (ibid., p. 2).

Schedler develops a new theoretical framework for the study of electoral authoritarian regimes in which he identifies competition *under* and *over* uncertainty as the driving force of politics in authoritarianism. Indeed, like all authoritarian regimes, electoral authoritarianism suffers from *two forms of uncertainties* – *institutional*, where the regime's hold on power is never secure, and *informational*, which leads to a situation where they can never be sure how secure they are. In electoral autocracies, Schedler argues, such a *politics of uncertainty* unfolds as a two-level game in which actors simultaneously struggle for *voters* (at the game level of electoral competition)²⁴ and *rules* (at the meta-game level of institutional change) (ibid., p. 6). Whether elections serve to maintain or subvert authoritarian

²⁴ Schedler (2013, pp. 5–61) stresses the *ambiguity of elections*. He argues that some kinds of authoritarian elections are more than mere instruments of dictatorship and that regular plurality elections for top positions at the country level change the internal logic of authoritarian politics. Such elections open up arenas of competition that, while providing enormous advantages to incumbent politicians, also provide opportunities and mobilization for opposition actors that do not exist in non-electoral regimes. Although such elections are inherently unfree and unfair, their outcomes are unpredictable – serving both the ruling parties to maintain authoritarian rule and opposition actors to subvert it. Electoral outcomes are then the combined product of both voters' and political elites' decisions (Schedler, 2015, p. 7) and the choices available to them from a “menu of electoral manipulation” (Schedler, 2002).

rule then depends on these conflicting dynamics that play out in the asymmetric electoral arena. Schedler's perspective on regime dynamics thus emphasizes the role of elections (Schedler, 2015) and explains it through the lens of domestic rather than structural factors (unlike competitive authoritarianism by Levitsky and Way). Here, he underscores the role of elites in power and opposition, as well as voters and their decision-making during elections. With regard to the international dimension of autocratization, if two forms of *uncertainty* characterizing electoral authoritarianism are taken into account, it is expected that external influences will more likely manifest in this "part" of the gray zone rather than in electoral democracies.

1.3. International Dimension of Autocracy

The role of external authoritarian influences on the quality of democracy is still a largely unexplored area in comparative autocratization research, and the literature on this theme has emerged mainly in the last decade. In the 1990s and after 2000, this debate focused primarily on external democratic influences on the quality of democracy in political regimes worldwide. Such a concentration of research on democratization was influenced mainly by the international environment and the democratization wave that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union (Huntington, 1991). Thus, researchers have focused on the role of both the US and the EU as "democracy promoters" (Börzel, 2016; Yakouchyk, 2016) who may both actively and passively influence democratization in the world (e.g., Burnell, 2004; Carothers, 1997; Diamond, 1992; Dimitrova & Pridham, 2004; Ikenberry, 1999; Levitsky & Way, 2010; McFaul, 2004; Schmitter & Brouwer, 1999; Schimmelfennig, 2011).

The question of external authoritarian influences on the quality of democracy has become particularly interesting to researchers in response to the changing international environment and the phenomenon of the "third wave of autocratization." The declining reputation and lure of the liberal democracy model characterize this transformation. This came both as a result of the post-2008 economic crisis as well as Bush's interventionist policy in Iraq and, at the same time, by the rise in influence and prestige of non-democratic regimes in the world, particularly Russia and China. Research in this regard is based on the assumption

that *if democratic states may seek to democratize and influence the quality of democracy in other countries away from authoritarianism towards democracy, then it can be assumed that authoritarian states similarly seek to autocratize and influence the quality of democracy in other states away from democracy towards authoritarianism.* However, as some scholars have emphasized, there are differences in the external support provided by democracies and autocracies, and their activities and methods cannot be seen as identical.²⁵ At the same time, it also cannot be argued that democratic actors exclusively support democratization (Ambrosio, 2015; Brownlee, 2012; Emmanuel, 2013; Meyerrose, 2020; Peiffer & Englebert, 2012; Tansey, 2016a; 2016b; Willis, 2012), and vice versa, i.e., that authoritarian states only support autocratization (Melnykovska, Plamper, & Schweickert, 2012; Tolstrup, 2015; von Soest, 2015).

Research on international authoritarian influences on the quality of democracy is characterized by theoretical incoherence and conceptual fragmentation. As Tolstrup (2015, p. 8) points out, it often compares apples and oranges by mixing different influences and motivations behind them, whether on the part of the external actors or their domestic recipients.²⁶ Indeed, in the contemporary literature, one may come

²⁵ In this respect, Rachel Vanderhill (2013, pp. 13, 21) highlights the role of the domestic environment of democratic regimes, which elected elites must consider and make efforts to reflect the normative values of their regimes. Non-democratic regimes are not constrained in this way, and thus have a broader repertoire of activities they may pursue and methods they may employ against other countries. Burnell (2010) then mentions differences in the numerical preponderance of democracies, NGOs, and foundations that seek to spread democracy versus the number of authoritarian countries and organizations that would undertake activities to reverse democratization in the world. Similarly, Tolstrup (2015, 10) points out that democracy promoters, unlike autocracy promoters, do not hide their ambitions about promoting democracy abroad. Burnell (2010) explains this by the different degrees of lure of governance models, i.e. that authoritarian states do not have a single model of governance to offer for export. However, in this respect, he adds that China or Russia may have a greater reach than other authoritarian states. Burnell also argues that non-democratic states are less likely to impose autocracy abroad by means of force, yet admits that such an approach may change in the future, especially in light of Russia's increasingly threatening aspirations – an anticipation that came true in 2022. Finally, Tansey (2016b, pp. 143–144) argues that the way we talk about autocracy promotion suggests that it is a set of activities that mirrors the same activities of democracy promotion. Tansey cautions that this is a misleading expectation, for while many states do actively support autocratic incumbents, there is little evidence to suggest that this is done in the context of promoting autocracy as is the case for many international actors seeking to promote democracy.

²⁶ Tolstrup (2015, pp. 10–11) underscores the limitations of this research and the challenges faced by scholars. He argues that the support provided by authoritarian states is often hidden and these actors rarely publicly declare that they provide assistance. Support is often rendered behind closed doors in bilateral meetings of state leaders, through non-transparent transfers of funds and loans, or

across two dominant concepts that seek to describe the influences of international non-democratic actors²⁷ on the quality of democracy, namely “autocracy promotion” (Burnell, 2010; Gratius, 2022; Kneuer, 2022; Tansey, 2016a; 2016b; Vanderhill, 2013; 2014; Way, 2015; Yakouchyk, 2016; 2019) and “authoritarian diffusion” (Ambrosio, 2010; 2012; Ambrosio & Tolstrup, 2019; Bader, 2014; Bank, 2017; Lankina, Libman, & Obydenkova, 2016; Ziegler, 2016). However, the definition of these concepts and the various mechanisms that are subsumed under them often differ from researcher to researcher, making them challenging to operationalize.²⁸

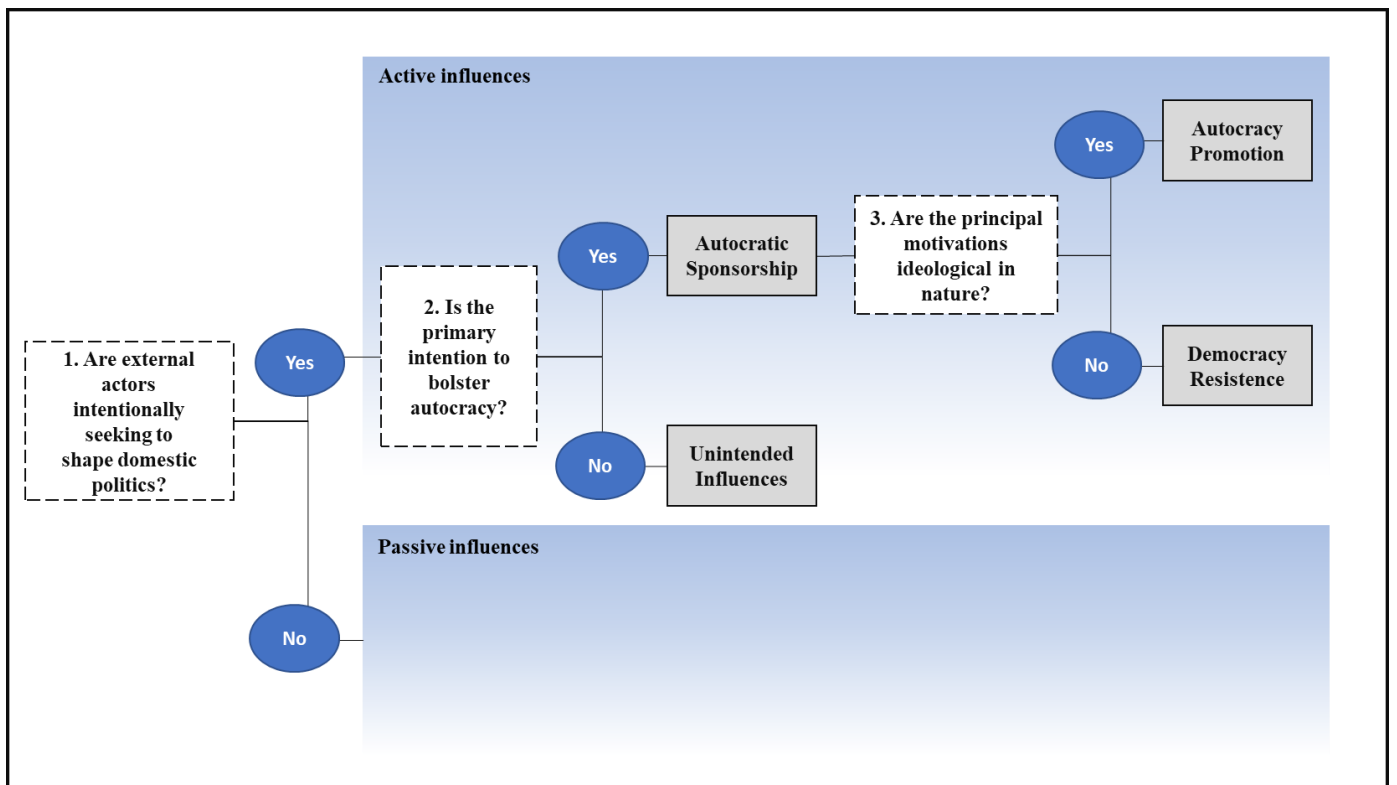
via the covert provision of military support. As a result, researchers lack certainty and solid evidence of what has taken place between the two parties. However, this does not mean that scholars should resign on trying to examine such an interaction and its effects. They just need be more honest about the constraints about data availability and not jump to unsubstantiated conclusions supporting claims of autocracy promotion.

²⁷ In the literature, it is possible to come across different names for these actors, such as “black knights” (Levisky & Way, 2010), “negative external actors” (Tolstrup, 2009), “autocracy promoters” (Yakouchyk 2016) or “autocratic patrons” (Bader, 2015b). There are also designations accentuating the regional nature of the influence, such as “illiberal regional powers” (Risse & Babayan, 2015) or “authoritarian gravity centres” (Kneuer & Demmelhuber, 2016).

²⁸ For example, Burnell (2010, p. 5–61) defines the concept of autocracy promotion inclusively, i.e., as an approach encompassing all international initiatives moving a political regime away from democracy and towards semi-democracy or authoritarianism. According to such a broad conceptualization, deliberate actions by an external actor may be only a small part of the international influence. At the same time, Burnell offers a more exclusive definition of autocracy promotion, taking into account the specific agency of external actors and their intentions. This conceptualization then no longer includes the unintended export of autocracy. However, Burnell simultaneously argues that any understanding of autocracy promotion can still include both deliberate attempts to influence the regime and, at the same time, the diffusion of authoritarian values and ideas across borders, which is based on the borrowing of authoritarian regime models and their institutions, taking place with or without the deliberate involvement of external actors. Thus, this understanding of autocracy promotion dilutes the concept into an essentially all-encompassing interaction between the recipient of influence and the authoritarian external actor, regardless their motives and agendas. Similarly, Melnykovska, Plamper, and Schweickert (2012) examine the autocracy promotion through a plethora of external influences and their effects on the quality of democracy. Authors examine Russia and the PRC’s activities in Central Asian. These again include various influences of the non-democratic actors, regardless of their intentionality. As a result, the study includes also those activities that may promote autocracy indirectly and where the agenda of the external actor is not obvious yet they are understood as the cases of autocracy promotion. The conceptual stretching is also present in Vanderhill’s study (2013), who understands the autocracy promotion as the active support of illiberal elites, groups, or regimes through direct assistance from an external actor, whose goal is not necessarily authoritarianism. Fostering autocracy may be, however, an unintended consequence of such foreign influence, as external actors typically have vested interests in providing their support to other regimes, including economic or geopolitical goals. The promotion of authoritarianism may thereby involve various motives and interests whereas bolstering autocracy can be only one of them (*ibid.*, pp. 8–9).

This thesis draws on the work of Oisín Tansey (2016a; 2016b), who responds to such a state of knowledge by strictly dividing these influences into their passive and active forms, where the promotion of autocracy is only a very narrowly defined form of international influence. Tansey (2016a, pp. 33–34) presents his typology of international factors that may enhance autocratic resilience and survival and builds it around *three questions* about the source and nature of international influence related to external actors’ agency, intentions, and motivations (see Figure 3). By systematically (and sequentially) working through these questions, Tansey argues that some of the conceptual ambiguities can be avoided.

Figure 3: Typology of external influences on autocracy



Source: Tansey, 2016a, p. 33

The *first* question addresses the role of *agency*, i.e., some international influences on autocracy result from external actors’ attempts to influence domestic politics in the target countries. However, other forms do not involve such a central role for political actors and result from the influence of structural factors or passive influences. Therefore, distinguishing between active and passive international influences is essential. Such an initial distinction is a prerequisite for exploring more detailed forms under each type (Tansey, 2016a, pp. 33–35). *The second*

question relates to the role of *intentions*. Not all influences result from deliberate efforts to support autocratic rulers; some may be undertaken for different reasons. It is, therefore, important to ask what the intention of the external actor is and whether it intends to support the position of the ruling autocratic elites to distinguish active efforts from various forms of unintended influences. It is not always easy to empirically ascertain actors' intentions, especially when those attempting to assist autocratic actors abroad may want to hide their objectives. Yet, according to Tansey (2016a, p. 35), some indicators can be used to identify the intentions of external power.²⁹ The *third* and final question relates to the role of actors' *motivations* and helps to identify different forms of active regime sponsorship. Tansey (2016a, pp. 35–36) distinguishes between *self-interest-driven* and *ideology-driven* motives and argues they have implications for how different international influences on autocracy are conceptualized. Tansey identifies three primary motivations that may drive policies designed to strengthen autocratic regimes – two are rooted in instrumental self-interest, and one in ideological commitment. He argues that only the latter represents genuine autocracy promotion, while the former are understood as democracy resistance instances.

Tansey's typology demonstrates the wide range of potential influences on authoritarian governance and identifies key differences between the categories. As a result, the typology distinguishes three main categories of international influence: *passive influences*, *unintended influences*, and *active autocratic sponsorship*. These categories outlined are ideal types; in practice, authoritarian leaders may be subject to several external influences. Yet, as Tansey (2016a, p. 38) argues, they provide a valuable set of concepts for understanding the diverse influences that have often been conflated and over-aggregated. His typology is further complemented in this

²⁹ *First*, scholars may examine the statements of those international actors who seek to influence the domestic politics of countries abroad. *Second*, it is sometimes possible to infer intentions from the behavior of external actors, and in particular from the type of policies they pursue at the domestic level of the recipient. In this case, the provision of aid can be aimed at authoritarian practices, such as assisting a coup, electoral fraud, or violent repression, which indicate an intention to support or, conversely, negatively define oneself vis-à-vis other actors abroad. More broadly, Tansey (2016a, p. 36) mentions the provision of economic aid or energy subsidies, but these can be seen as less obvious indicators of deliberately designed foreign policy to bolster autocracy, as they may also serve other objectives, such as promoting economic development in the target country or gaining advantages in access to minerals. Tansey also emphasizes the *timing* of external support. This entails sudden surges in diplomatic and economic support that coincide with the challenges threatening the regime abroad.

work with respect to its objectives. Thus, the author will not deal with the unintended consequences defined by Tansey (2016a, pp. 45–49) as policies strengthening the position of authoritarian elites *despite* the original intentions of the external actor – the promotion of democracy. As the aim here is to examine the influence of an authoritarian regime, cases of democracies that may unintentionally provide such support are not included. In addition, Tansey’s typology of international influences on autocracy pays limited attention to the passive influences and their further definition and subdivision. Thus, drawing on existing literature conceptualizing passive international influences on autocracy, the typology is complemented with three passive forms – *autocratic linkage*, *emulation*, and *extraversion*. The result is a division which, however, cannot be considered exhaustive, and it is not the intention to present an all-encompassing typology of external passive influences.

1.3.1. *Active Influences – Autocratic Sponsorship*

As noted earlier, this category of international influence refers to instances where external actors actively engage in domestic politics to support authoritarian elites intentionally. This broad category of influences, *autocratic sponsorship*, entails “intentional international assistance to elite incumbents to help them retain their positions in power.” (Tansey, 2016a, p. 49). However, as Tansey argues, policies to support autocratic governments may vary significantly. Therefore, he distinguishes two forms of international sponsorship: ideologically motivated *autocracy promotion*, and *democracy resistance*, which is driven by strategic and instrumental motives related to concerns about the domestic and international repercussions arising from regime change abroad (ibid.).

1.3.1.1. *Autocracy Promotion*

The conceptualization of the autocracy promotion employed in this work is identical to that by Tansey (2016a, pp. 51–53; 2016b, pp. 150–151) or, for example, Weyland (2017), whose understanding of this form of influence is limited to purely ideological motives. While such a strict definition includes certain pitfalls regarding operationalizing and measuring the promotion of autocracy, it also helps to distinguish this form from others, thus avoiding conceptual stretching. Tansey (2016a, p. 52) argues that there is little evidence that promoting autocracy was a

significant feature of post-Cold War external sponsorship. Ideologically motivated support for regimes of this kind is most clearly evident in earlier historical periods.³⁰

Weyland (2017, pp. 10–14), like Tansey, defines autocracy promotion based on ideological motivation as the criterion by which regime models spread to other states. The incentives for the spread of a model are endogenous and carry a missionary tendency, which may include a range of instruments, from persuasion and nudging to coercion. According to Weyland, this form of influence seeks to exploit the vulnerabilities of foreign regimes to promote its regime model as widely as possible. Although Weyland (*ibid.*), like Tansey, sees ideologically motivated support for autocracy mainly as a phenomenon more observable in the past, unlike Tansey, he also observes its manifestations in the present. In this respect, Weyland refers to the promotion of autocracy by Chávez’s regime. In the future, he sees the potential to exercise this form of influence by Putin’s Russia, which, at the time of the publication of his research, has been pursuing a rather reactive strategy to prevent democratic contagion in the region. Similarly, he sees China as a potential autocracy promoter, which is perceived by developing states in Africa as a development model. According to Weyland, both of these states may take a more proactive stance and become ambitious in ideologically motivated support for autocracy abroad, reflecting their regime model.

More recently, in the context of debate about Beijing’s ideologically motivated efforts to promote authoritarianism beyond China’s borders, an article by Beckley and Brands (2023) in the *Journal of Democracy* should be mentioned. They argue that it is China’s “ideological offensive” that is “at the heart of its efforts to reshape the global order” (*ibid.*, p. 73) and question the resistance to the idea that there may

³⁰ Tansey (2016a, pp. 52–53) mentions the 19th century, when republican and monarchical regimes sought to promote their own regime forms. In the 20th century there was a competition between democracy, communism and fascism, and many of the examples of ideologically motivated regime sponsorship can then be seen in the projects of the fascist and communist international in the interwar and early post-war periods in Europe. Tansey (2016a, p. 53) finds no current instance of the promotion of autocracy that fits his definition. Cases that are often so classified, such as Russia’s involvement in the former area of Soviet Union, Saudi Arabia’s counterrevolutionary policies during the Arab Spring, or China’s engagement in the developing world, are, according to Tansey, other forms of influence absents the essential element that would allow it to be classified as autocracy promotion.

be an ideological component in China's grand strategy. They assert that "to grasp the Chinese challenge, we must grasp its ideological dimensions. If Woodrow Wilson and his followers wanted to make the world safe for democracy, the PRC's rulers want to do the same for autocracy. For them, autocracy is not simply a means of political control or a ticket to self-enrichment, but a set of deeply held ideas about the proper relationship between rulers and the masses." (ibid., p. 66). They also argue that Chinese belief in the superiority of its autocratic model stems from the regimes' insecurity, as the illiberal PRC finds itself in a world led by a liberal hegemon – the United States. For Beijing, this might lead to the perception of "pervasive danger and a strong desire to refashion the world order so that the PRC's particular form of government is not just protected but privileged." (ibid.). They see it as why the Chinese regime is engaged in an "aggressive effort to make the world safe for autocracy and to corrupt and destabilize democracies." (ibid.). In their view, the Chinese leaders are not mistaken if they think a world grounded in liberal values is one in which their illiberal government must be rendered permanently insecure. And as an authoritarian China becomes powerful, "it inevitably looks to strengthen the forces of illiberalism – and to weaken those of democracy – as a way to enhance its influence and bolster its own model." (ibid., p. 68).

1.3.1.2. *Democracy Resistance*

Regarding the "democracy resistance" concept, Tansey (2016a, p. 37) distinguishes *two primary motivations* that lead an external actor to sponsor a regime abroad. *The first* concerns cases where a transition to democracy in one setting is seen as threatening political authority in another. External actors may fear that the fall of authoritarianism abroad will have a contagion effect and unleash democratic forces in their domestic environment. As a result, they may be interested in protecting authoritarians abroad, primarily to preserve their own political power. The "fear of contagion" (ibid., p. 50) thus motivates sponsoring autocratic regimes abroad. *The second* motivation relates to considerations of policy alignment. Powerful states often wish to maintain and protect authoritarian regimes abroad to ensure sympathetic and pliant allies remain in power. Such support for autocratic regimes comes to the fore when there is a disconnect between government policy and popular opinion, raising concerns that free and fair elections would give rise to a new government that might break existing alliances and commitments. Support for

autocracy in such cases stems from strategic concerns about national security and economic interests. These motivations lead to policies that may best be described as democracy resistance. Tansey notes that these two sets of policies are related but at the same time distinct – “They are related in that they both rest on intentional efforts to bolster autocratic regimes abroad. They are distinct in that they are driven by different underlying motivations.” (ibid., p. 37). He then defines democracy resistance “as policies designed to support autocratic regimes abroad as a means to avoid the negative externalities that come with transitions to democracy.” (ibid., pp. 37–38).

The “reactionary” or “resistance” dimension of sponsorship is widespread in the literature.³¹ One of the more elaborated conceptualizations is offered by Christian von Soest (2015), who explores the motives and effects of “authoritarian collaboration” and underscores that cooperation between autocrats may change when they feel an existential threat. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between normal times and existential regime crises,³² which may increase the pressure to intervene abroad (von Soest, 2015, pp. 625–626). Similarly to Tansey (2016a), Risse and Babayan (2015, pp. 385–386) came up with the argument that the efforts of democratic actors to promote democracy have the potential to trigger a response from illiberal powers if at least one of two conditions is met. *First*, they cite an external actor who sees the Western democracy promotion in the target state as a

³¹ Already Jackson (2010) mentions the provision of support by an external actor in cases of concern about the potential spillover of protests and revolutions that may spread democratization in the region of its influence. In this sense, Vanderhill (2013, p. 23) also highlights situations where external actors may apply a policy of *counter-promotion* in response to the endeavors of democratic actors to promote democracy. Nodia (2014) then argues that what is called autocracy promotion is rather *resistance to Western influence* and its *democracy promotion*, noting that “in the world dominated by democracies, ‘autocracy promotion’ masquerades as defense of the underdog” (ibid., p. 143). Rather than the term “autocracy promoters”, she uses “democracy resisters” (ibid., p. 140), which better captures the nature of the Russian influence examined in hybrid regimes placed on the fault lines between Russia and the West.

³² Such a crisis can be triggered, for example, by elections, which may play a dual role in hybrid regimes. On the one hand, they may serve as a tool for incumbents to stay in power through their manipulation; on the other, they carry the risk of presenting an opportunity for the opposition to participate, albeit in a limited way, in the contest. Elections are also an opportunity for external democracy promoters to provide assistance to the opposition, and therefore pose a certain risk to the incumbents. Similarities in geographic proximity, shared history and social structure may also play a role in the decision to intervene. In this context, von Soest (2015, pp. 627–628) refers to the assistance that monarchies provided to each other during the Arab Spring, while the regime change in republican regimes was acceptable to them.

threat to the survival of its own regime. Second, they refer to a situation where the external actor perceives democracy promotion as *threatening its geostrategic interests* (political, economic, or military). According to the authors, it is then mainly the *effectiveness* rather than the selected instruments and strategies of these democracy-promoting efforts that may provoke a response from the authoritarian actor (ibid., p. 386).

Finally, Tolstrup (2015, pp. 678–680) examines the role of the black knights during elections in hybrid regimes in Eastern Europe. Tolstrup uses the term “black knights election bolstering” to describe how external actors (both non-democratic and democratic) act as guardians of autocracy or may pose a challenge to democracy. In this context, he identifies several motivations on the part of the external actors that lead them to resist democratization or regime change in another country. Such change would threaten their geopolitical and economic objectives and cooperation with the present regime. Likewise, in the case of spillover of protests, it may become a menace to broader interests in the region or possibly within the external actor’s regime per se. Tolstrup argues that the external actors will decide where specifically to provide assistance based on where their resources are most needed and effective. In this respect, it should be in those cases with highly competitive elections where the incumbent can lose power.

1.3.2. Passive Influences – Authoritarian Diffusion

The starting point for distinguishing between different types of influence is the role of the agenda – whether such influence is the result of a deliberate policy by external actors or not. This leads to a distinction between active and passive influences, where passive influences operate at the domestic policy level without the integral role of deliberate efforts by international actors (Tansey, 2016a, p. 39). Passive influences are thus understood here as independent of any foreign agenda directed at a regime abroad. As noted above, while Tansey divides international influences into passive and active, he mainly focuses on the active forms. Thus, this work offers its own, yet certainly *not exhaustive*, division of passive forms.³³ The author

³³ Ambrosio (2010, p. 379) notes that because diffusion theory has emerged from a wide range of disciplines and fields and has sought to answer numerous and diverse questions, there are almost as many explanations of how diffusion works as there are studies. Such fragmentation is well illustrated by Elkins and Simmons (2005, pp. 38–39) who reveal up to 30 different types of diffusion.

draws on existing literature addressing the issue of passive influences, often subsumed under the concept of *diffusion* in the literature. As was the case of active influences, one may encounter a problematic conceptualization of this passive dimension of external influences, leading to a situation where the different forms overlap and are often used interchangeably.

Diffusion is a concept that is broadly used in social sciences. It lacks a single definition and thus may encompass a variety of forms of influence, even active ones. Thus, on the one hand, one may encounter conceptualizations that completely exclude any intentionality, and diffusion is a process that unfolds without any programmatic effort on the part of any of the actors (Elkins & Simmons, 2005). On the other hand, some definitions also include active coercive influences under this concept (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 150; Shipan & Volden, 2008, p. 841). In the last decade, diffusion has also been employed in research on comparative autocratization to refer to the passive dimension of external authoritarian influence. In this regard, one may encounter the term *authoritarian diffusion* in the literature (Ambrosio, 2010; Ambrosio & Tolstrup, 2019; Gel'Man & Lankina, 2008; Hall & Ambrosio, 2017; Lankina, Libman, & Obydenkova, 2016; Tansey, 2016a, p. 40). Nevertheless, the problem of conceptual stretching is also present among scholars dealing with diffusion research in autocracies, as some work with both active and passive forms of international influence while using the concept of authoritarian diffusion (Gel'Man & Lankina, 2008; Lankina, Libman, & Obydenkova, 2016), which makes the conceptualization challenging.³⁴

In conceptualizing authoritarian diffusion, this work draws to some extent on Elkins and Simmons (2005, p. 38), who understand diffusion as “the actions and choices

Categorization of these processes depends on the purpose of the study and the degree of simplification of the definition by the researchers.

³⁴ Thomas Ambrosio (2010) attempts to deal with this conceptual ambiguity by situating his definition of authoritarian diffusion between these two positions – the one that is entirely passive and one that includes active influences. This allows external actors to deliberately seek to spread practices, but without coercing potential adopters (ibid., 378). Such a conceptualization precludes the use of coercion and power to force political change in another state. According to Ambrosio, rather than forcibly spreading their form of government, contemporary autocrats seek to create conditions that provide protection for regime change, and thus seek above all to ensure that “the democratic West can not impose its form of government on them.” (ibid.). However, even this conceptualization understanding diffusion as a “largely indirect and passive process” (ibid.), is inappropriate with respect to the division made in this work. Still, the influences that Ambrosio describes are categorized here under active forms and understood as democracy resistance.

of one country affect another, but not through any collaboration, imposition, or otherwise programmed efforts on any part of the actors.” In this thesis, this conceptualization is used only with regard to the *unintended efforts on the part of the external side of that influence but not so on the recipient side*. It is taken into account both the strictness of the division of influence and its conceptualization by Tansey (2016a; 2016b). At the same time, literature that highlights the role of domestic actors and recipients of external influence is considered (Clapham, 2007; Fourie, 2015; Peiffer & Englebort, 2012; Tolstrup, 2013; 2014; Tull, 2011). These actors need not be passive but may actively shape and form cooperation with the external actor according to their agenda and goals.

The literature on authoritarian diffusion mentions several key forms of international influence. The *first* area of passive influence examined in this work is the role of “linkage” to an external non-democratic actor. The debate about linkage draws on the notion of linkages to the democratic West by Levitsky and Way (2010). Their conceptualization is complemented by Tolstrup’s (2013; 2014) critique of the rigidity of Levitsky and Way’s approach, which stems from their focus on structural factors shaping this kind of influence. Tolstrup thus brings into the theoretical debate the vital role played by elites in the recipient state of influence, who can strengthen or weaken structural ties depending on their agenda and motivations. The conceptualization is then adapted to the work of Tansey, Koehler, and Schmotz (2016) and Schmotz and Tansey (2018), who came up with the notion of “autocratic linkage,” adapting Levitsky and Way’s concept to ties between autocracies.

The *second* strand of this work focuses on the issue of diffusion of authoritarianism “by example.” This reflects mainly the debate about China’s rise and its role and potential to become a model in economic and political development (e.g., Ambrosio, 2012; 2010; Demiryol, 2022; Breslin, 2011; Fourie, 2015; Halper, 2010; Hodzi, 2020; Huang, 2010; Kennedy, 2010; Kurlantzick, 2007; McCauley, Pearson & Wang, 2022; Ramo, 2004; Sojková, 2017; 2018). To a lesser extent, this discussion also includes Venezuela (Gratius, 2022; Griffiths, 2010; de la Torre, 2017; Rosales, 2016), and Russia (Averre, 2007; Casula, 2013; Jackson, 2010; Makarychev, 2008; Okara, 2007) as non-democratic states that represent a developmental model or exemplar for other countries that may wish to “emulate” for being a welcome alternative to the liberal democratic model of the West.

The strategy of “extraversion” (Bayart, 1993; Bayart & Ellis, 2000; Clapham, 1996; 2007; Peiffer & Englebert, 2012; Tull, 2011) represents the *third* and final form of passive influence. Here, it examines how African elites use the presence of an external actor and dependence on its support to consolidate their power and position over domestic opponents and competitors. Some studies have argued that China should not only play a theoretical role in this strategy (Clapham, 2007; Peiffer & Englebert, 2012; Tull, 2011), and as some scholars have demonstrated in several cases, African political elites instrumentalize Chinese influence to consolidate their power and regime (Alves & Chichava, 2018; Corkin 2013; 2019; Dreher et al., 2019; Hartmann, 2019; Wang, 2022).

1.3.2.1. *Autocratic Linkage*

The discussion around authoritarian international linkage is based on the theory and conceptualization presented by Levitsky and Way (2006; 2010), explaining the variation in the democratization of post-Cold War hybrid regimes through the concepts of “Western leverage” and “linkage to the West.” Western leverage can be defined as “governments’ vulnerability to external democratizing pressure.” (Levitsky & Way, 2010, p. 40). A country’s vulnerability to such pressure plays a crucial role – where states lack bargaining power and are heavily affected by Western punitive measures, the level of leverage is high; where countries have considerable bargaining power and may withstand these Western sanctions without significant harm, leverage is low (*ibid.*, p. 41).

According to Levitsky and Way, this pressure is based on three factors. The *first* and most important factor is the size and strength of the states and economies of each country. Governments of weak states with small, aid-dependent economies (a large part of sub-Saharan Africa would fall into this group) are more vulnerable to external pressure compared to governments of larger countries with considerable military or/and economic power (e.g., China and Russia). *Second*, coercion may be constrained by the competing foreign policy objectives of the West. In such cases, where economic and strategic interests override the West’s interest in pressuring democratization, autocratic governments may have the power to stave off external demands for democracy. *Third*, leverage can be reduced by the presence of “black

knights”³⁵ – powers whose economic, military, or diplomatic assistance helps mitigate the impact of Western democratizing pressure.³⁶

According to Levitsky and Way (2010), *linkage to the West* is crucial to understanding variation in the effectiveness of international democratizing efforts in the post-Cold War era. Linkage plays a more critical role in democratization, as leverage alone rarely translates into effective democratizing influence. Linkage should also increase the likelihood that Western states will use leverage to democratize foreign countries. They define linkage as “the density of ties (economic, political, diplomatic, social, and organizational) and cross-border flows (of capital, goods and services, people, and information) among particular countries and the United States, the EU (and pre-2004 EU members), and Western-dominated multilateral institutions. Linkage is a multidimensional concept that encompasses the myriad networks of interdependence that connect individual polities, economies, and societies to Western democratic communities.” (ibid., 43). In this context, they then distinguish a total of six different dimensions of these ties in their book, specifically 1) *economic linkage*, which includes trade, investment, and credit; 2) *intergovernmental linkage*, which includes bilateral diplomatic and military ties as well as participation in Western-led alliances, treaties, and international organizations; and 3) *technocratic linkage*, which includes the participation of Western-educated state elites and/or professional ties to Western universities or multilateral institutions; 4) *social linkage* involves flows of people across borders, including tourism, immigration and refugees, and diaspora networks; 5) *informational linkage* involves flows of information across borders through telecommunications, Internet connections, and Western media penetration; finally, there is 6) *civil-society linkage*, i.e., local ties to Western-based NGOs, international religious and party organizations, and other transnational networks (ibid., pp. 43–44). These ties are rooted in several historical factors, including

³⁵ Levitsky and Way (2010) adopt the notion “black knights” from Hufbauer et al (2007) to describe actors who undermined the impact of sanctions imposed by the US during the Cold War. Support from these actors may largely offset any deprivation caused by sanctions. In the period since the end of the World War II, offsets have been particularly evident in episodes where major powers have come into ideological conflict over the policies of a smaller state: e.g., US sanctions against Cuba and Nicaragua, and Soviet sanctions against Yugoslavia and Albania (Hufbauer et al., 2007, p. 8).

³⁶ According to Levitsky and Way (2010, p. 41), Russia, China, Japan, and France played this role at various times after the end of the Cold War, using economic, diplomatic, and other assistance to strengthen authoritarian governments in neighboring states or former colonies.

colonialism, military occupation, and geopolitical alliances. However, *geographic proximity* is identified as the most important source of linkage, as it has the potential to lead to dependence between states while offering opportunities for interaction (ibid., p. 44).

Theoretically, it is anticipated that if both linkage and leverage are high, the external pressure on democratization is consistent and intense (this is the case of democratization in Eastern Europe and the Americas). Where only linkage is high, the democratizing pressure will be indirect yet significant (as in Mexico or Taiwan). The democratizing pressure will be limited and only sporadic if the linkage is low but leverage high (most countries in sub-Saharan Africa). Finally, in cases like Russia, where both linkage and leverage are low, the effect of international pressure on democratization will be minimal (ibid., p. 53).

However, this structural approach by Levitsky and Way has also been criticized by some scholars (Hartmann, 2016; Slater, 2011; Tolstrup, 2013; 2014), who emphasize an excessive rigidity that is particularly evident when explaining variation *within* regions.³⁷ It is Tolstrup (2013; 2014), in particular, who details the limits of applying Levitsky and Way's theoretical framework when focusing on a specific region (Eastern Europe, in his study). According to Tolstrup (2013, p. 717), Levitsky and Way's structural explanation helps explain *inter-regional* differences but cannot address *intra-regional variation*. For Tolstrup, the structural approach is

³⁷ Slater (2011), in his review of Levitsky and Way's book, underscores the limits of applying the concepts to some cases of democratization in Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa. According to Slater, it is necessary to look for explanations for variation in democratization other than ties to the West. More generally, he points to the limits of their work in the regions that have undergone colonization or military confrontation with the West. In these regions the ruling elites and the opposition are more likely to face discredit if they are perceived as puppets of the West than its enemies (Slater, 2011, p. 378). Thus, the differences across cases and regions may not be the result of different levels of linkage but due to how these ties have been manifested historically. It is then this international "status anxiety", derived from fear of Western dominance rather than its ostracism, that allows to better theorize how Western power and interventionism may promote autocracy in these states (ibid.). Hartmann (2016) also arrives with a critique of the theoretical framework by Levitsky and Way as it fails to explain the variation in democratization in sub-Saharan Africa, which they erroneously view as a homogeneous entity. Hartmann explains intra-regional variation through regional forms of linkage and leverage that may influence regime dynamics, with regional organizations and states playing a major role in it. He argues that leverage, rather than linkage, plays a more important role, as "leverage is of prime importance at the regional level. Without a strong mandate of regional organisations and strong hegemony, there will be fewer transnational regional linkages in the political and economic sphere and no framework in place to make socialisation come about." (Hartmann, 2016, p. 86).

unconvincing because it implies that these ties are predetermined and cannot be modified if there are changes in actors' preferences. This makes Levitsky and Way's theoretical framework "too crude and static" (Tolstrup, 2014, p. 127). Moreover, such an explanation cannot account for cases where states are geographically and culturally close but differ in their ties to external actors, nor for those cases where the density of these ties changes dramatically over time.

Tolstrup thus calls for a dynamic approach that may explain both the stability of linkage and its transformations and arrives with the argument that the density of ties is subject to political decisions. Therefore, more attention should be paid to the domestic factors shaping such decisions. According to Tolstrup, *domestic elites* play a crucial role, acting as *gatekeepers* who may decide whether to strengthen or weaken ties with an external actor. These elites have a critical role in determining whether or not external influence will be successful. Building ties (or thinning them) is then not structurally determined. Still, it is a "political process, driven by political actors who actively seek to mold relations with the outside world in ways that help them to gain and keep political and economic power." (Tolstrup, 2014, p. 127). Tolstrup then distinguishes three types of domestic elites or gatekeepers – *ruling*, *economic*, and *opposition elites*. It is mainly the ruling elites that play a crucial role in forming ties, as they are not limited by their connection to a single organization or corporation but make decisions that have implications for society, the economy, and the political regime. The actions of elites can be motivated *rationally*, *strategically*, or *ideologically* (Tolstrup, 2013, pp. 725–727).

Tolstrup (*ibid.*, pp. 722–725) divides his modified conceptualization of linkage by Levitsky and Way (2010; 2006) into five dimensions, which he adjusts by the central role of gatekeepers. These include 1) *economic* linkages determined by elites who hold political power and decide what trade agreements are made or abolished, request for loans and foreign aid, or approve the offered external assistance. Therefore, the influence of political elites on economic linkage is critical, especially in a system where the economy is subject to greater government control. In other cases, economic and opposition elites may play an important role; 2) *intergovernmental* linkages are the dimension where ruling elites decide whether to join new intergovernmental initiatives. Opposition and civil society elites then may build their alliances and therefore undermine the ties of political elites; 3)

technocratic and *social* linkages (including migration or tourism) are less easily influenced by domestic elites (except in totalitarian regimes), as they change independently as a product of the aggregate activities of the broader population; 4) *information* linkages can be influenced by the ruling political elite, who take measures regulating the flow of information. Opposition and civil society may also develop independent communication links with external actors; 5) *civil society* linkages are also largely determined by political elites who (dis)allow their development. Opposition elites can then, in a favorable environment, build ties with international NGOs, party organizations, and other networks and actors of their choice.

Tolstrup (2014, pp. 129–130) simultaneously identifies four factors that determine the will and capacity of gatekeepers to influence attachment. The first such factor is *regime type*, i.e., the degree of political pluralism and the role of political institutions, which affect the ability of elites to maneuver in the face of external actors and strengthen or weaken ties. *Economic liberalization* influences the possibilities of economic elites' actions through the degree of autonomy of the economy within which they form ties. As a third factor, *audience expenditure* influences the building of ties according to the audience for whom they are formed and how it is expected to respond. The last factor is *external alternatives*, which play the role of black knights (Levitsky & Way, 2010). However, Tolstrup stresses that these alternative partnerships only make sense if they are studied through the gatekeepers' role in forming ties, thus assuming that political actors can choose which external partner to reject or with whom they want to cooperate. It is, therefore, bargaining power that shapes the strength of linkage.

Tolstrup's work mentions the potential of this approach in research on non-democratic influences. He argues that "there is nothing particularly Western – neither in the logic of the theory nor in the concepts of leverage and linkage – that forces us to only reserve them for such external influence," adding that "leverage and linkage are equally important for determining the success rate of both positive and negative actors." (Tolstrup, 2013, p. 721). Nevertheless, he does not elaborate on this idea any further. A few years later, Tansey, Koehler, and Schmotz (2016) arrived with the concept of "autocratic linkage." It is based on Levitsky and Way's (2010) structural conceptualization, defining it as "the density of ties and cross-

border flows between non-democratic regimes” (Tansey, Koehler, & Schmotz 2016, 5). With it, they explain the survival of autocracies across states and regions since the end of World War II, arguing that “autocratic linkages have important implications for the survival of authoritarian regimes because they foster preferences for status quo politics both among international partners and domestic constituencies.” (ibid.). And although linkage with both democratic and autocratic regimes abroad may at times work to bolster autocratic regimes, autocratic linkage has “distinct and powerful effects that democratic linkage does not.” (ibid.). As a result, autocratic linkage influences the success of international democracy promotion efforts because states with a high density of such ties will not submit to sanctions that may weaken their power. Theoretically, authoritarian ties increase the likelihood that external authoritarian actors will actively support non-democratic incumbents. At the same time, they also assume that these ties will facilitate the processes of *learning* and *emulation* associated with diffusion (ibid., pp. 6–7). The *regional dimension of autocratic linkage* is then considered in research by Schmotz and Tansey (2018) as they examine the role of intra-regional autocratic linkage in the survival of non-democratic regimes through three dimensions – trade, migration, and diplomatic exchanges. They then provide compelling evidence that regional ties reduce the probability of autocratic regime collapse. Thus, they confirm the importance of considering the regional dimension in research on linkage, as Tolstrup had emphasized (2013; 2014).

This work assumes the influence of China’s autocratic linkage on domestic politics in African hybrid regimes. Given the regional focus, Tolstrup’s (2013; 2014) conceptualization of linkage is employed. This is because it considers the possible variation within the region explained by the crucial role of gatekeepers in determining the density of these ties. Moreover, such a modified conceptualization of autocratic linkage fits the characteristics of China-Africa interaction, which, because of the principle of *non-interference*, takes place primarily between political elites who determine how such a cooperation will or will not look.

1.3.2.2. *Emulation*

How countries learn from and emulate the strategies of other countries is debated in various disciplines, including sociology, political science, public policy, and international relations. This, again, results in a great deal of fragmentation and overlapping concepts. Indeed, the very definition of the *emulation* employed in this thesis relies heavily on literature that includes multiple related concepts that attempt to describe the diffusion of policies, institutions, and ideas from one country to another. These include *policy transfer*, *learning*, *lesson-drawing*, or *convergence*, between which it is often difficult to draw boundaries.

In this context, Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, p. 344) mention that “policy transfer, emulation and lesson drawing all refer to a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions, etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place.” Thus, Dolowitz and Marsh are not convinced that the differences in conceptualization are too significant, yet they do not use the concepts of policy transfer and lesson drawing interchangeably. According to them, policy transfer may involve interaction where one supra-national institution forces another government to adopt a particular policy (*ibid.*). As Jones and Newburn (2007, p. 23) point out, “Even where policy transfer is coerced, the idea of policy transfer suggests that political agents are aware that they are drawing upon knowledge and experiences of other jurisdictions.” Thus, this understanding of policy transfer would be more in line with the active external influences as defined in this work.

Even in the literature on external non-democratic influences, one may come across scholars (Kneuer & Demmelhuber, 2016) viewing policy transfer as part of passive influence. They classify it alongside other mechanisms such as *example* and *demonstration*, while simultaneously ascribing to it a certain active dimension on the part of the external actor. However, it is the domestic actor that determines which ideas, institutions, policies, or behaviors are attractive and that demands and seeks new solutions or innovations and is therefore in favor of lesson learning or policy transfer. However, they do not rule out the possibility that external actors will “sell” a policy or experience as attractive for emulation. In their view, learning

and policy transfer are valuable approaches that shed light on specific mechanisms of interaction between internal and external environments, such as *copying*, *adaptation*, and *generation of hybrid models*, *synthesis*, *inspiration*, *emulation*, *voluntary adoption*, *social/political learning*, but also include the mechanism of *coercive transfer* (ibid.) implying a somewhat active influence from an external actor.

Unlike policy transfer, lesson drawing fits more closely with the passive dimension of influence explored in this work. According to Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, 344), it assumes that “political actors or decision makers in one country draw lessons from one or more other countries, which they then apply to their own political system. This focuses on ‘voluntary’ policy transfer, which occurs as a result of the free choices of political actors.” Similarly, Rose (1991, pp. 21–22) conceptualizes emulation as one type of lesson drawing³⁸, where emulation “accepts that a particular programme elsewhere provides the best standard for designing legislation at home, albeit requiring adaptation to take different national circumstances into account.” Likewise, Bennett (1991, p. 221) examines emulation as one process of *policy convergence*³⁹ and also as a form of lesson drawing where “the central

³⁸ In addition to emulation, Rose (1991, pp. 21–22) lists other types of lesson drawing as “copying”, which is the more or less intact adoption of a program already operating in another jurisdiction; “hybridization”, is then understood as the combination of elements of programs from two different places; then Rose also mentions “synthesis”, which combines known elements from programs in three or more different places; finally, “inspiration”, refers to the process whereby programs elsewhere are used as an intellectual stimulus to develop a new program without analogy. The actual drawing of lesson builds on empirical findings about programs that are being implemented elsewhere to create a new program that could be adopted in a domestic setting. Formulating a program, according to Rose, can be considered a creative act, not a process of copying.

³⁹ According to Bennett (1991, pp. 218–219), convergence may *first* mean a convergence of policy goals, a convergence of intentions in addressing common policy problems. *Second*, it may refer to policy content, defined as the more formal manifestations of government policy. *Thirdly*, it may be a convergence of the policy instruments available for policy administration. *Fourth*, convergence occurs in terms of policy outcomes, impacts or consequences. *Finally*, there may be convergence in policy style, which is the process by which policy responses are formulated (e.g., consensual or conflictual, incremental or rational, anticipatory or reactive, corporatist or pluralist, etc.). As Bennett points out, however, these distinctions are hardly clear-cut analytical categories, since such distinctions tend to divide policymaking into overly mechanical and stage-based parts not sensitive to the changing and interactive feedback processes that shape policy. Convergence, then, should be understood mainly as a process of “becoming” rather than as a condition of “being” more similar. The theoretical dimension that Bennett argues is crucial in convergence research is thus one of time rather than space as it implies a certain development over time. Here, the point of reference for comparison is not another country, but the deviation or variability from a certain previous stage. For this reason, then, the causes of convergence identified by Bennett are conceptualized as *processes*

characteristic of emulation is the utilization of evidence about a programme or programmes from overseas and a drawing of lessons from that experience. This process of lesson-drawing then produces a convergence on some dimension of policy effort. (...), emulation might explain a convergence of policy goals, of policy content or of policy instruments.” However, by logic, this cannot account for policy outcome or style in emulating policy goals because the policy of another country is employed as a model that may be adapted and improved. In other words, “The other country’s policy serves as a blueprint that pushes a general idea on to the political agenda.” (ibid.).

In the literature on comparative democratization and autocratization research, it is possible to come across another widely used concept – “learning” (Ambrosio, 2017; Diamond, 2006; Hall & Ambrosio, 2017; Heydemann & Leenders, 2011; Ortmann & Thompson, 2014; Weyland, 2017; Zito & Schout, 2009) – which is important to mention in relation to the emulation concept. The current literature exploring “authoritarian learning” builds on the debate about defining policy transfer and lesson drawing, and again, the idea is defined in both passive and active terms. There is no clear definition of what authoritarian learning is and is not. Hall and Ambrosio (2017) define authoritarian learning as a passive form of authoritarian influence, i.e., as a “*process in which authoritarian regimes adopt survival strategies based upon the past successes and failures of other governments.*” (ibid., p. 143; italics in original). Weyland (2017, p. 7) contrasts authoritarian learning with emulation as two types of “autocratic cooperation and diffusion.” According to Weyland, learning “most clearly gravitates toward the rationalist pole because it seeks pragmatic improvements to facilitate the achievement of interests,” whereas emulation falls toward the “constructivist pole as actors are swayed by normative or symbolic appeals or social-conformity pressures; they seek to live up to advanced standards or follow the trend set by a relevant peer group.” (ibid.).⁴⁰ Weyland’s conceptualization works with a form of authoritarian influence – diffusion – which

in order to emphasize the dynamic rather than static properties of the phenomenon. These processes are then, apart from the *emulation* employed in this work, also *elite networking*, *harmonization* and *penetration*. These are the most common determinants of convergence that can be encountered in the literature on comparative case studies, however, this list is not exhaustive (ibid., p. 220).

⁴⁰ According to Weyland (2017), learning is more typical of non-democratic regimes that do not have dominant ideologies, such as Putin’s Russia. In contrast, authoritarianism that embodies a new ideological model, such as Mussolini’s Italy, will be emulated.

he understands as active. In his understanding, emulation and learning can be the outcomes of active rational or ideologically motivated efforts by an authoritarian power to influence domestic politics in other parts of the world. The domestic factors also play a role, but more in the sense that the elites of the recipient of influence the *selection* of what will be imported from the foreign model that is *imposed* on them (ibid., pp. 8–14).

Emulation, learning, and lesson drawing are employed interchangeably to deal with the blurred boundary between concepts. Drawing on Bennett's (1991) and Dolowitz and Marsh's (1996) work, emulation is understood as a *voluntary process whereby elites in one country selectively⁴¹ and deliberately draw on the experiences of one or more countries that are perceived as models, which they then adapt to their own political system*. It should be noted, however, that such a conceptualization comes with certain pitfalls, particularly in research on non-democratic regimes. In his conceptualization, Bennett (1991, 220) emphasizes that emulation should not be inferred from the successive adoption of similar policies by different states when there is no empirical evidence of conscious copying, learning from experience, or adaptation; however, such a requirement runs up against the methodological limitations of examining authoritarian regimes and their effects on domestic politics in other states. The information that is crucial to identifying such conscious policy emulation is more likely to be available in democracies, which exhibit far less opacity, making it easier to detect it (Hall & Ambrosio, 2017).⁴²

Tracing the process of emulation requires identifying a causal process to the source of change, which is difficult in an authoritarian context. However, this does not

⁴¹As Fourie (2015, p. 302) points out, emulation is by definition different from imitation or copying because of its *selective nature*. This selectivity is sometimes deliberate and stems from policymakers' desire to adapt foreign experiences to local specificities.

⁴²Some scholars (Ambrosio, 2017, p. 185; Hall & Ambrosio, 2017, p. 144) argue that such a requirement to track the process of learning is highly challenging in autocracies where it is difficult to prove it takes place. Researchers thus have to rely on correlations between examples of the prior introduction of authoritarian practices and the adoption of similar policies by other autocratic governments in later periods. Similarly, then, Fourie (2015, p. 295) points out that the issue of research on emulation is complicated by carrying a certain "stigma" associated with possible intellectual robbery and weakness on the part of the emulator. As a result, elites are still sometimes reluctant to make overt references to foreign models in official documents and statements, as they could be seen as ignorant of the specifics of their society. At the same time, the convergence of policies or trajectories of several developing countries does not in itself prove that emulation has taken place. This makes emulation a challenging area of study and difficult to establish causality.

mean that it is impossible to examine how a foreign development model is perceived among elites and in the society of the potential emulator in the first place and what elements of it are seen as worthy of adoption and adaptation in the domestic environment. Instead, it is appropriate to examine whether such a debate is occurring at all, among whom, and to what features of the external model it relates. This is the route taken in research on the emulation of the Chinese development model in Africa by some scholars (Ambrosio, 2012; Fourie, 2015; Hodzi, 2020). This dissertation then builds on these studies.

1.3.2.3. *Extraversion*

The last concept examined in this work is “extraversion.” Jean-François Bayart first came up with the idea of extraversion in his study *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (1989 published in French; 1993 in English), to explain the dependence of the African continent on the outside world throughout history, be it the period of the slave trade, colonization or the post-colonial cold war period, demonstrating that Africa’s “unequal entry into international systems was for several centuries a major and dynamic mode of the historicity of African societies, not the magical suspension of it” (Bayart, 1993, p. 27). It is the concept of extraversion through which Africa’s dependent status is examined. It represents “the means of integrating Africa into the main currents of world history through the medium of dependence.” (Bayart & Ellis, 2000, p. 241). Extraversion emphasizes the role that African elites have played and continue to play in mobilizing international support and resources to strengthen and consolidate their power position and promote specific interests in domestic power competition – “The leading actors in sub-Saharan societies have tended to compensate for their difficulties in the autonomisation of their power and in intensifying the exploitation of their dependents by deliberate resource to the strategies of extraversion, mobilising resources derived from their (possibly unequal) relationship with the external environment.” (Bayart, 1993, pp. 21–22).

Bayart’s approach discredits the ideas of weakness, passivity, and marginalization attributed to Africa and Africans by dependency theory (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979; Bienefeld, 1988; Howe, 1981; Leys, 1996; Velasco, 2002) as causes of Africa’s economic status, where the main feature of the last three centuries has not been continent’s growing integration into the Western world economy, but a rather

“inability to pull the continent into its magnetic field.” (Bayart, 1993, p. 21). As Bayart further argues, “Africans have been active agents in the *mise en dependence* of their societies, sometimes opposing it and at other times joining it,” adding that it would be “naïve to indulge in an anachronistic interpretation of these indigenous strategies in terms of ‘nationalism’ or ‘collaboration’ where in fact considerations of local interest came into play, in a world which was indifferent to the national idea but which was subject to serious intra- and inter-societal tensions.” (ibid. p. 24, italics in original). The relationship with the external environment then became a major source of political centralization and economic accumulation, where the economic opening of the continent naturally accentuated political extraversion by enhancing opportunities for commercial mediation; hence, the intensification of internal exploitation became less necessary. Bayart, therefore, rejects the portrayal of African governments as victims of their own vulnerability. On the contrary, African governments have consciously and through their own choices exploited sources of dependency while, both on their own domestic political stage and within the global system, pursuing their own goals “within the margins of failure and success that the implementation of any strategy entails.” (ibid., p. 26).

In the context of China’s growing engagement on the continent, it was not until Clapham’s (2007) essay that it became argued that China should theoretically “fit” into this framework. However, Clapham argues, China’s arrival is far from equating to the role of the slave traders or colonialists as was the case in previous episodes of Africa’s encounter with the outside world, yet it cannot be described as a relationship based on equality, as both sides often portray it. According to Clapham (2007, p. 364), one of the reasons why China in Africa is so broadly welcomed and readily accepted is that it “fits so neatly into the familiar patterns of rentier statehood and politics with which Africa’s rulers have been accustomed to maintain themselves”; it is China, then, that provides a welcome counterweight to the governmental programs promoted by the Washington Consensus. However, this does not mean that China is offering a new model for Africa’s engagement with the outside world, rather, its role is precisely to reinforce the old system (ibid.). In this context, Alves and Chichiva (2018) note that while China’s growing engagement in Africa since 2000 has undoubtedly strengthened the portfolios of extraversion of many African elites towards Western partners and secured it some recognition on

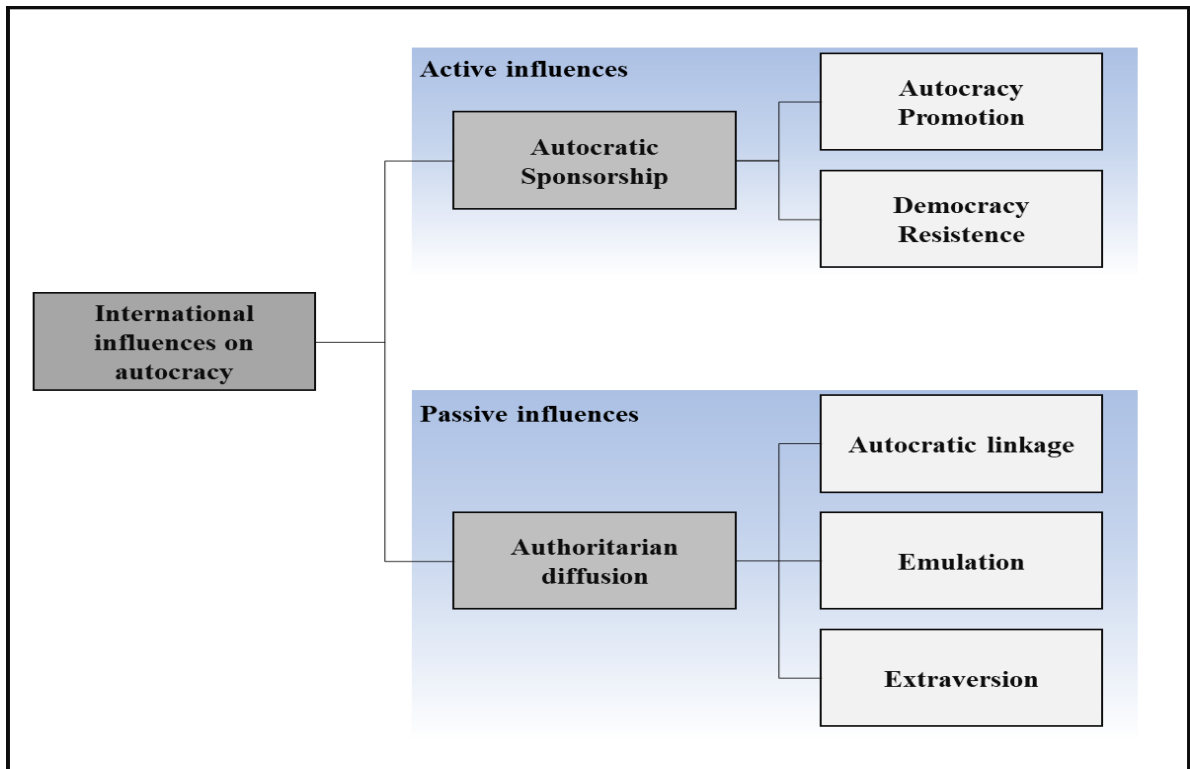
the continent, China is by no means spared the same fate, as so far, this type of agenda by African elites has proven in most cases to be self-serving and anti-development.

Studies that have examined the extraversion concept in relation to Western actors and donors have also gradually begun to mention the theoretical role of China as a factor that may negatively affect the promotion of the Western democratization agenda on the continent by strengthening the “extraversion portfolio” – the capacity of African governments to resist Western pressures (Peiffer & Englebert, 2012, p. 377). Similarly, scholars have looked at China’s negative influence on security cooperation with African governments, which has the potential to constrain the interests of Western actors in some states and strengthen the bargaining power of African states (Tull, 2011, p. 24). In the following years, there has been a surge of studies that began to take into account the role of the African agency face to face China (e.g., Carmody & Kragelund, 2016; Chiyemura, Gambino, & Zajontz, 2023; Dreher et al., 2019; Mohan & Lampert, 2013; Zhou, 2022) and, finally, its association with the concept of extraversion (Alves & Chichava, 2018; Corkin, 2013; 2019; Hartmann, 2019; Wang, 2022). Then, as Hartmann (2019) underscores, given the long history of extraversion, it should not be surprising that Chinese actors are drawn into domestic power games where they are perceived as allies of one political party, government, or ethnic group. For ruling elites seeking to maintain power, the stability of their governments, and sustain their survival, Chinese influence is welcomed, as they may use it to further their own political aims. The environment of neopatrimonial⁴³ African governments reinforces such goals based on clientelism, personalism, and nepotism, seeking to acquire material resources that may ensure the functioning of clientelist ties important to the survival of the ruling group. Hartmann thus emphasizes that the agency of the ruling elite matters

⁴³ According to Erdmann and Engel (2007, 105), neopatrimonialism is a mixture of two co-existing and partly interwoven types of domination – patrimonial and legal-rational bureaucratic. It takes place within the framework of modern stateness, wherein although formal structures and rules exist, in practice, the separation of the private and public spheres is not always observed. These spheres penetrate each other – “the patrimonial penetrates the legal-rational system and twists its logic, functions, an output, but does not take exclusive control over the legal-rational logic.” Thus, “informal politics invades formal institutions.” (ibid.). In this rule, informality and formality are closely linked in various ways and varying degrees; this combination is institutionalized. Thus, hypothetically, people can, to some extent, select which logic they want to employ to achieve their objectives and best realize their interests (ibid.)

because it shapes regime dynamics within Africa and determines the development trajectories of states. The rise of China and its engagement in Africa has reinforced such an agency by opening up alternative avenues for many governments to obtain loans and finance large and visible infrastructure projects.

Figure 4: Supplemented division of international influences on autocracy



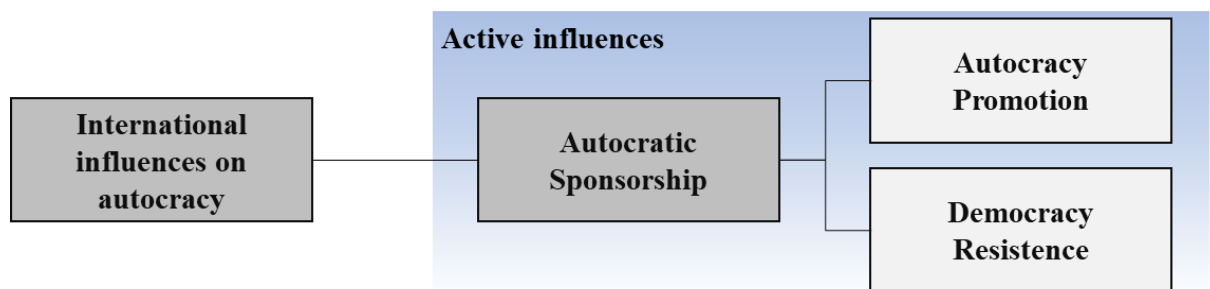
Source: Tansey 2016a; 2016b; supplemented by author

Based on Tansey's (2016a; 2016b) conceptualization and categorization of international influences, and in light of the debate in the literature regarding authoritarian diffusion and the forms of external influences that fall under it, this dissertation classifies influences as presented in Figure 4. These forms in the typology are operationalized in the following chapters and examined by looking at the influence of authoritarian China in African hybrid regimes.

2. China as an Autocratic Sponsor

This category of international influence refers to cases where external actors actively engage in the domestic politics of a foreign country with the specific intention of supporting authoritarian elites. The broad category refers to *autocratic sponsorship*, including “intentional international assistance to elite incumbents to help them retain their positions in power.” (Tansey, 2016a, p. 49). These policies aimed at supporting autocratic governments may differ. In this regard, the author follows Tansey’s conceptualization (Figure 5) that distinguishes two forms of sponsorship: *autocracy promotion*, which is ideologically motivated, and *democracy resistance* driven by strategic and instrumental motives related to concerns about the domestic and international repercussions arising from regime change for the recipient of such external sponsorship (ibid.).

Figure 5: Examined active international influences



Source: Tansey 2016a; 2016b

2.1. Autocracy Promotion

Autocracy promotion is defined narrowly as an intentional ideological influence by China that is actively projected toward its counterparts. Such a narrowed understanding can be seen as contentious as some scholars consider autocracy promotion mainly a form of manifestation of authoritarian power that is typical of a bygone era (Tansey, 2016a; 2016b; Weyland, 2017) or as an influence rather related to authoritarian regimes other than China (Vanderhill, 2013). The decision to include this conceptualized autocracy promotion is driven by dynamics inside China, which is undergoing centralization and autocratization under Xi’s

leadership⁴⁴ (Economy, 2021; Lee, 2017; Pei, 2020; 2021) whose foreign policy has become more assertive and emphasizing its ideological dimension⁴⁵ (Cabestan, 2022; Eisenman, 2023a; Eisenman & Shinn, 2018; Hackenesch & Bader, 2020; Herman, 2020; Inboden, 2021; Rudd, 2022; Scott, 2021; The Economist, 2020; Tobin, 2020). But then, it is not only these transformations in China and its foreign policy but also the rivalry and competition for influence in the world, especially with the US, that also include Africa (Jones, 2020; Labott, 2021; Repnikova, 2022; Sheehy, 2022; Soule, 2022). This calls for a more nuanced understanding of this form of influence globally and in Africa specifically.⁴⁶

In this work, the effect of ideologically driven autocracy promotion on the quality of democracy in African hybrid regimes is examined quantitatively through statistical data analysis employing linear regression with standard errors clustered on country. The dependent variable captures the degree of autocratization, using the

⁴⁴ In this context, one may refer to the *Document Number Nine* leaked to public in 2013, shortly after Xi came to power, and which “paints a grim picture of what the party sees as the threat posed by liberal ways of thinking. The message conveyed at these meetings [where the officials have been summoned to briefings about the document] has been a chilling one: stick to the party line and denounce any dissent.” (Drezner, 2013). The document shows the CCP and Xi’s fear of a possible erosion of power if the CCP does not root out the seven subversive strands that run through Chinese society. These were listed in the Document as: “Western constitutional democracy”; the promotion of “universal values” of human rights, Western-inspired understanding of media independence and civic participation, zealously pro-market “neoliberalism” and “nihilistic” criticism of the CCP’s traumatic past were identified as other dangers (ibid.). The Document thus signaled Xi’s “shift to a more conservative, traditional leftist stance with his ‘rectification’ campaign to ensure discipline and conspicuous attempts to defend the legacy of Mao Zedong.” (Buckley, 2013).

⁴⁵ The ideological dimension projected into China’s foreign policy has become evident in Xi’s 2017 report delivered at the 19th National Congress of the CPC. He openly referred to China’s specific development path and system – “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, which may constitute a solution for the problems of mankind and development of other countries (Xi, 2017). Xi’s report became understood as yet another indicator that “the party’s pursuit of modernity, power, and international status for China has been strategic, active, and purposeful”, while “Beijing’s aim is nothing less than preeminent status within the global order.” (Tobin, 2020).

⁴⁶ These confronting perspectives has become increasingly evident from some statements by the US officials. For example. A notoriously known speech emphasizing the conflicting perspectives of the US when compared to China was made by former US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton in 2011. During a visit to Zambia, Clinton expressed concerns about the possible neo-colonization of Africa by China and stressed that unlike China “the United States is investing in the people of Zambia, not just the elites, (...). There are more lessons to learn from the United States and democracies.” (Reuters, 2011). A similar vein of criticism was then followed by Clinton’s next visit to Africa in 2012 (Smith, 2012). Current Biden’s administration then defines itself as a democratic transparent partner vis-à-vis Chinese (and Russian) influence on the continent, outlining a return to democracy promotion policy (Wrong & Chutel, 2022).

V-Dem's *Liberal Democracy Index* (Coppedge et al., 2023). The index is inverted⁴⁷ for a better interpretation and reading of the results so that a positive coefficient indicates an increase in autocratization. Conversely, a negative value indicates democratization. The independent variable, China's ideological influence, is operationalized through the frequency of *visits by Communist Party of China (CCP) delegations and cadres*⁴⁸ in a regime year. The author uses the data by AidData (2022), capturing the number of such visits from 2010 to 2020. This allows for partially following the delimited time frame in this work, from 2010 to 2019. The values of the independent variable are delayed by one and two years (Coppedge et al. 2022; McMann et al. 2019) due to the possible endogeneity issue. This explanatory variable is a valid proxy for tracking China's ideological influence in African hybrid regimes as it captures the intensity of cooperation between political parties and the sharing of ideas and information on various issues. The influence of party visits and the associated organizing of seminars and training has not been explored in depth among scholars. Yet, one may encounter studies increasingly covering this topic that have emerged in the last few years (see Allen-Ebrahimian, 2023; Benabdallah, 2020; Cabestan, 2022; Eisenmann, 2023a; Eisenman & Shinn, 2018; Hackenesch & Bader, 2020; Herman, 2020; Sun, 2016). Regarding the theoretical debate, the following hypothesis is tested:

H1: *The autocratization of African hybrid regimes will grow as the number of visits by delegations and cadres of the Communist Party of China increases.*

2.1.1. Results – China's Autocracy Promotion Limited (yet)

The basic regression models (Table 1) show no statistically significant effect. For this reason, no further control variables were added to the analysis. Although regimes in the gray zone (Models 1 and 2) show a positive effect of the CCP visits on autocratization, it is not statistically significant. An unexpectedly negative effect is noted when the observations are restricted to electoral authoritarianism (EA) (Models 3 and 4) and electoral democracies (ED) (Models 5 and 6), yet still with

⁴⁷ The author subtracts the values of the original V-Dem index defining regimes from “0” to a value of “1”, where the more democratic a regime is, the closer it is to a value of 1.

⁴⁸ In the AidData (2022) dataset, the variable *cadre visits* covers the total number of visits by a broader cadre of officials from China in working level meetings, while the variable *CCP visits* includes the total number of visits to a target country by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) delegations. The number of these two types of visits is summed for every regime year.

no statistically significant effect recorded. Even when Xi Jinping's rule period is considered (Models 7 and 8), no statistically significant effect is observed. In the case of regimes in the gray zone, again, the ideological influence of Beijing is positive but remains insignificant. Once again, the effect is negative when the observations are constrained to the EA (Models 9 and 10) and ED regimes (Models 11 and 12). Still, as in all previous models, the influence is not statistically significant. Since this effect was not demonstrated in the baseline regression models, hypothesis H1 can be **rejected**.

Table 1: Regression models of the influence of the CCP delegations and cadres visits on autocratization

Explanatory variable	Liberal democracy index (inverted)											
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
	Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule, EA (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; EA (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; ED (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; ED (lagged 2 years)
CCP visits	0.065 (0.093)	0.080 (0.102)	-0.164 (0.102)	-0.066 (0.150)	-0.006 (0.155)	-0.049 (0.160)	0.038 (0.094)	0.099 (0.101)	-0.154 (0.112)	-0.094 (0.120)	-0.049 (0.167)	-0.068 (0.158)
Constant	-0.053 (0.147)	-0.066 (0.150)	0.033 (0.148)	0.037 (0.152)	0.005 (0.234)	-0.023 (0.238)	-4.520 (0.143)	-0.003 (0.143)	-1.01 (0.145)	-0.003 (0.147)	4.200 (0.145)	4.42 (0.243)
N of observations	393	349	240	211	144	129	307	307	184	184	108	108
N of groups: country	45	45	33	31	21	21	45	45	29	29	18	18
R2	0.004	0.006	0.025	0.010	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.010	0.024	0.009	0.002	0.005

Notes: * p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01

2.1.2. CCP's Relations with African Political Parties

Regression models did not confirm China's active ideological influence on autocratization in African hybrid regimes. Nevertheless, such results should be taken with reservation, as some scholars show that the absence of the effect of this form of influence on autocratization does not mean that China does not seek to influence political regimes in Africa ideologically. Particularly under Xi's government, efforts can be noted to intensify cross-party cooperation between the CCP/CPC through its International Department (ID-CCP) and political parties elsewhere. In this regard, some scholars have underscored the growing willingness of the Chinese regime to share its experience of one-party rule with other states and to advocate China's political model (Benabdallah, 2020; Cabestan, 2022; Hackenesch & Bader, 2020; Herman, 2020). This is done through actively building party-to-party relations and organizing political seminars and training, which "push for ideological alignment." (Herman, 2020, p. 437). These growing relations thus became a convenient mechanism to reach out to the local political elites to influence and sometimes even "capture" them, making them dependent on China and its government's interests (Cabestan, 2022, p. 27).

Hackenesch and Bader (2020, p. 1) show that the ID-CCP has built a global network of contacts with political parties amounting to 400 in over 160 countries, especially those in power.⁴⁹ Such contacts include visits by political party representatives and organizing seminars, training sessions, and sponsorship of party schools abroad. For China, this kind of cooperation has become an essential part of its endeavors to build and maintain a positive image of the country and the regime abroad, promoting its own political and economic interests, a tool for gathering information and sharing its own economic and political experience and its vision of the world order. Hackenesch and Bader (2020, p. 7) then argue that the party channel is a crucial instrument in implementing Xi Jinping's strategic shift from the "hide and

⁴⁹ In this context, the authors add that up to 70% of the contacts concern ruling parties. However, this proportion varies depending on the type of regime. These are democratic regimes where China is also more in touch with opposition parties and their leaders, given the greater chance of a shift in power compared to other regimes. In authoritarian regimes, then, the CCP maintains contact exclusively with the parties in power. In hybrid regimes, the CCP maintains 75% of its contact with the parties in power (Hackenesch & Bader, 2020, p. 4). In this respect, then, the CCP has shown great flexibility in its ability to adapt to alternations in power and thus to establish new contacts with parties that come to power through elections (Cabestan, 2022).

bide” time to the “new era” wherein he seeks to influence international relations proactively. Similarly, they note that party cooperation with political actors abroad is a traditional tool for Beijing to familiarize foreign elites with the latest political concepts of the Chinese regime, such as “peaceful rise” or Xi’s slogan “Chinese dream.” The visits have also become an opportunity to promote major infrastructure initiatives such as the BRI.⁵⁰ It is then under Xi’s government that there has been a growing interest on China’s part to share the experience of its authoritarian regime. According to Hackenesch and Bader (2020, p. 9), in the past, such learning from political experience used to be more reciprocal, and Beijing showed interest in learning from other states. However, this has changed drastically in the last decade, and this “mutuality” has faded away, leaving only one-sided sharing. Under Xi’s leadership, the ID-CCP’s theoretical seminars, policy cadre training, and field trips to China have also expanded and grown in importance. At these educational sessions, participants learn about China’s economic and political model, as well as how to build and maintain party discipline and cadre loyalty, fight corruption, strengthen leadership skills, manage the media and public companies, or control social and public opinion (Benabdallah, 2020; Cabestan, 2022; Eisenman & Shinn, 2012, p. 77; Herman, 2020; Sun, 2016).

In this context, Eisenman and Shinn (2012) note that political training sessions and seminars are organized on the demand of political parties from Africa, which make specific requests to the CCP, taking into account their needs. At the same time, however, the CCP actively seeks partnerships with “like-minded African parties and uses cadre training and party management courses to develop interpersonal ties and influence future generations of African political leaders.” (ibid., p. 76). Cabestan (2022, pp. 31–32) also highlights the proactive actions of the ID-CCP, summarizing the goals of its activities in Africa as (1) establishing an additional channel of communication with political elites, (2) reaching out and better influencing political elites; (3) contributing to taking control of or at least dominating countries’ narrative on China in rectifying “incorrect ideas” on the CCP and China; and (4) leveraging Chinese economic development’s “success story” to export the CCP’s governance and administrative management systems. Similarly, Lina Benabdallah (2020, p. 3)

⁵⁰ Hackenesch and Bader (2020, p. 7) counted that BRI has been discussed in more than 390 party meetings between 2014 and 2017.

emphasizes the convenience of organizing these activities for the regime in China. She argues that Beijing's development model, governance practices, and norms become more legitimate when adopted, mimicked, and positively received by the international community. This has led China and the CCP to promote its model as an alternative for other states.

Herman (2020), in her research on the CCP's collaboration with the South African parties (ANC and SACP), makes a point that the ANC representatives intended to borrow the Chinese development model. This was out of admiration for the great achievements of the CCP in nation-building while they asserted that the CCP's ruling experience and founding theory deserve to be learned by the ANC. Moreover, concerning the intentionality of the inter-party cooperation, she concludes that the "rhetoric from the ANC's own ranks could imply that the *CCP has advertised the China model as an ideology to be adopted by developing countries, rather than just an experience to be shared.*" (ibid., p. 444; italics added). This cooperation may have implications for the political regime in the longer term. Although the regular exchanges between officials suggest that the Chinese model is not imposed on the ANC rule, "considering the long history of the CCP and effectiveness of the communist party structure in the motherland, the possibility exists that programs can be adopted by the ANC in the long run."⁵¹ (ibid., pp. 448–449).

In Africa, the CCP has established relations with 110 political parties in 51 countries (Cabestan, 2022, p. 27), mainly maintaining contact with the ruling ones. Cabestan refers to the ID-CCP strategy as a "catch-all," highlighting an agnostic approach to building connections with parties in democracies and non-democracies, which is adaptive to new realities in the event of an alternation in power. Yet, a few political parties still stand out regarding the excessive frequency of contact (ibid, 28). In particular, Namibia's SWAPO, Zimbabwe's ZANU-PF, Tanzania's CCM, Mozambique's FRELIMO, Angola's MPLA, Ethiopia's EPRDF (or its successor Prosperity Party), and South Africa's ANC and SACP can be considered prominent partners. These are also political entities with which the CCP shares ideological similarities and are important for their influence in a country that is strategically

⁵¹ In this context, reference can be made to the extremely controversial collaboration between the parties prior to the 2019 elections. The ANC enhanced its interaction with the CCP to learn how to manage the public relations and messaging side of the elections (Benabdallah, 2020, p. 2).

valuable to the regime in Beijing (Cabestan, 2022, p. 29; Fourie, 2015; Hackenesch, 2013, p. 28; 2018, pp. 135–137; Hackenesch & Bader, 2020, p. 5; Herman, 2020). Indeed, the prominence of some of the aforementioned political parties has been reflected in the CCP’s support for building party schools in Africa. Thus, in 2014, the ANC gained support from the CCP for developing its party school in Venterskroon, South Africa.⁵² The school was “modelled on the China Executive Leadership Academy Pudong in Shanghai, one of the Communist Party’s leadership and governance schools where party members and foreign guests attend classes on ‘revolutionary traditions,’ learning everything from Marxist theory to media management.” (Findlay, 2014).

A more recent example is the USD 40 million support by the CCP to build a party school, the *Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Leadership School*, in Tanzania, which was jointly established by six ruling parties from the region⁵³ (Allen-Ebrahimian, 2023; Nantulya, 2023; Wilson, 2022; Xinhua, 2018). The acclaimed goal of this school is “the collective pursuit of liberation through socialism,” where the Chinese approach to socialism bears an anti-Western notion (Wilson, 2022). In this respect, Song Tao, Minister of the ID-CCP, stated in his opening address at the school in May 2022 that “the CPC is ready to strengthen experience exchange in state governance and administration with the six parties, promote practical cooperation in various areas, practice true multilateralism, jointly oppose hegemony and power politics, safeguard the legitimate rights and interests and overall interests of developing countries, and promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.” (ibid.). Similarly, during the inauguration earlier that year, Tanzanian President Hassan, also the chairwoman of the ruling CCM, emphasized shared ideas about party management and values among the founding parties and the CCP – “We want our parties to have well-organized leaders, strong leaders who know their discipline and values, who will understand, manage and educate the community about our ideology.” (Nayabiage, 2022a).

⁵² The school became a part of a broader ANC strategy to counter corruption and nepotism. The ANC declared 2013-2023 the “decade of the cadre,” with the aim of putting party members through a political school to gain integrity and get rid of troublesome behavior (Findlay, 2014).

⁵³ Those include CCM, ANC, FRELIMO, MPLA, SWAPO, and ZANU-PF (Wilson, 2022).

Concerning these latest developments, the absence of the effect of CCP visits on autocratization may indicate that more time is needed to observe the results. It is one thing for the recipients of this influence to take up the information shared by the Chinese, for instance, during political training. Still, accepting and implementing it in their regime is another thing. In other words, it is necessary to consider that autocracy promotion as an ideological influence may take longer to become “translated” in the quality of democracy indicators’ scores. It is thus appropriate to approach the issue of manifestations of China’s autocracy-promoting efforts with “strategic patience” (Custer 2022, p. 1). Even if such an effect has not yet been manifested in data tracking the quality of democracy, at the same time, such an outcome does not mean it cannot happen over a more extended period. Notably, the crucial CCP initiatives, which go beyond the timeframe of this work, show that this party cooperation is certainly not waning. The effect of increasing ideological footprint on the continent may be a matter of the future. In this context, one may point to the party school in Tanzania, which only started to enroll its first students in June 2022, when training was provided to 120 cadres from African partner parties (Nyabiage, 2022b). More generally, Benabdallah (2020) expects a further increase in Beijing’s investment in people-to-people exchanges, including the interaction between political parties through training sessions, seminars, or visits. Benabdallah refers to the growing importance of this kind of interaction in light of China’s changing investment priorities, as reflected in the action plans of the last few FOCACs. Although its willingness to lend finance to African counterparts is declining, what is growing instead is the promotion of people-to-people exchanges in various sectors (Benabdallah, 2020; Wu, 2021). Then, while the COVID-19 pandemic inevitably affected this form of interaction, it certainly cannot be said to have stopped it.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ For example, in June 2022, Nigeria’s Inter-Party Advisory Council, which is an umbrella organization representing all the country’s registered political parties, organized a joint seminar with the Chinese embassy and the ID-CCP. The theme of the event was “Building China-Nigeria Parties Consonance, Performing Nigeria-China Symphony” and the seminar focused on sharing experiences between parties. This included a briefing by China’s Ambassador to Nigeria Cui Jianchun on “China’s political system, CPC’s 100-Year history, and achievements, highlighting President Xi Jinping’s Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.” (van Staden, 2022). More recently, in February 2023, top CCP officials paid visits to their ruling counterparts in Kenya and Tanzania, to brief the hosts on the guiding principles of the 20th CPC National Congress (Xinhua, 2023).

2.1.2.1. *CCP's Relations with Zambian Ruling Parties*

As an illustration of the development of close party-to-party relations, one may also refer to the case of Zambia. The ideological affiliation of the ruling parties can be traced back to the time of the struggle for independence when China provided financial and material assistance to Zambia's opposition parties (Abegunrin & Manyeruke, 2020, p. 118). The close cooperation between the ruling parties continued after the independence and was smoothed by the socialist inclinations of the Zambian ruling party UNIP and Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda's philosophy of humanism that became projected in the foreign policy of the country (Sun, 2019). This early inter-party cooperation created a solid base for the relations between the parties and countries for the upcoming decades. These early relations have been frequently mentioned even in the context of today's party-to-party cooperation, as was the case of a visit in 2017, when Xu Lyping (Vice-Minister of CPC International Department) stated that Zambia and China "have always been all-weather friends," and "saluted the leadership of the late Chairman Mao and Zambia's first President Kenneth Kaunda, who built a relationship based on mutual trust and interests that continues to thrive to this day." (ZDML, 13. 6. 2017).

As for the time frame followed in this work (2000 – 2019), one may refer to the CCP meetings with their Zambian counterparts that also reflect China's endeavors to cooperate with any party at that time in power. Thus, already under the rule of MMD, the CCP members visited Zambia several times. In 2005, former President Mwanawasa met the CPC delegation, while one of the principal aims of the visit "was to deepen mutual understanding between the CPC and the MMD and boost the China-Zambia ties." (china.org.cn, 2005). Similarly, in 2009, then-President Rupiah Banda asserted that "the ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) has a lot to learn from the Communist Party of China (CPC) in its bid to accelerate development in the country," while praising China that "managed to pull through the global economic crunch because of sound economic policies set by the CPC." (The Post, 15. 12. 2009). Banda, during this meeting, also expressed determination to strengthen the ties with the CPC "in an effort to strengthen the economic policies of the country [and] further disclosed that a Zambia delegation would soon be travelling to China to explore [the] best way of transferring some of

the good policies initiated by the CPC through the Chinese government, to Zambia.” (ibid.).

This cooperation continued and intensified under the PF, which was in power from 2011 to 2021. Since 2010, AidData’s (2022) information shows 29 visits by CCP delegations and cadres in Zambia, of which 26 were organized under the rule of the PF. These visits included high-level visits between the PF’s government officials as in June 2014, where the CCP’s representatives praised the development in Zambia under the PF’s rule and emphasized the shared interests, close inter-party cooperation, and willingness to learn from each other. During this visit, China’s Vice-President Li stated that the CPC and PF would continue extending cooperation and programs at the party level while expressing happiness “with the performance and conduct of PF members that had gone for exchange programmes in that country.” (The Post, 20. 6. 2014). Li then indicated an interest in further cooperation by inviting the PF officials to China to learn to deal with the common challenges the ruling parties face – “The international department of the CPC extends its invitation to you [PF Secretary General Wynter Kabimba] to lead a delegation of party officials this year to China to enhance our party-to-party relationship. As ruling parties, we will face a lot of challenges in governing our countries, so we need to compare notes and experiences, learn, share and support each other, PF is leading the people of Zambia to realise its development.” (ibid.). Kabimba then welcomed this offer to learn from the CCP, stating that it can be reflected in the PF’s efforts to implement its socio-economic program in Zambia – “To drive this transformation, it takes efforts of women and the youth in the party to complement these programmes. We know that the CPC has a long and extensive experience to share with us. (...), Such programmes instil a sense of discipline, volunteerism, commitment and loyalty to the party, and party members ultimately develop a sense of belonging to the party.” (ibid.)

In 2017, these close relations between the PF and the CCP were yet again revealed when it was announced that the PF’s secretary general, Davis Mwila, was invited to visit China by the CCP “to learn more about party organization.” (ZDML, 1. 11. 2017). Frank Bwalya, then PF’s deputy spokesperson, commented such a decision as representing the beginning of a new relationship between the CCP and the PF and that “There will be an exchange of ideas between the two political parties, and

this meeting is very strategic, as you know, the communist party is very stable political party that has been in existence for many years,” while expecting that the PF will “learn a lot especially on how to strengthen the party.” (ibid).

Beyond these bilateral meetings, one may simultaneously encounter Beijing’s increasing efforts to integrate inter-party cooperation into broader institutionalized cooperation schemes between China and African counterparts, such as FOCAC. Thus, right before the 2018 FOCAC in Beijing, and as a result of Xi’s efforts to institutionalize the high-level meeting “as a platform for political dialogue with broad representation and international influence” (ZDML, 25. 7. 2018), 40 African governing political parties (including the PF) and the CCP gathered in Dar es Salaam. The event named “Theory and Practice of CPC and African Parties in Exploring Development Paths Suited to Specific National Conditions” aimed to engage the participating parties “in in-depth discussions around the theme and compared notes on governance experience.” Beyond that, it also served the CCP to present its development path to the attendees so they could learn how to come up with their own models of development, as explained in the ZDML article:

The obvious question by critical thinkers is, perhaps, why is the CPC courting governing political parties in its quest to build a community with a shared future for mankind? Political parties are expected to play the role of political guidance in building this dream community for China and Africa. After 40 years of what it terms the successful road to socialism with Chinese characteristics, China is now forging ahead with a new round of economic reforms and opening up measures to build what it calls a great modern socialist country by the middle of this century. (...), The lesson for Zambia and Africa is to blaze the path to development with suitable development models considering specific country needs and conditions. The PF made it clear at the Dar es Salaam summit that this is the route that Zambia will take in its quest to become a middle income and prosperous country. “Looking at the journey China has travelled to this point, Zambia under the Patriotic Front is ready to learn from what works and what does not work,” a PF member of the Central Committee, Kebby Mbewe, said in his presentation at the high-level meeting. (ibid.).

It should also be mentioned, however, that this party-to-party cooperation did not avoid criticism by the political opposition. In this context, it is possible to refer to then-oppositional PF MP Guy Scott’s reaction to the meeting in 2009 between the ruling MMD and the CCP representatives. Scott doubted that there was anything to

learn from the CCP, seeing this cooperation even potentially dangerous for the Zambian multiparty political system.

But lessons for the MMD? What might they be? Surely it is possible, without departing from protocol, to acknowledge that Zambia – for whatever reasons – departed from the One Party State mode of governance nearly 20 years ago. The CPC might have had some lessons for UNIP in its heyday (teaching it arithmetic for example), but surely it has to be said that Movement for MULTI-party Democracy [capitals in original] was dedicated to bringing about a shift to multi-party politics in Zambia and is, we must presume, still devoted to that ideal. (...), Just what can we learn from the CPC and its government’s way of doing business back home in China? What Christmas present have the folks that gave us the Long March, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution and the massacre of Tiananmen Square got for us? (...), God forbid that Zambia should ever experience some of the kind of social experiments inspired by Chairman Mao after his takeover of the mainland. (The Post, 29. 12. 2009).

Even sharper criticism of these meetings was then aimed at the very PF in 2018. That year, the opposition party – the National Democratic Congress (NDC), with its then-leader Kambwili, began to criticize the closeness between the ruling PF and the CCP, even openly accusing the CCP and the Chinese government that China was breaching one of the basic principles of its foreign policy – non-interference and expressed an “‘extreme’ disappointment with the Chinese Communist Party to openly thrown their political weight behind the Patriotic Front government.” In NDC’s view, the Chinese government was “indirectly supporting the PF thus interfering ‘in our internal political space’” and the CCP and the Chinese government “has clearly crossed the red line by associating and supporting the PF. As NDC, we thus urge China to stop its interference in Zambia’s internal politics. The NDC in government will open a mission in Taipei as a way of recognizing Taiwan as a sovereign state.” (The Mast, 14. 7. 2018).

In the end, however, Zambia became a rare case where China experienced difficulties sustaining the party-to-party relationship after the PF’s loss in the 2021 elections to the now-ruling UPND (Cabestan, 2022, p. 37). For more than two years, the CCP was unable to create the same level of cooperation with the new party and its leader, Hakainde Hichilema. This may be due to the legacy of the previous intensive collaboration between China and Zambia, which led Zambia into deep economic distress and indebtedness. Also, Beijing came to be seen as complicit in

the increasingly authoritarian direction adopted mainly under Lungu's government, whose ambitions of an aspiring dictator were funded via the kickbacks from the Chinese projects as well as Beijing's willingness to actively cooperate in initiatives that were further squeezing the democratic space in the country. Nevertheless, the UPND-CCP relations were consolidated in late October 2023. The UPND members visited China to engage with the CCP and attend a symposium on "Ruling Party's Exploration of the Path Towards Modernisation in Accordance with Domestic Realities of China and Zambia," held at CCP's Shandong School of Governance. Thus, in the end, UPND, just like former ruling parties, has also started to take inspiration in governance from its Chinese counterpart (Zambian Observer, 2023).

The Zambian case shows that although ideologically driven autocracy promotion by Beijing was ongoing and intensified over time in the 2010s in autocratizing Zambia, eventually, it did not prevent an alternation in power. Despite close cooperation and cadre training, this influence failed to affect a change in 2021 when the UPND won the elections and, with it, the democratization of the regime⁵⁵ (Coppedge et al., 2023). In this regard, the case of Zambia, as well as the results of the regression analysis, beg the question for future research: why do democratization and alternation in power occur despite such cooperation, and thus, to what extent political parties and their cadres in African hybrid regimes are even able to apply lessons from collaboration with a closed authoritarianism like China lacking electoral competition? Yet again, one needs to take into account that Beijing's major ideologically driven efforts to exert its influence on the regimes abroad may still come in the future given the developments outside of the timeframe of this thesis, as referred above in the chapter.

⁵⁵ In this regard, one can point to similar limitations in one of the continent's "best students" of the Chinese model of governance, Ethiopia's EPRDF (Fourie, 2015). Here too, despite intense cross-party cooperation, the EPRDF collapsed in 2018, and the Prosperity Party emerged as a ruling party. Again, these changes also led to an increase in the quality of democracy in Ethiopia according to V-Dem data (Coppedge et al., 2023).

2.2. Democracy Resistance

Democracy resistance is understood as an active influence on the part of the external autocratic actor that is reactionary, in the sense of its anticipated response to the democracy promotion efforts or democratic diffusion processes potentially posing a threat to a foreign regime whose survival is in external power's interest. As defined by Tansey, democracy resistance entails "policies designed to support autocratic regimes abroad as a means to avoid the negative externalities that come with transitions to democracy." (2016a, pp. 37–38). This may be done out of fear of contagion of one's own domestic regime by these transitions abroad or concern about possibly losing an ally abroad due to these unwelcomed changes. The triggers for these worrisome events may be both external, taking on the form of democracy promotion efforts driven from abroad, or/and those driven domestically (von Soest, 2015, pp. 625–626; Tolstrup, 2015, pp. 678–680). China's responses to these incentives are coded as *dependent variables* and examined with several mechanisms through which it is assumed it reacts to prevent foreign hybrid regimes from democratizing and thereby eventually menacing its survival. Based on the theoretical debate on democracy resistance, the following hypothesis is tested:

H2: *China responds to the democracy-promoting incentives menacing the survival of a hybrid regime abroad by increasing its support.*

H2a: *China responds to the democracy-promoting incentives, Western democratic aid, menacing the survival of a hybrid regime abroad by increasing its development aid.*

H2b: *China responds to the democracy-promoting incentives, Western sanctions, menacing the survival of a hybrid regime abroad by increasing its development aid.*

H2c: *China responds to the democracy-promoting incentives, domestic pro-democracy mobilization, menacing the survival of a hybrid regime abroad by increasing its development aid.*

H2d: *China responds to the democracy-promoting incentives, Western democratic aid, menacing the survival of a hybrid regime abroad by increasing its military support.*

H2e: *China responds to the democracy-promoting incentives, Western sanctions, menacing the survival of a hybrid regime abroad by increasing its military support.*

H2f: *China responds to the democracy-promoting incentives, domestic pro-democracy mobilization, menacing the survival of a hybrid regime abroad by increasing its military support.*

China's development aid is the first dependent variable that may show whether China reacts to incentives endangering foreign regimes. The values of China's overall development aid are taken from the *AidData* dataset (Custer et al., 2021), which provides information on China's official development finance at the project level and is available from 2000 to 2017. The values are counted on the commitment level because, according to Berthélemy and Tichit (2004, p. 254), pledges rather than disbursements better reflect the donor's decisions. Also, assuming that the aid commitments reflect donors' agenda and decision-making, literature on determinants of aid distribution argues that the donors take into account "what each other are doing" (Trumbull & Wall, 1994, p. 877) and reacting to one another. Several studies have demonstrated how Western donors react to China (Hernandez, 2017; Li, 2017), but there is a lack of understanding of whether it also works the other way around. Thus, it is assumed that aid commitments better indicate China's responses to various incentives, including other donors' commitments and Beijing's response to what has been actually disbursed in ODA democratic flows. China's ODA flows are employed to understand its reaction considering that this type of development flow is more aligned with Beijing's foreign policy interests⁵⁶ (Dreher & Fuchs, 2015; Dreher et al., 2018) as it is also the case of Western donors (Dreher et al., 2022; Palmer, Wohlander, & Morgan, 2002; Vreeland & Dreher, 2014).

⁵⁶ As suggested by Dreher et al. (2018), the political interest behind China's foreign aid has been amplified by the fact, that the line ministers have been in charge of foreign and security policy and decisions about allocation of the concessional finance. It was not until 2018, China's foreign aid agency *China International Development Cooperation Agency* (CIDCA) was established (Sun, 2019). This, however, did not mean that the aid flows would become more independently distributed from now on. On the contrary, as Marina Rudyak (2019) argues, CIDCA's establishment "aims to elevate the political importance of foreign aid, better align the country's aid agenda with its overall foreign policy, and tackle bureaucratic fragmentation."

Military support is also considered a politically motivated form of Beijing's support to regimes abroad (Yang, 2020) to counterbalance Western powers' influence. Chinese defense contractors may compete with other exporters in terms of price while offering greater flexibility during negotiations (Raska & Bitzinger, 2020, p. 97). In addition, China has become a leading arms supplier to Africa.⁵⁷ The author also considers military support as a potential form of China's reaction to democracy-promoting endeavors emerging from external and domestic efforts in a foreign country. It is operationalized in two ways. *First*, the *military trade* data is taken from the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database and its Trend Indicator Values (TIVs) (SIPRI, 2022). The data are available for the whole time range from 2000 to 2019. *Second*, military support is also counted as the number of *projects* China provides to a recipient foreign country in a regime year. The data are taken from the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database's Trade Registers (SIPRI, 2022) dataset, gathering the "transfers of major weapons" information where China is indicated as a "supplier" of weapons to its African counterparts. This information is then summed with the project data on military assistance provided by AidData (Custer et al., 2021). Projects are counted on the commitment level for AidData and the year of order for the SIPRI data. The values of these projects were not counted as the available datasets provided by the AidData and SIPRI do not often include the prices of the committed/ordered military projects, yet there is evidence of their existence. This additional operationalization is included because the portfolio of military cooperation activities between China and Africa is diverse, and the weapons provision is only a part of it. The AidData dataset shows initiatives that include transferring various military equipment and technical support, construction materials, and knowledge through training sessions. The data are available for the period from 2000 to 2017.

The incentives that may trigger the response on the part of China are divided into *external*, including efforts to promote democracy by the Western democratic actors, whether through *sanctions* or *democratic aid*. Domestic *intra-regime* processes emerging in support of democracy may also endanger the survival of the ruling

⁵⁷ Raska and Bitzinger (2020, p. 102) show that only in 2012 and 2015, China became the single largest supplier to Africa, capturing nearly one-third of the continent's overall arms market, surpassing exports from Europe, Russia, and the US

regime by mobilizing society. Those incentives are understood as *independent* variables explaining the variation in China's reaction. With few exceptions (One-China policy), the variables listed below are *again delayed by one and two years* (Coppedge et al., 2022; McMann et al., 2019) to observe their effects on the dependent variable and avoid the endogeneity issue.

External stimuli prompting China's reaction entail *Western democratic aid* operationalized by the value of development assistance (ODA) provided by the US as one of the major democracy promoters into the "government and civil society sector" of a recipient country.⁵⁸ The data are taken from the OECD's *Creditor Reporting System* (CRS) database (OECD, 2023). Democratic aid is operationalized as the values on a *commitment level*. This should show whether China is reacting to the pledges by the Western donor, in other words, whether it responds to its behavior (Kim & Oh, 2012; Mascarenhas & Sandler, 2006). The data are available from 2000 to 2019. *Second*, China may also assess the effectiveness of the democratic aid provided by the West in a recipient country. This operationalization considers whether the pledges have been delivered as the amount committed by the donor and disbursed may substantially differ (Celasun & Walliser, 2008; Hudson, 2013; Lührmann, McMann, & Van Ham, 2018). This operationalization also considers the argument that it is the effectiveness of democracy promotion efforts that matters and can trigger a response of external authoritarian power (Risse & Babayan, 2015, p. 386). In this case, the ODA values are counted at the *disbursement level*. The OECD's data on the aid disbursement is available from 2002 to 2019.

Second, Western sanctions are the second external incentive examined due to China's long-term critical stance to their imposition by the West, seeing them as a coercive interference in the domestic affairs of other states undermining their sovereignty. In the past, China vetoed UN sanctions imposed against the regime in Zimbabwe for violating human rights (Worsnip, 2008), opposed the sanctions against Sudan (Holland, 2007), or, more recently, abstained from voting in the case

⁵⁸ This choice is also based on the assumption that China is more likely to monitor and react to the democracy-promoting activities of individual major donors on the continent, rather than, for example, cumulative EU aid. At the same time, the power rivalry between Washington and Beijing is taken into account in this respect, which assumes a response to US activities.

of the arms embargo on South Sudan (Nichols, 2016). The sanctions imposed by the West (US) are coded as a binary variable, and data is taken from *The Global Sanctions Database* (GSDB) (Kirikakha et al., 2021) and is available from 2000 to 2019. The sanctions included are selected according to their a) *objectives*, which must include at least one of the following aims – policy change, democracy, and/or human rights support; and b) *type* of sanctions, where trade, financial, and arms and military sanctions are included. The variable is coded as “1” in these cases when sanctions were imposed and “0” when the US did not sanction the target country.

Intrastate stimuli that may lead to China’s reaction are operationalized as V-Dem’s *mobilization for democracy*. This assumption builds on the expectation that transitions to democracy may undermine the legitimacy of the authoritarian regime, even without external intervention.⁵⁹ The data are drawn from the V-Dem database, where the values for this variable are coded for the whole time range from 2000 to 2019. Here, events are understood as pro-democratic “if they are organized with the explicit aim to advance and/or protect democratic institutions such as free and fair elections with multiple parties, and courts and parliaments; or if they are in support of civil liberties such as freedom of association and speech.” (Coppedge et al., 2023, p. 229). This variable involves the mobilization of citizens for mass events such as demonstrations, strikes, and sit-ins, potentially menacing the regime’s survival, and is coded from 0 to value 4.⁶⁰

Several alternative explanations are *controlled* assumingly with the potential of clarifying the determinants of the provision of Chinese resources. These are split into those that are a) driven by *China’s self-interest* (natural resources, China’s

⁵⁹ It has been demonstrated, that the domestic democracy-promoting processes abroad forced governments in even distanced autocracies to adopt measures reinforcing their political system and preventing it from unwelcomed changes at home. Indeed, in reaction to the protests during Arab Spring, the authorities in China arrested human rights activists and lawyers to avoid unrests on domestic soil, which could have had menacing implications for the survival of the regime. This fear of contagion, according to Bader (2015b, p. 25) suggests, that “in a globalized world, Beijing sees the threat of democratic diffusion as extending beyond close neighbors.” Beyond that, Beijing has also recognized that these subverting domestic processes may become costly, as due to the revolution in Libya it was forced to evacuate tens of thousands of Chinese workers and also lost its investments in the extraction sector in the country (Parello-Plesner & Duchâtel, 2014; Zerba, 2014).

⁶⁰ The “0” indicates virtually no events; “1” implies that there have been several small-scale events; “2” then shows that there have been many small-scale events; the value “3” indicates the occurrence of several large-scale and small-scale events; lastly, the value “4” captures many large-scale and small-scale events (Coppedge et al., 2023, p. 229).

exports, One-China policy) and those b) driven by the *recipient's need* (GDP per capita, humanitarian emergency, conflict).

China's self-interests:

- 1) *Natural resources* information is taken from the *World Bank* using the data of *Total natural resource rents as % of GDP* with data available from 2000 to 2019. It is assumed that China wants to secure access to the natural resources of a recipient country (Halper, 2010; Naim, 2007; Tull, 2006).
- 2) *China's export* works with the assumption that Beijing uses its resources to promote its export interests in a particular country (Dreher & Fuchs, 2015). The data are available for the whole time range and taken from the dataset provided by the *Johns Hopkins University CARI* dataset (2022a).
- 3) *One-China policy* considers whether the recipient country diplomatically recognizes the Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan or the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Beijing. Such a stance should condition the PRC's official cooperation (Dreher & Fuchs, 2015; Dreher et al., 2018). The variable is coded binary – "1" indicates that the regime recognizes Beijing, and "0" means that the country sustains diplomatic ties with Taiwan. The list of the countries recognizing ROC is taken from Rich (2009) and is updated by the author.

Recipient's need:

- 4) *GDP per capita* assumes that China sends more of its resources to countries that need its assistance as they are poorer (Dreher & Fuchs, 2015; Dreher et al., 2018). The information is drawn from the *World Bank* data available for the entire time scale. On the other hand, it can also be assumed that richer countries will be able to buy weapons from China.
- 5) *Humanitarian emergency* should indicate the level of need for China's assistance (aid) by a recipient country and is operationalized as the *total number of people affected by disasters* in a recipient country in a given regime year (Dreher et al., 2018). The data is available for the entire time frame and taken from the *EM-DAT, The International Disaster Database*.
- 6) *Conflict* in the recipient's country is included only in those models where military support is the dependent variable. It is assumed that those countries

with civil wars will demand more military support (De Soysa & Neumayer, 2008). The data on *armed conflict* data is taken from the dataset provided by *UCDP-PRIO* (Gleditsch et al., 2002). The conflicts included are those defined as “intrastate” (where side A is always a government; side B is always one or more rebel groups, while there is no involvement of foreign governments with troops) and those labeled as “extrasystemic” (conflicts between a state and a non-state group outside its own territory, where the government side is fighting to retain control of a territory outside the state system. This takes into account the conflicts with various terrorist Islamist groups). In addition, only conflicts with cumulative intensity, with more than 1,000 battle-related deaths recorded over time since the onset, were included in the analysis. The presence of conflict is coded as a binary variable – “1” for years with conflict and “0” value for those without conflict. The data are available for the whole time range.

2.2.1. Findings

2.2.1.1. Chinese Aid versus Democratic Aid

The results of regression analyses show that, with respect to the Chinese aid flows, Beijing reacts mainly to the democratic aid disbursement (Table 2), not democratic aid commitments (Table 3), implying it takes into account the effectiveness of the democratic aid rather than the pledges, as suggested by Risse and Babayan (2015). However, these results are somewhat puzzling as they demonstrate that when democratic ODA disbursement increases, the Chinese aid decreases in response. The effect is significant when the explanatory variable is delayed by two years for the gray zone (Model 2) and in electoral authoritarianism (EA) (Model 4). The explanation becomes less strong under Xi’s rule, where the effect weakens for all hybrid regimes lagged by two years (Model 8) and decreases under the significance level in electoral authoritarianism when all control variables are included (Model 10). These results go against the anticipated assumption as stated in the H2a hypothesis and the conclusion of some studies demonstrating that China reacts positively to other donors’ aid provisions (Dreher et al., 2018).⁶¹

⁶¹ However, it must be added that Dreher et al. (2018) test China’s ODA reaction to commitments of all ODA flows of the Western donors without singling out the democratic aid.

Nevertheless, the results shown in Table 2 should be considered with caution. The coefficients indicating the negative relationship between the two variables are statistically significant yet not strong. Similarly, the models show meager explanation power as, at best, when all the control variables are added, they can explain nearly 1% of the variation in China's development aid provision (Model 8). Apart from the main independent variable, the models show that a statistically significant determinant for the Chinese aid provision is the maintenance of official diplomatic ties with Beijing. Also, based on the results, China seems more interested in providing aid to less affluent countries with lower GDP per capita.

On the other hand, the humanitarian emergency does not seem to be a determinant of the Chinese ODA. Also, natural resources remain below the level of statistical significance; thus, it appears that the presence of natural resources in the recipient country does not drive the Chinese ODA. Moreover, under Xi's rule (Model 8 and 9), it reaches even negative values, implying that as the rents from the natural resources increase, the less ODA finance the country gets from China. These findings undermine the image of China as a rogue aid donor (Naim, 2007) and confirm the conclusions of some previous research (Dreher & Fuchs, 2015; Dreher et al., 2018; Hoeffler & Sterck, 2022).

Table 2: China's reaction (aid, commitments) to external incentives (Western democratic aid, disbursement)

	China's development aid												
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12	
Explanatory variables													
Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	0.022 (0.024)	Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 year)	EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	
Democratic aid (US, disb.)	0.022 (0.024)	-0.035** (0.015)	0.005 (0.020)	-0.031** (0.014)	0.162 (0.167)	0.136 (0.147)	0.027 (0.039)	-0.025* (0.013)	0.011 (0.040)	-0.023 (0.014)	0.148 (0.184)	0.101 (0.142)	
Natural resources		0.031 (0.034)		0.025 (0.037)				-0.007 (0.028)		-0.016 (0.034)			
China's export		0.064 (0.055)		0.022 (0.031)				0.043 (0.050)		-0.004 (0.024)			
One-China policy		0.044*** (0.016)		0.039** (0.016)				0.044** (0.019)		0.036* (0.019)			
GDP per capita		-0.042** (0.021)		-0.046* (0.023)				-0.053 (0.036)		-0.053 (0.059)			
Humanitarian emergency		0.018 (0.025)		0.023 (0.026)				-0.035 (0.023)		-0.038 (0.025)			
Constant	0.022 (0.044)	0.024 (0.025)	0.024 (0.054)	0.030 (0.056)	0.031 (0.084)	0.042 (0.087)	0.000 (0.066)	0.005 (0.068)	0.000 (0.085)	0.006 (0.088)	0.001 (0.118)	-0.001 (0.116)	
N of observations	638	597	414	385	216	204	217	217	133	133	74	74	
N of groups: country	45	45	34	33	21	21	45	45	29	29	18	18	
R2	0.000	0.008	0.000	0.004	0.021	0.015	0.001	0.009	0.000	0.008	0.023	0.011	

Notes: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

Table 3: China's reaction (aid, commitment) to external incentives (Western democratic aid, commitment)

China's development aid												
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Explanatory variables	Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 year)	EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 2 years)
Democratic aid (US, comm.)	0.049 (0.034)	0.024 (0.021)	0.026 (0.026)	0.565 (0.015)	0.258 (0.241)	0.144 (0.159)	0.084 (0.065)	0.026 (0.037)	0.080 (0.084)	0.010 (0.024)	0.284 (0.283)	0.148 (0.203)
Constant	0.000 (0.038)	0.000 (0.037)	-9.90 (0.045)	-0.000 (0.045)	0.009 (0.080)	0.004 (0.076)	0.001 (0.067)	0.000 (0.066)	0.003 (0.087)	0.000 (0.085)	-0.000 (0.118)	-0.000 (0.119)
N of observations	755	755	498	498	248	248	217	217	133	133	74	74
N of groups: country	45	45	35	35	21	21	45	45	29	29	18	18
R2	0.003	0.001	0.001	0.000	0.064	0.020	0.008	0.001	0.006	0.000	0.089	0.024

Notes: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

However, some studies also show China as an alternative donor (Woods 2008), stepping in those instances when other donors are phasing out their development aid provision. Moreover, Strange et al. (2017) demonstrate that alternative ODA from non-traditional donors (including China) may have a stabilizing effect on the survival of regimes characterized by weak institutions and may prevent the outbreak of conflict in cases where there has been a sudden withdrawal of aid finance from traditional (OECD) donors. At the same time, however, it also means that with alternative funding from China, Western donors lose leverage over enforcing policies consistent with Western preferences. In this respect, one may refer to Resnick's (2013, p. 130–132) study showing that China provided assistance to Malawi after Western donors started withholding their aid due to deteriorating civil liberties in the country due to violation of economic conditions for aid disbursement imposed by the IMF in 2011. Similarly, in Ethiopia, China increased its development aid when Western donors briefly suspended their aid following the brutal crackdown on protests in 2005. China has since become one of the most prominent partners for the regime in Ethiopia, both in terms of investment and alternative development finance (Fourie, 2015; Hess, 2019).

2.2.1.2. *Chinese Aid versus Western Sanctions*

Table 4 shows the results of testing hypothesis H2b, where the sanctions imposed by the US are tested as an explanation for the increase in Chinese development aid. The results demonstrate a strong case for this explanation when looking at the electoral democracies (ED) (Model 6), with results holding strong also under Xi's rule (Model 12). Yet, given the number of observations dropping under 100 in the ED during Xi's government, these results should be interpreted with caution. This result is again somewhat surprising. One may expect that more authoritarian hybrid regimes need China's assistance more often, considering their repressive nature, increasing the probability of facing international sanctions. Also, empirical

evidence refers to those cases of EA, such as long-sanctioned Zimbabwe, where China provided aid⁶², or Rwanda in 2012.⁶³

On the other hand, it is possible to come across cases when China was increasing its development finance to the electoral democracies when facing sanctions from the US. For example, one may refer to the Ivory Coast, which had to deal with the decade-long sanctions imposed by the US, which were announced to be lifted only in late 2017 (Federal Register, 2017). These sanctions were imposed under Bush's administration in reaction to the Ivory Coast officials blocking the 2003 peace process and included an arms embargo, asset freezes, and travel bans (Reuters, 2016; VoA, 2016) and impacted severely the country's economy (VoA, 2011). Looking at cooperation with China, according to AidData (Custer et al., 2021), Ivory Coast received essentially 100% of these flows from China from 2006 to 2017 (in total, more than 1 billion USD in ODA). The country then received almost a full quarter of this funding in the last two years when it became an electoral democracy. According to AidData (ibid.), the projects included grants, debt forgiveness, concessional loans promoting trade and agriculture development, and improving

⁶² Relations between Zimbabwe and China go back to the liberation era but intensified after 2000 when the Mugabe regime faced international sanctions over human rights abuses, electoral irregularities, and the introduction of controversial land reforms. Also, because of the sanctions, China has gradually become a key investor in the country. In terms of development aid, China has provided more than 8 billion USD from 2000 to 2017 (Custer et al., 2021). The grants and concessional loans spanned various sectors, from agriculture, health, transport, and education. In terms of sustaining the regime in power, some of the support by Beijing became quite useful, especially in the ICT sector wherein China provided surveillance systems to help the regime keep the society under control after the wave of protests and the coup against Mugabe in 2017 (Gilbert, 2019). Although material and diplomatic backing was crucial for the regime's survival, also Chinese investments were ultimately affected by Mugabe's erratic politics, and cooperation became marked by mistrust (Sachikonye, 2019). Thus, during the 2017 coup against Mugabe Beijing rather silently endorsed the military (Banerjee & Rich, 2017).

⁶³ In Rwanda, China provided development aid in the aftermath of the sanctions imposed on Kigali in 2012. The sanctions came because of Kigali's involvement in fueling the conflict in the eastern DRC by supporting M23 rebels, leading Western donors to withhold aid flows (Smith, 2013). Still in 2012, China increased its ODA after Kagame's visit to Beijing, where he signed a 25 million USD interest-free loan agreement. By the end of 2012, China pledged two more interest-free loans (Grimm & Hackenesch, 2019). However, it is possible to question the effectiveness of this cooperation from the perspective of the regime in Kigali. The volume of aid provided was still small compared to the financial support Rwanda had become accustomed to receiving from the West. Although China for a while did help stabilize the regime, Kigali rather needed budgetary aid to pay civil servants, not so much tied aid. Thus, Beijing assistance was not truly a replacement for the Western ODA. Yet, Grimm and Hackenesch argue that for Kigali ODA from China became still useful diversification of financing that helped it counter the Western pressure.

economic and social infrastructure in the country, helping to cope with the impact of sanctions. Also, this cooperation included projects reinforcing the law-enforcement capacities of the country's police forces through equipment provisions and organizing training sessions for police officers in China (Assouman, 2017).

Apart from the statistically significant main explanatory variable, diplomatic ties with Beijing are strong. In the case of Model 6 and Model 12, the export from China becomes statistically significant. In Model 11, although the explanatory variable became statistically significant in the basic model, the results dropped when all control variables were included, leaving significant diplomatic ties with Beijing and humanitarian emergencies only. Again, as the previous regression results showed, natural resources are not a statistically significant variable. Also, it seems Chinese ODA finance is allocated to poorer countries. This again confirms the findings of some earlier studies on determinants of the Chinese ODA allocation (Dreher & Fuchs, 2015; Dreher et al., 2018).

Table 4: China's reaction (aid) to external incentives (Western sanctions)

China's development aid												
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
	Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 2 years)
Sanction (US)	0.039 (0.032)	0.042 (0.032)	0.008 (0.031)	0.007 0.032	0.308 0.309	0.202 ** (0.088)	0.030 (0.047)	0.041 (0.050)	-0.020 (0.055)	-0.017 (0.056)	0.370 (0.268)	0.297 ** (0.140)
Natural resources						-0.043 (0.068)					-0.095 (0.090)	-0.118 (0.107)
China's export						0.409 *** (0.058)					0.059 (0.164)	0.318 *** (0.077)
One-China policy						0.034 * (0.018)					0.063 ** (0.029)	0.029 (0.026)
GDP per capita						-0.034 (0.037)					-0.110 (0.073)	-0.082 (0.069)
Humanitarian emergency						-0.012 (0.083)					0.087 ** (0.352)	-0.021 (0.063)
Constant	0.001 (0.037)	0.001 (0.037)	0.000 (0.045)	0.000 (0.045)	0.013 (0.067)	0.019 (0.047)	0.000 (0.066)	0.000 (0.066)	0.000 (0.085)	0.000 (0.086)	0.017 (0.078)	0.004 (0.062)
N of observations	755	755	498	498	248	248	217	217	133	133	74	74
N of groups: country	45	45	35	35	21	21	45	45	29	29	18	18
R2	0.002	0.002	0.000	0.000	0.081	0.230	0.001	0.002	0.000	0.000	0.183	0.282

Notes: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

2.2.1.3. *Chinese Aid versus Mobilization for Democracy*

The regression analysis results demonstrate that China responds positively to mobilization for democracy in a recipient country through its development aid (Table 5). Mobilization for democracy proves to be a statistically significant determinant, mainly when taking the whole gray zone into account (Models 1 and 2), and its significance also holds under Xi's rule (Models 7 and 8), including electoral authoritarianism (EA) (Models 9 and 10), where it however drops to a 10% level. The explanatory variable also proved statistically significant in the basic models in EA (Models 3 and 4) but fell below the significant level when the control variables were added. However, it must be again considered that the overall strength of the coefficient estimates remains small. The explanatory power of these models can thus explain only 2% of the variations in the dependent variable at their best when all control variables are included (Model 10).

Apart from the main explanatory variable, the models show that, as anticipated, diplomatic ties with Beijing hold significance on a moderate level in Models 1, 2, 3, and 4. However, the significance does not hold in the rest of the models, with the time frame limited to Xi's rule. Similarly, only in the first model is it possible to observe a statistically significant coefficient showing a negative relationship between China's exports and its ODA. Yet, at the same time, its strength is low and underlines the result of other models in the table where China's export is not a determining factor for its aid provision. Likewise, natural resources do not prove to be a statistically significant determinant of Chinese ODA, nor humanitarian emergencies, except for Model 8, where the effect is negative at a 10% level. GDP per capita remains negative, as in previous regression results, implying that *the poorer the country is, the more Chinese ODA gets*; yet again, the effect is statistically insignificant.

Table 5: China's reaction (aid) to domestic incentives (mobilization for democracy)

China's development aid												
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
	Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 2 years)
Mobilization for dem.	0.061** (0.027)	0.055* (0.030)	0.054 (0.034)	0.066 (0.039)	0.112 (0.085)	0.113 (0.082)	0.082** (0.037)	0.099** (0.047)	0.095* (0.0534)	0.135* (0.073)	0.168 (0.132)	0.146 (0.117)
Natural resources	0.046 (0.040)	0.020 (0.032)	0.042 (0.042)	0.014 (0.035)			0.006 (0.060)	-0.034 (0.030)	0.006 (0.074)	-0.059 (0.041)		
China's export	-0.000*** (0.000)	0.057 (0.046)	0.036 (0.026)	0.20 (0.025)			0.030 (0.021)	0.029 (0.037)	0.013 (0.018)	-0.006 (0.017)		
One-China policy	0.029** (0.013)	0.028** (0.012)	0.014* (0.008)	0.014* (0.008)			0.029 (0.019)	0.030 (0.020)	0.006 (0.011)	-0.001 (0.010)		
GDP per capita	-0.029 (0.019)	-0.023 (0.015)	-0.038 (0.024)	-0.025 (0.018)			-0.039 (0.042)	-0.025 (0.032)	-0.043 (0.058)	-0.012 (0.039)		
Humanitarian emergency	0.004 (0.013)	0.014 (0.016)	-0.005 (0.017)	0.013 (0.017)			-0.001 (0.020)	-0.041* (0.025)	-0.020 (0.029)	-0.044 (0.027)		
Constant	0.006 (0.036)	0.004 (0.036)	0.003 (0.044)	0.003 (0.044)	-0.001 (0.071)	-0.001 (0.071)	0.002 (0.064)	0.007 (0.067)	0.004 (0.086)	0.010 (0.088)	-0.004 (0.108)	-0.007 (0.108)
N of observations	755	755	498	498	248	248	217	217	133	133	74	74
N of groups: country	45	45	35	35	21	21	45	45	29	29	18	18
R2	0.009	0.011	0.009	0.008	0.013	0.013	0.013	0.016	0.013	0.020	0.030	0.023

Notes: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

Empirical evidence from the African hybrid regime confirms that China responds via the provision of ODA to the potentially regime-destabilizing protests. An example may be observed in Ethiopia. After the end of the Cold War, the EPRDF's regime was undergoing liberalization, allowing greater political competition. The process of political liberalization resulted in the 2005 elections, where the EPRDF faced a well-organized political opposition threatening its dominance in the parliament. (see V-Dem's data, Coppedge et al., 2023). The results of the elections, with EPRDF winning the majority in the parliament, were challenged by the opposition parties, who accused the ruling party of stealing the elections through rigging. In reaction, the opposition organized massive anti-government protests (Hess, 2019). The regime's response was brutal, arresting tens of thousands of protesters and killing nearly 200 people (The New York Times, 2006). As expected, Western governments criticized the EPRDF's handling of the protests and briefly suspended ODA. China, on the other hand, seized the opportunity and responded by congratulating the re-elected Meles.

Moreover, in the months following the controversial elections, Ethiopia and China increased cooperation dramatically regarding trade, military, and development finance provisions. Ethiopia has become one of Beijing's most important economic partners and political allies in Africa. Moreover, the high-profile development projects that Beijing financed after the elections guaranteed the regime greater control over the population and stability and prevented further protests.

As Gagliardone (2013a; 2014; 2016) points out, the opposition's success in the 2005 elections and the subsequent protests were, to a large extent, driven by greater access to information that offered a critical stance on the EPRDF regime, where the boom in information and communication technologies and the associated greater outreach of the Ethiopian diaspora with its critical stance towards the government played an important role. It was the latter who could afford to criticize the government more openly on their blogs and articles that also resonated in Ethiopia. Also, mobile phones became broadly used to mobilize people. After the 2005 events, the EPRDF realized that the ICT sector became somewhat of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it was recognized as a critical sector for the country's economic development and growth. On the other hand, it was a sector that required much more government attention and control as when liberalized, it could pose a

menace to the regime's survival (Gagliardone, 2013a; 2016). Put simply, the Ethiopian government faced the challenge of expanding its telecommunications sector without losing its monopoly.

China provided the solution to this dilemma, and in the years that followed, it became the model for EPRDF's state-controlled information society.⁶⁴ In 2006, the Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation and the Chinese ZTE signed the largest agreement in Africa's telecommunication history. ZTE, with the backing of the China Development Bank, has offered a 1.5 billion USD loan to revamp and expand Ethiopia's telecommunications system. Six years later, another 1.6 billion USD was provided to ZTE and Huawei to continue the expansion (Gagliardone, 2016, p. 1). The Chinese companies helped Ethiopia "realize its vision of a tightly controlled but developmentally oriented national information system" (Gagliardone, 2014, p. 8). Although these large loans do not qualify as ODA flows, they came hand in hand with aid that further facilitated their implementation. Thus, according to AidData, in 2006, ZTE donated 10 million USD in communications equipment to the Ethiopian Telecom Training Center, and the same year, this Chinese company also trained 1,000 communication engineers in Ethiopia. In 2015, to support the sector further, ZTE granted 300,000 ETB to the Ethiopian ICT Innovation Competition (Custer et al., 2021).

As put by Gagliardone (2013a, 78), without China's support in the ICT sector, EPRDF's government would have been either forced to liberalize the regime or accept the lack of internet connectivity and mobile communication, which would have had a major impact on the economic development of the country. China offered a welcomed solution that helped EPRDF enact its political plans and sustain stability after the challenging 2005 elections and protests. Due to this assistance,

⁶⁴ In this regard, however, it is important to note that China certainly does not stand alone as an actor that provides the Ethiopian regime with the know-how to control the ICT sector. A 2014 report published by Human Rights Watch informed that several European companies delivered advanced surveillance technology to monitor members of the diaspora. Ethiopia has also acquired and used the FinFisher system of Gamma International, based in the UK and Germany, and the remote-control system of Hacking Team from Italy. These tools are used to gain access to files, information, and activities on the computer of an infected target. Ethiopians living in the UK, the US, Norway, and Switzerland were among those affected by the software. Similarly, then, in the US and the UK, cases of illegal wiretapping of the diaspora have been reported (HRW, 2014).

Ethiopia became “the nation in Africa that most pervasively filters the Internet and surveils communications.” (Gagliardone, 2016, p. 2).

2.2.1.3.1. *Resisting Mobilization for Democracy in Zambia*

Staying with the role of projects implemented in the ICT sector, one may also refer to Zambia as another example where an autocratizing government used China’s services and know-how to suppress the opposition. The major ICT projects were implemented to stifle civil society and its potential mobilization, particularly under the rule of the PF and specifically President Edgar Lungu (from 2015 to 2021). In August 2019, the Wall Street Journal published an article (Parkinson, Bariyo, & Chin, 2019) that connected Huawei’s technicians with the PF’s effort to suppress opposition voices in the country. Two Huawei technicians helped the government gain access to the phones and Facebook pages of opposition bloggers running a pro-opposition news website that repeatedly criticized Lungu. The Huawei experts tracked down their location and were in close contact with the police forces deployed to arrest them. Although Huawei denied this involvement, the PF spokesman, Antonio Mwanza, later confirmed the information. He said Huawei technicians, based inside Zicta, Zambia’s telecom regulator, had been helping the government combat opposition news sites, stating, “Whenever we want to track down perpetrators of fake news, we ask Zicta, which is the lead agency. They work with Huawei to ensure that people don’t use our telecommunications space to spread fake news.” (ibid).

Similarly, one of the opposition leaders in the country interviewed in 2020 shared his own experience with surveillance and digital repression in the country.

We got ZAMTEL [Zambia Telecommunications Company Limited], a government institution they are using Huawei software. ZAMTEL has a communication portal for Airtel and MTN⁶⁵. By taking over ZAMTEL, they [the Chinese] are also controlling MTN and Airtel. Huawei donated computers to our ministers, and they gave high-powered laptops to the Government of Zambia. The Government of Zambia is now implementing e-governance, and it is implemented by Huawei. Zicta has been overtaken by Chinese engineers, technicians, and IT guys. They are running Zicta, and the software is Huawei. And now they are monitoring and targeting, especially politicians. Each and everything I write on my laptop, in a few days, they are coming

⁶⁵ Two major mobile operators in Zambia.

looking for me just because I am posting something on WhatsApp. It is coming from the infiltration of our communication systems. We don't know where ZAMTEL stands, don't know the relationship between Zamtel and Huawei, Zamtel and ZTE. That is how they have compromised the communication system of our republic (Respondent 13, 1. 8. 2020)

Another opposition party leader shared a similar view about China's role in the surveillance of the opposition in the country:

We are also left on our own because China is now supporting them [the PF] in terms of limiting our freedoms. They got these cameras all over the place. Even if you walk in here, they know that Iva has walked in this place. So they are squeezing down on our political freedoms with the support of China. The Western countries they should be supporting greater freedoms, but they say, "No, no, no, we don't get involved," and so on. So, by their lack of action, they are facilitating more of Chinese technology in these places (Respondent 15, 7. 9 .2020)

Similarly, this matter of the increase in digital monitoring affecting respondents' lives and work came up during an interview with a representative of one of the Zambian NGOs, also referring to cautiousness when conducting the very interview that was, in this case, done via a phone call:

Right now, we are passing cyber laws that is definitely going to restrict public space. If you are driving around Zambia, Lusaka, Livingstone, and other towns, you are going to see a lot of cameras on the streets snooping on people. There has been no clear information about the purposes of those cameras, what are they there for, what's their intention, what's their objective, what we they are going to do, are they for security or are they for tracking or monitoring citizens' activity? It's very opaque [in] that particular contract. It is all out there being used to shrink the civic space online and even physical. To give you the interview, that's why I gave you several options [about the platform used], because at this point you must be very sure you are not afraid of the system, you are going to hold your own in case of they are listening to your conversations, you're not doing anything illegal, (...). But some of us are already very concerned, so, for instance, my phone and my laptop, for the first time in my life, I have been using VPN. I had never, until this year, been using VPN in my life. I had no need for that. But right now, I'm forced to use not one but several VPNs, because you simply cannot trust the state anymore, they are trying to get too much [information] from you, and they are so opaque that [it] makes you quite uncomfortable. (Respondent 11, 28. 7. 2020)

These surveillance activities were related to the Smart City Zambia initiative that Huawei financed through concessional loans provided by the China Exim Bank for

the project's two phases in 2015 and 2017. According to AidData (Custer et al., 2021), the project's first phase cost over 65 million USD, and the second phase cost nearly 281 million USD. According to Munoriyarwa and Chiumbu (2022, p. 220), implementing these projects in Zambia is mainly driven by the government's endeavors to "forestall possible opposition-led rebellions through digital authoritarianism."⁶⁶ These became a great concern for the PF as the country's economic situation deteriorated and dissenting voices grew in number. In response, the PF government became more repressive over time (Freedom House, 2020; Hinfelaar & Kaaba, 2019). In Zambia, where Chinese companies have been heavily investing in the construction and mining sectors (Brautigam, 2022; Lee, 2017), keeping the allied regime in power became a major driver for Beijing to deepen cooperation in the ICT sector. This, of course, came hand in hand with the profit imperatives of the Chinese firms involved in these projects (Huawei, ZTE, and Hikvision) and the Chinese regime's desires to expand its surveillance systems to ensure its growing dominance in the region and dependence on the Chinese technologies⁶⁷ (Munoriyarwa & Chiumbu, 2020, p. 221).

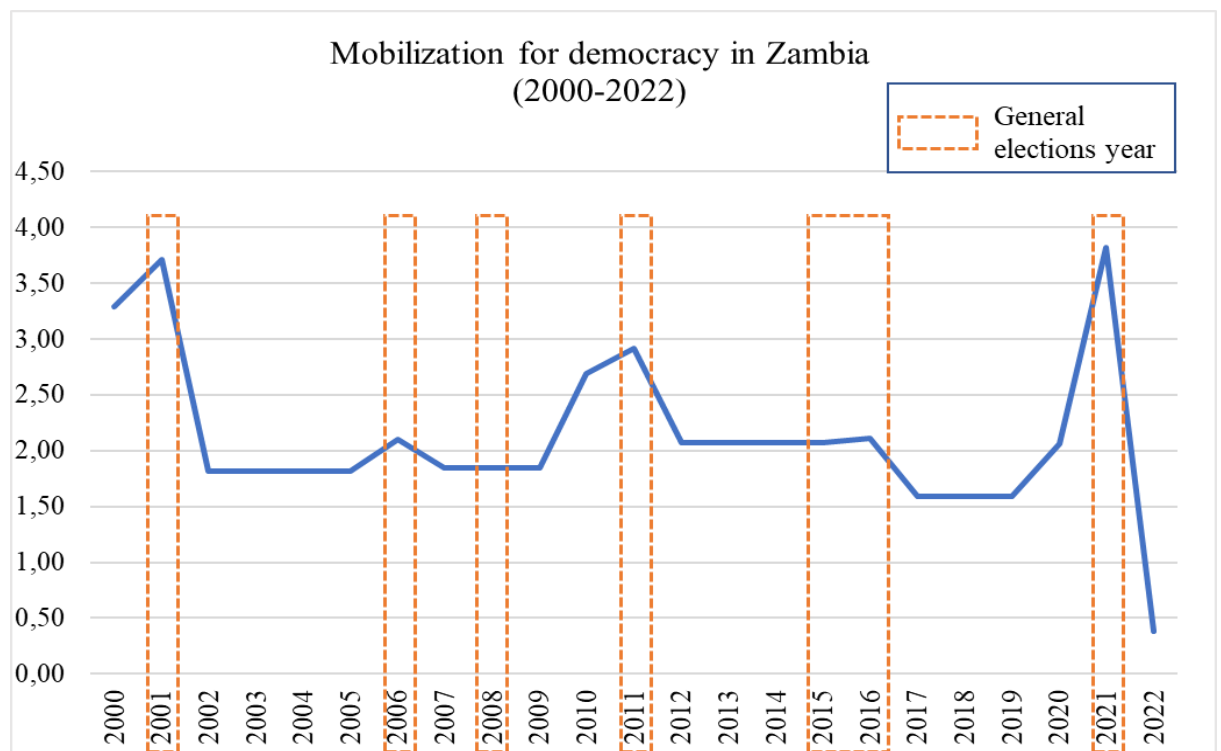
The aforementioned support in the ICT sector to curb in-country opposition should not be so surprising in the case of Zambia, where China has in the past shown a

⁶⁶ Such concern on the part of the ruling PF can be demonstrated by the deployment cameras on the campus of the University of Zambia (UNZA). As Hinfelaar, Resnick and Sishuwa (2020, pp. 14–15) note that UNZA and its students have historically played an important role in the struggle against repressions. It should be also stressed that there are tens of thousands of individuals studying and working at the university, which is a challenging human force, threatening the authoritarian ambitions of aspiring dictators such as Lungu. Thus, in response to student protests against the PF and the increasingly deteriorating state of economy, the government undertook some repressive measures. Among others, these included deployment of Chinese cameras at the campus. This measure came in March 2016, following demonstrations that the PF described as sponsored by opposition. The deployment has traditionally been justified by the PF government on the grounds of ensuring security (Munoriyarwa & Chiumbu, 2022). However, as Hinfelaar, Resnick and Sishuwa (2020, p. 24) note, "the fact that the cameras have been placed in key locations, mainly where student protests start from, suggests this is only a cover for masking the actual objectives: to provide surveillance, identify student agitators or those involved in demonstrations for possible expulsion and establish which opposition political actors visit campus to politicise student protests, however legitimate and whatever form they take."

⁶⁷ Beijing's recent efforts to actively promote its technology have included increasing visits by developing country leaders to the headquarters of tech companies in Shenzhen. In September 2023, Shenzhen was visited by current Zambian President Hichilema, whose itinerary included ICT giants such as Huawei, Tencent, and ZTE. In 2023 alone, over 60 foreign officials visited Shenzhen's technology companies, including Venezuelan President Maduro, Algerian President Tebboune, and DRC President Tshisekedi (Jingjing, 2023).

readiness to speak into the political arena at moments that had the potential to threaten its interests in the country, especially at a time of alternation in power. Thus, one may refer to the notorious moment before the 2006 elections, when Beijing stated that if opposition leader Michael Sata were elected, it would suspend its economic activities in the country (O’Hara, 2006). It was also before the 2006 elections when the Chinese government granted the Zambian government a batch of goods worth 1.2 million USD aimed to be used in the elections (China.org.cn, 2006). The fear of an alternation in power drove Beijing to more tangible support a year before the 2011 elections. At the same time, 2010 and 2011 became a period when mobilization for democracy, according to V-Dem data, reached its highest levels since 2001, as indicated in Figure 6.⁶⁸

Figure 6: Mobilization for democracy in Zambia (2000 – 2022) and the years of general elections



Source: V-Dem (Coppedge et al., 2023)

⁶⁸ As Aidoo (2019) points out, the 2011 elections were highly competitive and a major challenge for the ruling MMD, which, after 20 years in power became out of touch with the growing discontent and alienated from the needs of the population. Despite the rise of protests from marginalized segments often operating in a sector that is the backbone of the Zambian economy – the mining sector in Chinese-operated mines, Banda downplayed serious misconduct by investors and was more committed to Chinese interests than the grievances of the Zambians. This gave rise to revolts from which the opposition took full advantage in the 2011 elections.

It was in 2010 that Zambia received its largest-ever financial support from China since 2000 (which dropped in the 2011 election year while awaiting results), with the funds estimated to have been used by the then-government MMD to support its election campaign (Brautigam, 2021; Ofstad & Tjønneland, 2019). Several Zambian respondents also mentioned this issue of China's support before the 2011 campaign. For instance, an employee of a local NGO remembered:

Rupiah Banda's 2011 campaign machinery was partly sponsored by the Chinese, although that was not in the public domain as for how much money was invested in Rupiah Banda's campaign, (...), what is not in dispute is that the bulk of their campaign materials, we're talking about cloth, (...), the majority of that campaign fabrics came from China. And the same was with Mr. Lungu's campaign as well, (...). So, the [political] influence is there because they can bankroll a campaign. (Respondent 11, 28. 7. 2020).

The MMD lost the 2011 election, and the PF, which had been critical of Beijing up to that point, reversed its critical stance and began to court China (Aidoo & Hess, 2015, p. 133). One respondent in Zambia then added in response to Beijing's actions in supporting the MMD ahead of the 2011 election, "They [Beijing] should have done their homework" (Respondent 21, 21. 10. 2020). In other words, Beijing should have known better and anticipated that the PF would change its critical stance towards China after the elections.

2.2.1.4. *Chinese Military Support versus Democratic Aid*

Regarding military support provided by Beijing, democratic aid proved to be a significant determinant in both the trade with weapons (Table 6) and projects (Table 7). The explanatory variable remains significant at a 1% level regarding the gray zone and electoral authoritarianism (EA). In addition, the coefficient estimate increases for the observations under Xi's rule, both for the export of weapons (Table 6) and military project numbers (Table 7). More importantly, in the case of trade, the results show a strong coefficient and large explanation powers of all models. In particular, the models under Xi's rule (8 and 10) can explain more than 30% of the variation, implying that Beijing has become more responsive to democracy promotion efforts over time.

Apart from the main explanatory variable, in the case of military trade (Table 6), except for the diplomatic ties variable in Model 2, which shows the lowest

significance level, no other alternative explanation proves to be statistically significant. Interestingly, when it comes to the trade with weapons, natural resources do not play any role; their effect is even negative. Nevertheless, it seems, based on the positive effect of the GDP per capita and China's exports, that Beijing trades more with richer countries and those where it has trade interests. However, this explanation is yet again statistically insignificant. Conflict, although positive, is not a statistically significant variable in either of the models.

Regarding the number of military projects (Table 7), apart from the consistently statistically significant explanatory variable, diplomatic ties with Beijing are significant across the models. In the basic model, the explanatory variable is also significant in electoral democracies (ED) (Models 5 and 11) and the gray zone under Xi's rule (Model 7). However, in these cases, the significance level dropped when additional control variables were included, leaving only the One-China policy, exports (Model 7), and conflict on the statistically significant level (Model 11). Again, interestingly, neither natural resources nor GDP per capita are important determinants when it comes to the allocation of military projects by China. Again, this shows that military project support is driven by external democracy-promoting factors and Beijing's long-term foreign policy principles – no diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

Ethiopia may again serve as an empirical example. After the aforementioned protests in 2005, it continued to receive democratic aid, amounting to 40 million USD in democratic support from the United States only between 2008 and 2011, according to OECD statistics. In the years following this period, Meles' regime imported 54 million USD worth of arms from China and implemented, according to SIPRI and AidData information, two military projects (SIPRI, 2023; Custer et al., 2021). Thus, in 2011, China exported several dozen armed personnel carriers or, for instance, a year later, a surface-to-air missile system and supplies Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile for the missile system. The arms deliveries, along with increasingly close cooperation with China in other areas, as described earlier in the thesis, can be interpreted as an effort by the regime to counterbalance Western pressure to liberalization, decrease its dependency, and improve its bargaining position vis-à-vis criticism from the West (Hess 2019). In general, the results of this analysis are intriguing and call for further research that considers how China

responds to external threats to a regime abroad that is immediately threatened by the deployment of democratic aid.

Table 6: China's reaction (military support, trade) to external incentives (Western democratic aid, disbursement)

Explanatory variables	China's military support (trade)											
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
	Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 2 years)
Democratic aid (US, disb.)	0.044 (0.042)	0.454*** (0.017)	0.052 (0.044)	0.484*** (0.027)	-0.100 (0.0533)	0.005 (0.061)	-0.047 (0.056)	0.542*** (0.018)	-0.071 (0.081)	0.556*** (0.028)	0.063 (0.110)	0.096 (0.135)
Natural resources		-0.033 (0.025)		-0.027 (0.025)				-0.003 (0.027)		-0.009 (0.032)		
China's export		0.096 (0.060)		0.091 (0.076)				0.053 (0.039)		0.038 (0.043)		
One-China policy		0.027* (0.015)		0.018 (0.029)				0.011 (0.011)		0.008 (0.011)		
GDP per capita		0.030 (0.028)		0.029 (0.027)				0.023 (0.026)		0.029 (0.032)		
Conflict		0.026 (0.040)		0.027 (0.044)				0.053 (0.043)		0.049 (0.051)		
Constant	0.019 (0.072)	0.008 (0.033)	0.024 (0.089)	0.010 (0.031)	0.010 (0.117)	0.022 (0.123)	-1.44 (0.095)	1.57 (0.029)	1.87 (0.123)	7.32 (0.034)	-8.630 (0.140)	-3.30 (0.139)
N of observations	728	687	466	437	250	238	307	307	184	184	108	108
N of groups: country	45	45	34	33	21	21	45	45	29	29	18	18
R2	0.017	0.215	0.0023	0.235	0.000	0.000	0.002	0.334	0.005	0.345	0.004	0.009

Notes: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

Table 7: China's reaction (military support, projects) to external incentives (Western democratic aid, disbursement)

	China's military support (projects)											
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Explanatory variables	Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 2 years)
Democratic aid (US, disb.)	0.046 (0.057)	0.171*** (0.016)	0.005 (0.044)	0.242*** (0.017)	0.041 (0.053)	0.135 (0.093)	0.057 (0.052)	0.209*** (0.026)	0.053 (0.096)	0.338*** (0.024)	0.041 (0.071)	0.120 (0.145)
Natural resources		-0.008 (0.044)		-0.041 (0.042)	0.102 (0.087)		0.030 (0.071)	0.014 (0.082)		-0.069 (0.067)	0.253 (0.172)	
China's export		0.054 (0.038)		0.017 (0.019)	0.090 (0.112)		0.219*** (0.044)	0.067 (0.050)		0.050 (0.042)	-0.122 (0.074)	
One-China policy		0.144*** (0.024)		0.115*** (0.026)	0.170*** (0.043)		0.081*** (0.021)	0.109*** (0.022)		0.075*** (0.023)	0.116*** (0.051)	
GDP per capita		-0.005 (0.042)		-0.005 (0.044)	0.064 (0.124)		0.043 (0.055)	-0.009 (0.049)		0.026 (0.042)	0.152 (0.184)	
Conflict		-0.046 (0.051)		-0.074 (0.052)	0.156 (0.143)		0.038 (0.091)	-0.026 (0.073)		-0.089 (0.055)	0.371*** (0.069)	
Constant	0.050 (0.060)	0.064 (0.057)	0.053 (0.068)	0.071 (0.063)	0.038 (0.091)	0.059 (0.113)	0.001 (0.074)	-0.001 (0.072)	-0.001 (0.105)	0.004 (0.074)	-0.018 (0.098)	-0.001 (0.124)
N of observations	600	600	416	387	217	205	220	220	135	135	75	75
N of groups: country	45	45	34	33	21	21	45	45	29	29	18	18
R2	0.002	0.047	0.000	0.054	0.106	0.015	0.093	0.081	0.003	0.139	0.205	0.016

Notes: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

Unlike the disbursement level of democratic aid, the statistical significance cannot be observed in the case of trade with weapons on the commitment level of democratic aid (Table 8). When the dependent variable is operationalized in terms of military projects (Table 9), the significance of the explanatory variable drops as additional alternative explanations become included in the models. The results again confirm that China reacts when democratic ODA is disbursed, not “only” pledged by the democratic donor. Only in the case of the results in Table 9 is the committed democratic ODA significant in the three basic models in ED (Model 5) and ED under Xi’s rule (Model 11). Also, in the basic model, the democratic ODA commitments became significant for the gray zone under Xi (Model 7). However, when control variables were added, the significance level dropped, leaving only significant diplomatic ties across the models, China’s export in Model 7, and conflict in the recipient country in Model 11. Natural resources and GDP per capita positively affect the number of military projects. However, they remain statistically insignificant.

Table 8: China's reaction (military support, trade) to external incentives (Western democratic aid, commitments)

China's military support (trade)												
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Explanatory variables	Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 2 years)
Democratic aid (US, comm.)	0.064 (0.046)	0.081 (0.052)	0.080 (0.049)	0.053 (0.090)	-0.013 (0.054)	-0.009 (0.048)	-0.056 (0.055)	-0.041 (0.055)	-0.094 (0.083)	-0.063 (0.085)	0.076 (0.127)	0.064 (0.117)
Constant	8.04 (0.064)	1.30 (0.064)	-5.29 (0.077)	0.000 (0.059)	-1.30 (0.107)	-1.20 (0.107)	-9.88 (0.095)	-9.87 (0.095)	1.40 (0.123)	1.36 (0.124)	-2.37 (0.140)	-1.99 (0.141)
N of observations	847	847	552	552	282	282	307	307	184	184	108	108
N of groups: country	45	45	35	35	21	21	45	45	29	29	18	18
R2	0.004	0.007	0.006	0.074	0.000	0.000	0.003	0.002	0.009	0.004	0.006	0.004

Notes: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

Table 9: China's reaction (military support, projects) to external incentives (Western democratic aid, commitments)

	China's military support (projects)											
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Explanatory variables	Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 2 years)
Democratic aid (US, comm.)	0.032 (0.042)	0.034 (0.041)	-0.008 (0.028)	-0.002 (0.029)	0.004 (0.064)	0.106 (0.062)	0.016 (0.061)	0.064 (0.070)	-0.005 (0.078)	0.026 (0.104)	-0.032 (0.108)	0.086 (0.105)
Natural resources					0.105 (0.089)		0.030 (0.072)				0.273 (0.174)	
China's export					0.125 (0.111)		0.227*** (0.042)				-0.101 (0.072)	
One-China policy					0.168*** (0.041)		0.085*** (0.022)				0.121** (0.053)	
GDP per capita					0.069 (0.123)		0.038 (0.055)				0.158 (0.186)	
Conflict					0.128 (0.135)		0.043 (0.091)				0.376*** (0.071)	
Constant	0.000 (0.056)	0.000 (0.056)	0.000 (0.059)	5.20 (0.059)	0.017 (0.093)	0.003 (0.106)	0.002 (0.074)	-0.000 (0.082)	-0.000 (0.105)	-0.001 (0.105)	-0.200 (0.098)	0.001 (0.126)
N of observations	760	760	502	502	249	249	220	220	135	135	75	75
N of groups: country	45	45	35	35	21	21	45	45	29	29	18	18
R2	0.001	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.105	0.011	0.090	0.005	0.000	0.001	0.205	0.008

Notes: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

2.2.1.5. *Chinese Military Support versus Western Sanctions*

Sanctions imposed by the West (US) did not prove to be a significant explanation for China increasing its arms shipments to African hybrid regimes (Table 10) or increasing the number of military projects (Table 11). In the case of trade (Table 10), no statistical significance can be discerned across models. Moreover, the relationship between the two variables is not entirely positive, as a negative coefficient value appears in several models under Xi's rule (Models 7, 8, 9, 10). At the same time, this negative relationship does not hold for electoral democracies (ED) in the same period, where the coefficient estimates stay just below significance levels (Models 11 and 12). Similarly, when looking at the results where the dependent variable is the number of military projects (Table 11), the conclusions are essentially the same. Sanctions are significant in only one of the models (Model 11) in ED under Xi's rule. However, the value drops below the significance level when additional control variables are added. In this model, only diplomatic relations with China retained statistical significance, as anticipated, and conflict also emerged as a significant determinant.

Table 10: China's reaction (military support, trade) to external incentives (sanctions)

China's military support (trade)												
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Explanatory variables	Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 2 years)
Sanctions (US)	0.022 (0.55)	0.015 (0.055)	0.008 (0.065)	0.006 (0.066)	0.065 (0.091)	0.030 (0.057)	-0.013 (0.059)	-0.026 (0.056)	-0.049 (0.076)	-0.045 (0.074)	0.145 (0.229)	0.114 (0.106)
Constant	-0.29 (0.066)	-3.50 (0.066)	1.50 (0.080)	9.86 (0.080)	-1.01 (0.107)	-9.91 (0.107)	-3.77 (0.095)	2.39 (0.095)	2.23 (0.124)	2.59 (0.124)	-4.89 (0.107)	1.46 (0.133)
N of observations	847	847	552	552	282	282	307	307	184	184	108	108
N of groups: country	45	45	35	35	21	21	45	45	29	29	18	18
R2	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.004	0.001	0.000	0.001	0.002	0.002	0.091	0.013

Notes: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

Table 11: China's reaction (military support, projects) to external incentives (sanctions)

	China's military support (projects)																							
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12												
Explanatory variables																								
Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	0.047 (0.050)	Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	0.001 (-0.039)	EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	0.053 (0.063)	EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	0.010 (0.047)	ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	0.045 (0.076)	ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	0.009 (0.068)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	0.027 (0.070)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	-0.054 (0.055)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	-0.016 (0.096)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	-0.059 (0.074)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	0.014 (0.139)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	0.021 (0.074)	
Sanctions (US)																								
Natural resources																								
China's export																								
One-China policy																								
GDP per capita																								
Conflict																								
Constant	0.001 (0.056)	8.10 (0.056)	0.000 (0.059)	-0.000 (0.059)	0.002 (0.109)	0.000 (0.110)	-0.000 (0.083)	0.001 (0.084)	0.001 (0.105)	0.002 (0.106)	-0.018 (0.099)	0.000 (0.128)												
N of observations	760	760	502	502	249	249	220	220	135	135	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
N of groups: country	45	45	35	35	21	21	45	45	29	29	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	
R2	0.002	0.000	0.003	0.000	0.002	0.000	0.001	0.003	0.000	0.004	0.204	0.000	0.000	0.004	0.204	0.004	0.000	0.004	0.004	0.204	0.204	0.004	0.000	

Notes: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

These findings go against the claim that China supports so-called pariah states in Africa sanctioned for their human rights violations (Large, 2008; Naim, 2007). Yet, there are instances where Chinese military support helped sustain a regime abroad. Given the regression results above, these should not be understood as some broad trend in China's behavior. With respect to Beijing's reaction to sanctions, an unfamous instance of China's military support to the Sudanese regime can be mentioned here. China has been Khartoum's key international sponsor since 1989, and the relationship developed over time into a more embedded and strategic engagement. It was mainly in the 2000s, however, that Beijing started to find the relationship with Bashir's violent rule increasingly problematic with regard to adherence to the core principles of its foreign policy – non-interference – and protection of its massive investment investments in the country's oil industry. As Daniel Large puts it, it was the “particular vulnerability of anti-government violence of Chinese oil operations, which are more exposed than other key oil investors from India and Malaysia, has underscored China's deepening political involvement and correspondingly elevated the need to investment protection into a higher priority for Beijing” (Large, 2009, p. 618). The threats and attacks on the Chinese facilities and nationals by the rebels served as a reason for Beijing to promote the resolution of the conflict. Also, they led to China's more active engagement in Sudanese politics, or so-called “influence without interference” (Anshan, 2022, p. 210). At the same time, the long-term principles promoted in China's foreign policy came into play as the “underpinning Beijing's concern at external responses advocating intervention in Darfur has been strong belief in the proper, legitimate role of the central state in maintaining order and avoiding political fragmentation, the importance of political stability and the inherent danger of promoting non-consensual ‘regime change’ from without.” (Large, 2009, p. 620).

As a result, on the one hand, Beijing repeatedly opposed the sanctions imposed on the regime for violating human rights, possibly leading to a regime change and menacing Chinese investment associated with the government in Khartoum. On the other hand, China did leverage its relationship with the regime to negotiate cooperation with the UN to find an agreeable solution for all sides.⁶⁹ This eventually

⁶⁹ The pressure on Khartoum to find a solution to the crisis was also attributed to the 2008 Beijing Olympics and became a “high-water mark” of this external pressure (Large, 2009, p. 620).

led Khartoum to accept a hybrid peacekeeping mission in Darfur. Yet, while maintaining the argument that “sanctions would only prolong suffering” (Al Jazeera, 2007a), China was accused (together with Russia) of selling the weapons to the Sudanese government that were used in Darfur despite the UN embargo (The New York Times, 2007). This accusation reemerged in 2011 when Amnesty International asserted that “China and Russia are selling arms to the government of Sudan in the full knowledge that many of them are likely to end up being used to commit human rights violations in Darfur” (Amnesty International, 2012),⁷⁰ thus further prolong the conflict and the repressive Sudanese government’s rule.⁷¹⁷²

2.2.1.6. *Military Support versus Mobilization for Democracy*

Regarding China’s reaction to the pro-democracy protests in a recipient country, it is mainly the military projects that proved to be responsive (Table 13), as the trade with weapons emerged as a statistically insignificant factor across the models (Table 12). In the case of military project provision, the mobilization for democracy proved to be statistically significant in four models, including the gray zone (Models 1 and 2) and electoral authoritarianism (EA) (Models 3 and 4). On the contrary, against expectations, the results show that China, under Xi’s rule, is not responsive to the pro-democracy mobilizations in Africa.

Apart from the main explanatory variable, other variables were statistically significant. China’s export to Africa seems to lead to an increase in committed military projects, except for Model 4, where the significance drops. Also, as anticipated, diplomatic ties with Beijing remain statistically significant but only in the gray zone. The significance drops in EA (Models 3 and 4). Natural resources

⁷⁰ It was not illegal to supply weapons to Khartoum, yet it was required suppliers to have “end-use” guarantees from the Sudanese government that the arms will not end up in Darfur (Reuters, 2012).

⁷¹ The Amnesty International report referred to an incident from December 2011 that occurred at the Zam Zam camp for people displaced by the conflict, where Sudanese security forces carried out a looting raid during which a man was shot dead and six other people were injured. According to the organization, the witnesses reported finding ammunition bearing Chinese manufacture codes and dates indicating that it was transferred to Darfur after the imposition of the UN embargo. Moreover, the 2010-manufactured Chinese ammunition was also discovered at the conflict borderline between the Northern and Southern parts in Sudan (Amnesty International, 2012).

⁷² At this place, however, it must be emphasized, that China’s role in armaments for Khartoum was rather modest compared to other actors, namely Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, whose arms transfer amounted to 77% of all imports between 2007 and 2016. China was responsible for “only” 19% of all military exports to Sudan during that period (Hammond, 2017).

are insignificant determinants for military support provision and also hold a negative coefficient value, showing that the more natural resources a country has, the fewer military projects it receives from China. Otherwise, although statistically insignificant, China seems to provide more military projects to more affluent countries and those dealing with a conflict.

Table 12: China's reaction (military support, trade) to domestic incentives (mobilization for democracy)

China's military support (trade)												
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Explanatory variables	Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 2 years)
Mobilization for dem.	0.060 (0.072)	0.066 (0.072)	0.071 (0.089)	0.077 (0.089)	0.045 (0.108)	0.048 (0.105)	0.131 (0.101)	0.126 (0.099)	0.145 (0.127)	0.148 (0.127)	0.124 (0.161)	0.082 (0.144)
Constant	8.60 (0.065)	1.01 (0.65)	-1.86 (0.078)	-7.32 (0.078)	-1.00 (0.108)	-4.81 (0.109)	3.94 (0.093)	2.76 (0.093)	-2.61 (0.120)	-1.43 (0.120)	-1.64 (0.139)	-1.41 (0.141)
N of observations	847	847	552	552	282	282	307	307	184	184	108	108
N of groups: country	45	45	35	35	21	21	45	45	29	29	18	18
R2	0.004	0.004	0.005	0.006	0.002	0.002	0.017	0.016	0.021	0.022	0.015	0.007

Notes: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

Table 13: China's reaction (military support, projects) to domestic incentives (mobilization for democracy)

China's military support (projects)												
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Explanatory variables	Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 2 years)
Mobilization for dem.	0.097** (0.042)	0.109** (0.049)	0.107* (0.063)	0.150** (0.067)	0.080 (0.093)	0.061 (0.097)	0.088 (0.086)	0.106 (0.092)	0.040 (0.094)	0.086 (0.115)	0.115 (0.152)	0.079 (0.150)
Natural resources	-0.030 (0.033)	-0.001 (0.039)	-0.036 (0.031)	-0.033 (0.030)								
China's export	0.000** (0.000)	0.084* (0.049)	0.168*** (0.033)	0.070 (0.048)								
One-China policy	0.103*** (0.023)	0.095*** (0.026)	0.034 (0.022)	0.034 (0.028)								
GDP per capita	0.060 (0.433)	0.050 (0.046)	0.067 (0.044)	0.067 (0.051)								
Conflict	0.046 (0.050)	0.007 (0.047)	0.053 (0.054)	0.012 (0.055)								
Constant	-0.000 (0.050)	0.008 (0.050)	0.168 (0.050)	0.007 (0.050)	-0.000 (0.111)	-0.000 (0.111)	-0.001 (0.081)	-0.000 (0.081)	0.000 (0.105)	0.002 (0.106)	-0.005 (0.127)	-0.005 (0.129)
N of observations	760	760	502	502	249	249	220	220	135	135	75	75
N of groups: country	45	45	35	35	21	21	45	45	29	29	18	18
R2	0.034	0.039	0.054	0.035	0.007	0.004	0.008	0.011	0.002	0.007	0.014	0.007

Notes: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

An example of military cooperation against mobilization can be demonstrated in China's engagement in Zimbabwe. As early as 2005, the Chinese government sent intelligence officers to Harare to provide telecommunications and radio communications training. The Chinese government has also assisted the Zimbabwean authorities in censoring certain websites by monitoring Internet traffic. This project was implemented allegedly with regard to the upcoming elections in Zimbabwe (Custer et al., 2021; Reporters without Borders, 2005). In the forthcoming years, the military cooperation between the two countries kept growing, involving various projects, as indicated by AidData (Custer et al., 2021). As recently as 2005, China provided Zimbabwe with several dozen military trucks, training, and medical material. In 2006, Beijing donated building materials to the Zimbabwe Defence Forces to construct barracks. Still, in 2006, Harare and Beijing signed a cooperation agreement about military material and technical training provisions. Also, that year, China National Aero-Technology Import and Export Corporation reportedly provided 150 million USD in supplier credit to Harare for the 12 K-8 Jet Trainer Aircraft Acquisition Project. In 2011, cooperation further strengthened when Zimbabwe signed a loan to build a National Defence College for military training. The institution received several buses and ICT equipment as a gift from Beijing in 2012 (Chivara, 2013; Custer et al., 2021).

However, Beijing's most controversial move in terms of military cooperation with Harare regarding "curbing" the mobilization of citizens dates back to the spring of 2008. In April 2008, the infamous Chinese "ship of shame" (The Zimbabwean, 2008) was "carrying weapons to an electorally defeated but militarily defiant [Zimbabwean] government" (Spiegel & Le Billon, 2009, p. 324) while Mugabe's regime was engaging in repressions during elections. The cargo included assault rifles, mortar shells, and 3 million rounds of ammunition (ibid., p. 327). It should have assisted Mugabe in winning the second round of presidential elections after losing the first round to the opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangirai. The electoral setbacks made Mugabe nervous, and as a result, he resorted to violent tactics against opposition members and their supporters to intimidate voters ahead of the second round. The delivery timing was not coincidental, although Harare ordered a year before the elections. The shipment led to international resistance, with a union of South African dockers collectively refusing to unload the shipment for further

transportation to Zimbabwe. Religious leaders and lawyers in South Africa won a court order to stop the cargo. These actions resulted in international outcry, and Mozambique, Namibia, and Angola also turned away the Chinese ship. Although some items were eventually offloaded in Luanda, the ship returned to China with its military cargo (Zoyab, 2011).

The Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman, Jiang Yu, defended the shipment, stating that the contract had been signed the previous year and was unrelated to the crisis in Zimbabwe, and the issue became politicized. According to her, the trade contract was “consistent with our [Chinese] laws and with security council resolutions and China’s international obligations. We have been very responsible and cautious with regards to weapons exports.” (Tran, 2008). The cargo became a problem for Beijing when it least needed it, the year Beijing hosted the Olympics, and, along with other “missteps,” notably those in Sudan, the incident undermined China’s efforts to build its image of a rising peaceful power. Moreover, against Yu’s statement, Human Rights Watch (2008) argued that the shipment had violated the principles of China’s regulations for the export of arms to other countries – enabling the buyer to meet legitimate self-defense needs, strengthening peace, security, and stability in the region concerned, and not using military sales to interfere in the internal affairs of other states (HRW, 2008). The controversies concerning the cargo on the “ship of shame” indicated China’s willingness to engage in reputation-damaging cooperation to help an allied regime sustain its power by boosting its repressive capacities to handle domestic challenges.

Similarly, in Zambia, China yet again demonstrated its willingness to help a friend in need as it supported the ruling PF before the 2021 elections in enhancing its repressive capacities. As was leaked in the Zambian newspapers in 2015, the government gained a 193 million USD worth loan from a Chinese state-owned weapons manufacturer Poly Technologies Inc. that was to pay for security equipment for police, the immigration department, prisons, and the Drug Enforcement Commission and which the PF government was trying to hide before the public (Lusakatimes.com, 2015). As AidData (Custer et al., 2021) reported, the detailed terms of the loan are unknown. However, it was not only a controversial loan for its lack of transparency and high price but also for its troublesome content. In March 2019, the Zambia Police Service reported that it had received the first

supply of security equipment funded from the loan, which included 16,000 combat uniforms, 15,000 tactical and stab-proof vests, 50,000 raincoats, 16,000 rack sacks, and was delivered to Lilayi Police Training College in Lusaka. Another batch of uniforms and communication equipment started arriving in the country later that year and in early 2020 (ibid.). The 2020 equipment supply can be seen as the most controversial, as it also included weapons and ammunition, anti-riot cartridges, and 225 utility and heavy-duty vehicles. In April 2020, the last consignment arrived, including 191 pick-up vehicles for the Zambia Police Service, Zambia Correctional Service, Immigration Department, and Drug Enforcement Commission (ibid.). China delivered the antiriot equipment and weapons only 17 to 16 months before the general elections in August 2021, which the PF seemingly correctly suspected to be highly challenging when it comes to public mobilization for democracy, as indicated earlier in Figure 6.

2.3. Chapter Conclusion

Based on the regression analysis results, ideologically motivated *autocracy promotion* was not confirmed as an influence explaining the autocratization of African hybrid regimes. Thus, these findings lend credence to authors seeing ideologically driven international influence as a matter of the past (Tansey, 2016a; Weyland, 2017) or as an example of influence exerted by regimes other than China (Vanderhill, 2013). However, in this respect, as empirical evidence shows (Benabdallah, 2020; Cabestan, 2022; Herman, 2020; Sun, 2016), the projection of such ideologically motivated influence by Beijing cannot be entirely dismissed, given the resources the CCP has invested in the building of cross-party relations and knowledge sharing with its African counterparts. This has become a particularly increasing form of collaboration under Xi's rule. This form of inter-party cooperation and knowledge transfer may take longer (if at all) to be reflected in African political regimes, thereby also the quality of democracy. Given that the studies mentioned in this chapter show intensifying cooperation in people-to-people exchanges, Beijing's ideological influence should not be dismissed. Indeed, as has been reported, Beijing launched some of the most significant initiatives to strengthen cross-party cooperation beyond the timeframe of this dissertation.

When it comes to *democracy resistance*, the findings show that China indeed responds to both external and domestic incentives that have the potential to menace the survival of the African hybrid regimes. However, these reactions differ based on the incentives evoking them and the mechanisms employed as a response. More specifically, with respect to hypothesis H2a, assuming that *China responds to Western democratic aid by increasing its development aid*, the results of regression analyses show that Beijing reacts mainly to the disbursement of democratic aid, not democratic aid commitments. Beijing thus considers the effectiveness of the democratic aid rather than pledges. However, these results emerged somewhat puzzling as they demonstrate that when democratic ODA disbursed by the West increases, Chinese aid decreases in response. The effect remains significant in the gray zone and electoral authoritarianism. The effect becomes less strong under Xi's rule, as it falls under the significance level in electoral authoritarianism. Although these results go against the anticipated assumption as stated in the H2a hypothesis, at the same time, they may be interpreted as that Beijing acts as an alternative donor and steps in and out when foreign countries are deprived of their financial flows by traditional donors. In general, however, these findings cannot be taken authoritatively due to the overall weakness of the coefficients across the models and the low explanation power of these models.

As a trigger for China's aid provision, sanctions are statistically significant in electoral democracies only, while this significance seems to be increasing during Xi's rule. Thus, hypothesis H2b, assuming that *China responds to Western sanctions by increasing its development aid*, has been confirmed only in a limited way. A positive reaction to the sanctions was expected in electoral authoritarianism, whose survival should be rather menaced by coercive measures. Also, empirical evidence shows electoral authoritarianism regimes getting development aid from Beijing when sanctioned (Rwanda in 2012 or Zimbabwe since the early 2000s). However, this does not mean that one cannot encounter cases of China increasing its aid to electoral democracies while facing Western sanctions, as it did in Ivory Coast.

Hypothesis H2c, assuming that *China responds to the domestic pro-democracy mobilization by increasing its development aid*, was confirmed. Mobilization for democracy proved to be a significant determinant of China's reaction via its assistance regarding regimes in the gray zone. As anticipated during Xi's rule, it

holds strong, and this effect also becomes significant in electoral authoritarianism. This confirms the anticipations about the fragility of electoral authoritarianism being rather menaced by the protests supporting democracy. However, the models' explanation power and the coefficient estimates strength are weak. Nevertheless, empirical evidence from several African hybrid regimes (Ethiopia and Zambia) shows that Beijing is willing to provide development finance in reaction to the mobilization endangering the regime. Particularly, Beijing's funding in the ICT sector has proved to have the potential to enhance the capacities for digital repression of aspiring African autocrats.

The Chinese military support was a powerful response to democratic aid disbursement. Thus, hypothesis H2d, assuming that *China responds to Western democratic aid by increasing its military support*, was confirmed. The results apply to both modes of military support: military trade and the number of military projects. For trade, the results indicate a particularly strong reaction to aid disbursement in the gray zone, especially in electoral authoritarianism. As anticipated, China's response was even more significant during Xi's rule. In the case of military projects delivered, the results are similar. Yet, the coefficients are smaller, and the models' explanation power is weaker. These results are again only applicable when it comes to the disbursement of democratic aid, not the pledges, further confirming that Beijing considers the aid effectiveness rather than the commitments by Western donors. The findings in the quantitative analysis may also find support in the empirical case of Ethiopia.

The sanctions imposed by the West on the African hybrid regimes proved to be an insignificant trigger for China's reaction in the form of military support; this applies both to military trade and the number of military projects. Thus, hypothesis H2e, assuming that *China responds to the Western sanctions by increasing its military support*, was rejected. However, there is some empirical evidence that Beijing assists sanctioned governments with its military support, as shown in the case of Sudan. These results may indicate a lack of trend regarding Beijing's reaction to the sanctions or that it just prefers employing other modes of endorsement, like rhetorical backing and voting in the UN.

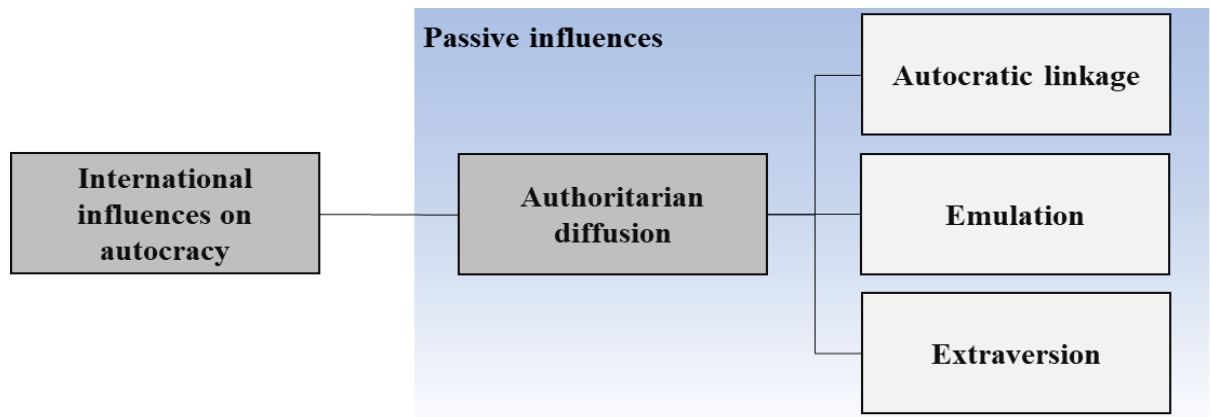
The last hypothesis (H2f) tested in this chapter assumes that *China responds to domestic pro-democracy mobilization by increasing its military support*. This expectation was confirmed only regarding the number of military projects, not the military trade. In terms of the provision of the military projects, the results show that mobilization for democracy became a determinant for China's military response in the gray zone regimes and, specifically, in electoral authoritarianism. However, contrary to expectations, mobilization for democracy was not a significant factor during Xi's rule. The findings are supported by the Zimbabwe case, where long-term military support from Beijing enhanced the regime's military capacities and survival. Zimbabwe may also serve as a case showing that even in terms of military trade, Beijing is willing to support a foreign regime facing domestic challenges. Similarly, the case of Zambia may again serve as an example wherein China provided anti-riot equipment and weapons in anticipation of the highly contested and PF regime challenging 2021 elections.

3. China as an Authoritarian Diffuser

In this work, authoritarian diffusion is understood and examined as a passive international influence. Its unintended nature is only considered concerning the external power, not the recipient. Thus, the research that underscores the role of domestic actors is taken into account (e.g., Clapham, 2008; Dreher et al., 2019; Fourie, 2015; Peiffer & Englebert, 2012; Tolstrup, 2013; 2014; Tull, 2011; Wang, 2022). These domestic gatekeepers may actively shape and form cooperation with an external autocratic power according to their agency and goals.

First, “linkage” to an external non-democratic state is examined, drawing on the work of Levitsky & Way (2010) on democratic linkage to the West. Their framework is complemented by Tolstrup’s work (2013; 2014), which brings into the theoretical debate a critical role that elites play in the recipient state of influence, who may shape structural ties according to their agency and motives. The conceptualization is then adjusted to the work of Tansey, Koehler, and Schmotz (2016) and Schmotz and Tansey (2018), who came up with the notion of “autocratic linkage,” adapting Levitsky and Way’s concept to ties between autocracies. *Second*, the diffusion of authoritarianism is then examined, reflecting the debate about the rise of China as a model in economic and political development for other countries that may wish to “emulate” its autocratic features (Ambrosio, 2012; 2010; Demiryol, 2022; Breslin, 2011; Fourie, 2015; Halper, 2010; Hodzi, 2020; Kennedy, 2010; Kurlantzick, 2007; McCauley, Pearson, & Wang, 2022; Ramo, 2004; Sojková, 2017; 2018). *Third*, the strategy of “extraversion” (Bayart, 1993; Bayart & Ellis, 2000; Clapham, 1996; 2007; Peiffer & Englebert, 2012; Hartmann, 2019; Tull, 2011; Wang, 2022) is the final form of passive influence introduced. Extraversion is examined as a strategy through which African elites use the presence of an external actor and their own dependence on its support to consolidate power and position over their domestic competitors. Thus, it is assumed that ruling political elites instrumentalize the Chinese influence to hold on to power. In this regard, the forms of passive international authoritarian influence are demonstrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Examined passive international influences



Source: Tansey, 2016a; 2016b; supplemented by the author

This chapter combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative methods include *multiple linear regression* with standard errors clustered on the country used in examining autocratic linkage to China and *logistic regression* employed in the case of extraversion, where the dependent variable is coded as binary. The qualitative methods used include an *explanatory case study* to demonstrate the effects of China’s passive influence on autocratization in the case of Zambia. However, the explanatory case studies are concerned only with autocratic linkage and extraversion. An *exploratory case study* of Zambia is employed to examine emulation, which helps to reveal, if at all, and, eventually, by whom emulation is suggested. This is done through analyzing the content of the newspapers.

In addition to secondary sources and official statistics, this chapter draws on information from semi-structured interviews conducted in Zambia and a large corpus of articles printed in Zambian newspapers and collected manually during field research in the country in 2019 and 2020. The *content analysis of the media frames* is used to examine how China was portrayed in the Zambian press. This became an essential source of information as the identified categories of media frames, the frequency of occurrence of articles in frames, and coded sources in the stories help reveal the density of ties and the key actors sustaining them. Likewise, analysis of media frames shows if and by whom China is framed as a model in the Zambian press and how the Zambian government instrumentalizes China’s presence.

The operationalization of the media frames concept is described in detail below. The author takes into account theoretical and empirical vagueness and conceptual fragmentation⁷³ (Scheufele, 1999), with no existing consensus about how to recognize frames in the news (Van Gorp 2007; Matthes & Kohring 2008) that results from the growing number of definitions of framing. For this, the author employs the definition introduced by Entman (1993) that allows for an applicable operationalization and facilitates the identification of the frames in the articles (Sojková, 2022).

According to Entman, “To frame is to select *some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described” (1993, p. 52; italics in original). In Entman’s definition, several frame elements or functions that make for a frame may be recognized – frames *define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies*. These elements may be found all in one sentence. However, it may happen that frames in a single text need not necessarily contain all the listed functions. In a text, frames are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences providing thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments (Entman, 1993).

This part of the work relies on a qualitative inductive method to identify media frames to answer the following question – *How was China framed in Zambian newspapers throughout the years?* Based on the selection criteria described in the Introduction, the author analyses the content of 1,974 articles that were printed in

⁷³ The framing idea is based on the work of sociologist Erving Goffman (1974), who employs the concept of frames as “schemata of interpretation” that enable their users “to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms.” (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). Media frames were researched in a more detailed way in Gaye Tuchman’s (1978) or Todd Gitlin’s (1980) work, focusing on the media coverage of social movements in the USA. In Gitlin’s view, the media frames then “organise the world both for journalists who report it and, in some important degree, for us who rely on their reports. *Media frames are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organise discourse, whether verbal or visual.*” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7; italics in original). As Gitlin notes, frames enable journalists to process an amount of information quickly and in a routine way, by which they are essentially an inevitable part of journalistic practice (ibid).

the state-owned *Zambia Daily Mail Limited* (ZDML) (1,234 stories) and two private-owned newspapers – *The Post* and *The Mast* (740 stories), from 2003 to 2019. The unit of analysis is a media article, where each text contains all or some of the elements of a frame determined based on Entman’s (1993) definition. Both dominant frames and secondary frames⁷⁴ are identified based on the following elements forming the frame:

- *Problem definition* – determining what is caused by a causal agent, i.e., what is the core problem of the story; what are the costs and benefits resulting from the actions of the causal agent?
- *Diagnosis of causes* – identification of the forces that stand behind a particular issue; who bears the responsibility for the fallouts; explanation of why the causal agent acts the way he/she does.
- *Moral judgment* – description of causal agents and adjectives used in relation to them and their actions; are the actions judged positively, neutrally, or negatively?⁷⁵
- *Suggested remedies* – what options are listed as possible solutions to the problem; how are the offered solutions justified; what effect is expected from the listed solutions?

In addition to determining the framework’s features mentioned above, the author also codes other elements in every item collected to manifest the distinction between the particular dominant frames (see codebook in Appendix 3). Based on the above-described Entman’s (1993) conceptualization and methodology, eight frames were identified in the ZDML and The Post/The Mast. These are framing China as a *development partner* (DP), *political partner* (PP), *exploiter* (Expl), *culturally different actor* (Cult), an *instrument* of Zambian political actors (Instr), *model of development* (MoD), *criminal actor* (Crim), and, finally, a *competitor*

⁷⁴ According to Linstrom and Marais (2012, p. 30), the researcher may decide whether to identify either only a dominant frame or a dominant and secondary frame in each of the news articles. The dominant frame is the main theme of the news article, while the second frame is a supplementary idea that supports the main theme.

⁷⁵ Positive judgments – the case presents only the benefits of actions or marginalizes negative judgements; neutral judgements – the case points to both negative and positive arguments without marginalizing any of them; negative – the case describes actions only as negative or marginalizes positive arguments.

(Comp).⁷⁶ A more detailed overview of the frames, their frequency, tone, and sources is demonstrated below using descriptive statistics (Tables 14, 15, 16, 17). Individual categories are more thoroughly debated within the three passive influences examined in this chapter – *linkage*, *emulation*, and *extraversion*.

Table 14 shows that the ZDML overwhelmingly framed China as a DP and, to a lesser extent, a PP. These two categories made up 66% of observations in the ZDML. This is unlike in the case of The Post/The Mast, where the results show that although the DP frame was also the most frequent, the second largest category framed China as an Expl (Table 15). Such a selection of topics contributed to a more frequent negative tone of China coverage in the private press. In The Post/The Mast, a positive tone was present only in 44% of observations, and China was framed neutrally in 21% of observations, while 35% were negative in their tones. The ZDML coverage of China was overwhelmingly positive, with 76% of observations being positive in their tone, 16% neutral, and only 8% negative.

Table 14: The frames identified in the ZDML (number and share; 2003 – 2019)

N of observations and share of appearances (%)	Name of the frame									
	DP	PP	Expl	Cult	Instr	Crim	MoD	Comp	Other	Total
Dominant frames	731	143	75	72	72	58	57	13	13	1234
	59%	12%	6%	6%	6%	5%	5%	1%	1%	100%
Secondary frames	104	30	28	20	22	11	57	10	0	282
	37%	11%	10%	7%	8%	4%	20%	4%	0%	100%
Total n. of frames	835	173	103	92	94	69	114	23	13	1516
	55%	11%	7%	6%	6%	5%	8%	2%	1%	100%
Tone: positive/neutral/negative (share in %)	86/12/2	82/17/2	38/19/43	83/14/3	40/57/3	32/20/48	94/5/1	19/29/52	38/31/31	76/16/8

Source: Author

⁷⁶ There is also a residual category of frames that did not fit any of the identified categories, whether for being thematically different or not containing enough information that would allow for classifying the stories under some of the identified categories.

Table 15: The frames identified in The Post/The Mast (number and share; 2003 – 2019)

N of observations and share of appearances (%)	Name of the frame									
	DP	PP	Expl	Cult	Instr	Crim	MoD	Comp	Other	Total
Dominant frames	396	71	93	23	7	74	40	22	14	740
	54%	10%	13%	3%	1%	10%	5%	3%	2%	100%
Secondary frames	60	17	35	17	17	12	30	8	0	196
	31%	9%	18%	9%	9%	6%	15%	4%	0%	100%
Total n. of frames	456	88	128	40	24	86	70	30	14	936
	49%	9%	14%	4%	3%	9%	7%	3%	1%	100%
Tone: positive/neutral/negative (share in %)	59/23/18	62/18/20	0/12/88	65/23/13	0/50/50	2/24/73	83/11/6	0/7/93	14/64/21	44/21/35

Source: Author

Tables 16 and 17 show the number and share of sources identified in dominant frame categories in the Zambian newspapers. The government sources (ZGOV and ChGOV) were the most frequent in both newspapers. In the ZDML, they made up 57% of sources identified in the articles. Yet this share is lower in the case of the private press with only 41%. In The Post/The Mast, the individual stories gave more space to other voices, often dissenting from the standpoint of the ruling political elites, and that included political opposition (ZPO), with 8% of sources (compared to 2% in the ZDML) as well as representatives of Zambian unions, business associations and workers (U&A&W) with 4% of sources. This larger share of critical voices also explains the more negative tone identified in the private press, as mentioned above.

Table 16: Number of sources and share of their appearances (%) in the dominant frames (ZDML, 2003 – 2019, 1,234 articles)

Type of source	DP (731)		PP (143)		Expl (75)		Cult (72)		Instr (72)		Crim (58)		MoD (57)		Comp (13)		Other (13)		Total (1234)	
ZGOV	453	38%	79	40%	61	34%	22	16%	55	67%	15	16%	28	23%	3	17%	6	32%	722	35%
ChGOV	290	24%	76	38%	15	8%	29	22%	2	2%	6	6%	27	23%	1	6%	2	11%	448	22%
FGOV	36	3%	14	7%	16	9%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	3	3%	1	6%	2	11%	73	4%
ChB	92	8%	0	0%	14	8%	3	2%	2	2%	2	2%	6	5%	0	0%	0	0%	119	6%
ZB	46	4%	0	0%	0	0%	2	1%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	49	2%
FB	21	2%	0	0%	3	2%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	3	17%	0	0%	27	1%
U&A&W	10	1%	0	0%	12	7%	0	0%	1	1%	2	2%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	25	1%
ZPO	9	1%	11	6%	5	3%	0	0%	3	4%	2	2%	2	2%	0	0%	0	0%	32	2%
ZLG&TA	46	4%	1	1%	5	3%	3	2%	5	6%	1	1%	3	3%	1	6%	0	0%	65	3%
ChLG	14	1%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	7	6%	0	0%	0	0%	22	1%
LE	6	1%	2	1%	8	4%	0	0%	0	0%	49	52%	1	1%	1	6%	4	21%	71	3%
ZSA	18	2%	1	1%	5	3%	1	1%	1	1%	0	0%	5	4%	0	0%	0	0%	31	2%
FSA	36	3%	2	1%	16	9%	3	2%	2	2%	1	1%	9	8%	2	11%	0	0%	71	3%
ChSA	12	1%	3	2%	0	0%	9	7%	0	0%	1	1%	10	8%	0	0%	1	5%	36	2%
ChM	10	1%	3	2%	0	0%	9	7%	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%	0	0%	0	0%	24	1%
ZM	14	1%	5	3%	4	2%	11	8%	1	1%	4	4%	2	2%	0	0%	0	0%	41	2%
FM	21	2%	0	0%	7	4%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	3	3%	0	0%	0	0%	32	2%
FNGO	3	0%	0	0%	4	2%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	9	0%
ZNGO	10	1%	0	0%	2	1%	2	1%	0	0%	4	4%	2	2%	1	6%	0	0%	21	1%
ChNGO	5	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	3	3%	2	2%	0	0%	0	0%	10	0%
IOs and IFIs	26	2%	2	1%	3	2%	5	4%	0	0%	0	0%	7	6%	4	22%	2	11%	49	2%
ZCit	17	1%	0	0%	0	0%	6	4%	9	11%	3	3%	0	0%	1	6%	1	5%	37	2%
ChCit	5	0%	0	0%	0	0%	26	19%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	1	5%	33	2%
Total n. of sources	1200	100%	200	100%	180	100%	134	100%	82	100%	94	100%	120	100%	18	100%	19	100%	2047	100%

Source: Author

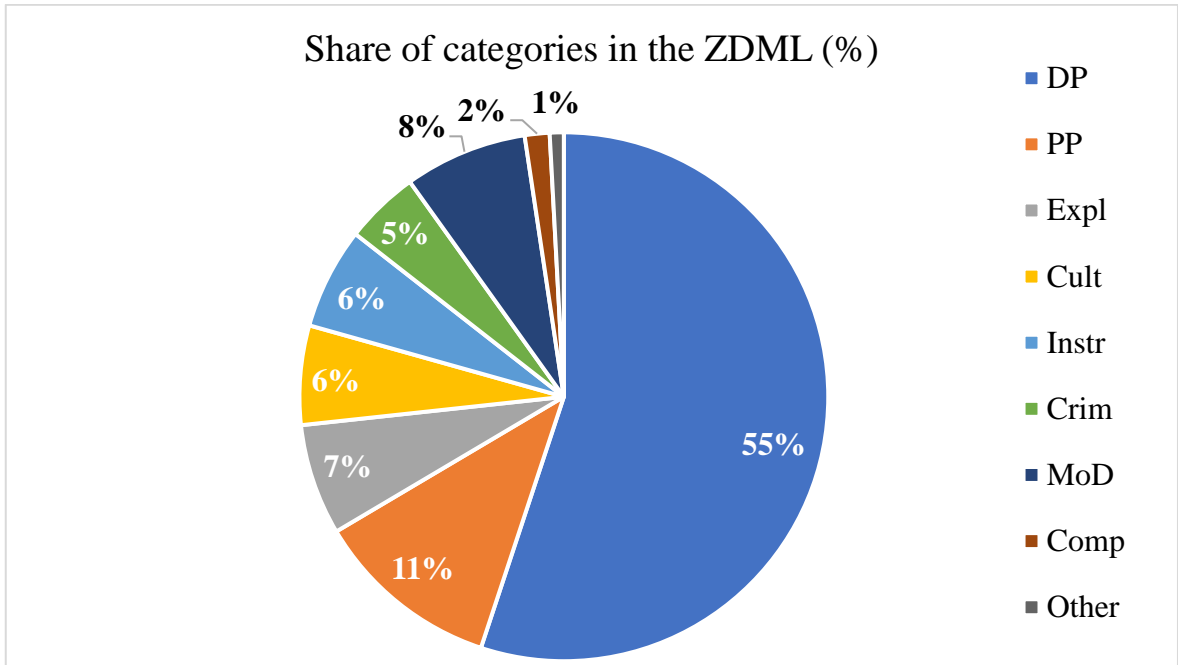
Table 17: Number of sources and share of their appearances (%) in the dominant frames (The Post/The Mast, 2003 – 2019, 740 articles)

Type of source	DP (396)		PP (71)		Expl (93)		Cult (23)		Instr (7)		Crim (74)		MoD (40)		Comp (22)		Other (14)		Total (740)	
ZGOV	222	33%	43	30%	43	21%	10	24%	5	38%	8	6%	13	20%	10	31%	4	18%	358	27%
ChGOV	90	13%	40	28%	11	5%	9	21%	1	8%	4	3%	19	29%	0	0%	4	18%	178	14%
FGOV	39	6%	21	15%	7	3%	2	5%	0	0%	0	0%	3	5%	2	6%	0	0%	74	6%
ChB	47	7%	0	0%	13	6%	4	10%	0	0%	8	6%	1	2%	0	0%	1	5%	74	6%
ZB	21	3%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%	2	3%	4	13%	0	0%	29	2%
FB	21	3%	2	1%	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	27	2%
U&A&W	13	2%	0	0%	44	22%	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	59	4%
ZPO	41	6%	21	15%	22	11%	1	2%	5	38%	3	2%	2	3%	7	22%	1	5%	103	8%
ZLG&TA	36	5%	1	1%	9	4%	0	0%	0	0%	4	3%	2	3%	5	16%	1	5%	58	4%
ChLG	4	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	3%	0	0%	0	0%	6	0%
LE	5	1%	4	3%	17	8%	0	0%	0	0%	82	62%	0	0%	0	0%	2	9%	110	8%
ZSA	20	3%	1	1%	6	3%	5	12%	0	0%	1	1%	2	3%	2	6%	0	0%	37	3%
FSA	18	3%	1	1%	8	4%	3	7%	0	0%	2	2%	9	14%	0	0%	0	0%	41	3%
ChSA	5	1%	2	1%	0	0%	4	10%	0	0%	0	0%	2	3%	0	0%	1	5%	14	1%
ChM	2	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	0%
ZM	3	0%	0	0%	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%	0	0%	1	5%	6	0%
FM	17	3%	0	0%	3	1%	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	23	2%
FNGO	4	1%	0	0%	4	2%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	5%	9	1%
ZNGO	12	2%	4	3%	9	4%	0	0%	2	15%	1	1%	1	2%	0	0%	2	9%	31	2%
ChNGO	3	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4	0%
IOs&IFIs	32	5%	2	1%	0	0%	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	4	6%	0	0%	0	0%	39	3%
ZCit	12	2%	0	0%	3	1%	2	5%	0	0%	8	6%	0	0%	2	6%	4	18%	31	2%
ChCit	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%	0	0%	2	2%	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	4	0%
Total n. of sources	667	100%	142	100%	201	100%	42	100%	13	100%	132	100%	66	100%	32	100%	22	100%	1317	100%

Source: Author

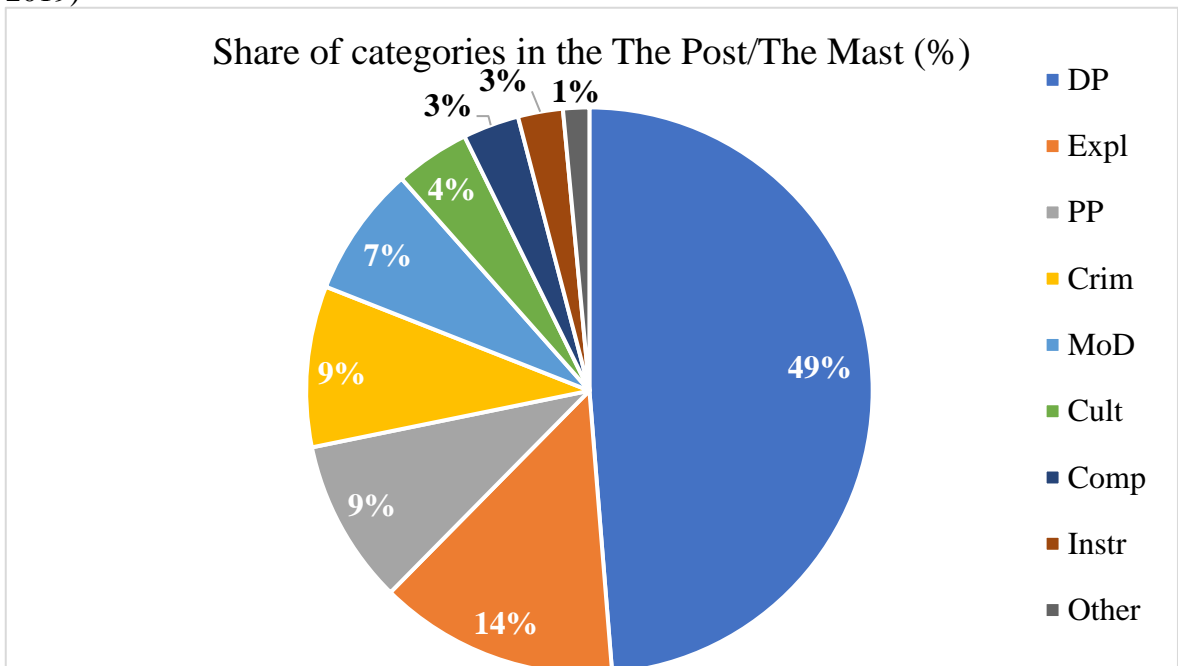
Two Figures (8 and 9) that depict the share of categories in examined print media were added to make the distinction between the different newspapers more understandable to the readers.

Figure 8: The share of frame categories identified in the ZDML (%; 2003 – 2019)



Source: Author

Figure 9: The share frame categories identified in The Post/The Mast (%; 2003 – 2019)



Source: Author

3.1. Autocratic Linkage to the “East”

The ties to China are examined through Tansey, Koehler, and Schmotz’s (2016) concept of “autocratic linkage,” which draws on Levitsky and Way’s (2010) structural notion of linkage to the West. With the idea of autocratic linkage, authors explain the survival of autocracies across states and regions since the end of World War II, defining it as “the density of ties and cross-border flows between non-democratic regimes.” (Tansey, Koehler, & Schmotz, 2016, p. 5). Regarding the regional orientation of this work, autocratic linkage to China is examined considering Tolstrup’s (2013; 2014) conceptualization, modifying the structural and static notion of linkage by Levitsky and Way. Tolstrup’s concept considers the intra-regional variation in ties to external actors and ascribes a central role to various gatekeepers sustaining, strengthening, or canceling the ties. Gatekeepers’ decision-making, thus, becomes the critical factor as it assumes that actors have the power to choose which external partner to reject or with whom they want to cooperate.

Tolstrup (2013, pp. 725–727) divides linkages into five dimensions. *First, economic* linkages, including trade, investment, and credit, are determined mainly by elites who hold political power and decide what trade agreements are made or abolished, make requests for loans and foreign aid, or approve the offered external assistance. *Second, intergovernmental* linkages include bilateral diplomatic and military ties as well as participation in alliances, treaties, and international organizations, which are also the dimensions where ruling elites decide whether they join new intergovernmental initiatives. Domestic elites less easily influence *third, technocratic, and social linkages* that include migration or tourism as they change rather independently as a product of the aggregate activities of the wider population. *Fourth, information* linkages include the flow of information across borders through telecommunications, Internet connections, and foreign media penetration. The ruling political elite can also influence these ties, who may adopt measures regulating information flow. *Fifth, civil society* linkages are also largely determined by political elites who allow and encourage their development. Opposition elites can then, in a favorable environment, build ties with international NGOs, party organizations, and other networks and actors of their choice.

Based on the theoretical debate, the following hypothesis is tested:

H3: *With increasing ties to China, the autocratization of African hybrid regimes will also grow.*

Autocratization, as the *dependent variable*, is operationalized the same way as it was in the case of autocracy promotion influence. Thus, the V-Dem's inverted *Liberal Democracy Index* is employed (Coppedge et al., 2023). There are several *independent variables* examined that are operationalized with respect to the conceptualization of linkage by Tolstrup (2013; 2014) as a) *economic*, b) *intergovernmental*, c) *technocratic and social*, and d) *information* linkages.⁷⁷

The 1) *economic* linkage is measured with the mutual trade volume. The data are available for the whole time range and taken from the *Johns Hopkins University SAIS China-Africa Research Initiative* (2022a) dataset. 2) *Intergovernmental* linkage is operationalized through the number of political elite visits between the states. AidData (2022) captures the number of visits worldwide from 2010 to 2019; this allows for partially following the time frame delimited in this work. 3) *Technocratic and social* linkages are operationalized through the number of Chinese workers and migrants in Africa. It is assumed that the country *willing* to issue work permits, which are not that easily obtainable, will also be rather willing to welcome other incoming Chinese migrants (e.g., entrepreneurs, students, and tourists). It is, after all, the host country policymakers who have the authority to decide who may enter their country through the issuance of visas and, likewise, who foreign companies can or cannot hire (Ghiselli & Morgan, 2022, p. 5). The data are taken from *Johns Hopkins University SAIS China-Africa Research Initiative* (2022b) and include Chinese workers sent to work on Chinese companies' construction contracts in Africa and Chinese workers hired for other labor services, such as working in factories.⁷⁸ Information about the number of workers is available

⁷⁷ The *civil society linkage* is not included in the analysis. As mentioned earlier, relations with China take place mainly at the official level among the elites. This is due to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, which has been part of Chinese foreign policy since the 1950s. It is thus assumed that such ties do not exist or are conducted with the knowledge of the ruling political elites.

⁷⁸ This variable capturing the influx of Chinese workers may also reflect the broader spectrum of Chinese interests in Africa. It may also indicate the number of projects implemented (especially in the construction sector) where Chinese workers are employed. Similarly, their numbers can indicate

from 2009 to 2019. The 4) *information linkage* is operationalized through a volume of loans in the ICT sector. A number of these loans include projects implemented to support the upgrading of local media. At the same time, they indicate the willingness of African governments to set up and borrow money in collaboration with China for such initiatives where, because of the demanding know-how and competence in their management (e.g., data centers), one assumes long-term Chinese involvement and thus access to data. In other words, they demonstrate the willingness of African governments to make sensitive information accessible to a foreign actor (Munoriyarwa & Chiumbu, 2022; Parkinson, Bariyo, & Chin, 2019). At the same time, the projects implemented within this specific sector often require a thorough training of African staff and, therefore, also show the degree of willingness to receive information and knowledge from the Chinese counterpart and eventually use it in the domestic environment, both in the field of media management, e-governance initiatives, internet monitoring, and surveillance in general. Data on China's committed loans in this sector are drawn from the *Boston University Global Development Policy Center* (2022) dataset, available from 2000 to 2019. Due to the possible endogeneity issue, all independent variables lagged one and two years (Coppedge et al., 2022; McMann et al., 2019).

Besides the main explanatory variables, several alternative explanations are tested. Apart from the former French colony variable, all control variables were again delayed by one and two years:

- 1) *GDP per capita* controls the argument that democratization is driven by its economic growth and affluence (Lipset, 1960; Przeworski & Limongi, 1997). Operationalization is the same as in the sub-chapter on *Democracy Resistance*.
- 2) *The former French colony* variable counts if the country was a French colony in the past. It is assumed that the colonizer's identity or the type of legal system established matters and has a lasting effect on economic and political development (Bjørnskov & Rode, 2020; Grier, 1999). The variable

Chinese private investors' interests to run their businesses in the country. Finally, they may also reflect the quality of relations at the highest political level of both countries and the (un)willingness of the ruling elites to safeguard jobs for the domestic workforce vis-à-vis Chinese interests and workers.

is dummy, where the value “1” indicates that a country was a French colony, and “0” it was not. It is assumed that countries with the French colonial legacy will be more inclined to autocratize. The variable is self-coded by the author.

- 3) *Urbanization* is expected to influence autocratization negatively. As Wallace (2014, p. 3) argues, cities “bring together masses of people, improve communication links among them, and increase the ability of private grievances to accumulate and circulate.” Thus, they are prone to disruptions and endangering the particularly non-democratic regime’s survival. Urbanization is operationalized as a share of the urban population in the country’s total population. Data are drawn from the WB’s WDI (2023) and available for the whole period followed in the work.
- 4) *Natural resources* can undermine the state’s economic development and democratization (Ross, 2001; Boix & Stokes, 2003). Operationalization is the same as in the *Democracy Resistance* section.
- 5) The *conflict* controls for countries with civil wars that will more likely autocratize. Operationalization is the same as in the *Democracy Resistance* section.
- 6) *Linkage to the West* (Levitsky & Way, 2010) is operationalized with the *KOF Globalisation Index*, which measures a country’s economic, social, and political globalization dimensions (Gygli et al., 2019). The index ranges from “1” to “100”. The author assumes that with increasing globalization, a country becomes more prone to democratization (Kollias & Paleologou, 2016; Thomas, 2016).

3.1.1. *Economic Linkage to China*

As can be observed in Table 18, trade as the main explanatory variable is statistically significant when it comes to the gray zone regimes (Models 1 and 2) and even when the period is limited to Xi’s rule (Models 7 and 8) during which the significance of the coefficient even increases. The coefficients of the main explanatory variable also reached statistical significance in basic models of electoral democracies (ED) during Xi’s rule (Models 11 and 12). However, it dropped when the control variables were added. Based on these results, *it can be*

asserted that trade with China positively influences the autocratization of African hybrid regimes.

Besides the main explanatory variable, as anticipated, natural resources prove to be a statistically significant determinant of autocratization, except for Model 8, where its significance drops. Interestingly and against theoretical expectations, in Models 11 and 12 showing coefficients for ED during Xi's government, the estimates for natural resources become negative. Nevertheless, they remain below statistical significance levels. As expected, conflict is a significant determinant for explaining autocratization in hybrid regimes. Its significance only drops in Model 12 in the ED during Xi's rule. Linkage to the West, as anticipated, has a negative and statistically significant effect across the models in the regression. Urbanization has a negative impact on autocratization, reaching a moderate significance level in ED under Xi's rule (Models 11 and 12). Against expectations, GDP per capita shows a positive influence on autocratization. However, it is statistically insignificant. French colonial legacy affects autocratization positively but remains under a statistical significance level. Overall, the models where the trade as the explanatory variable remains significant can explain roughly 25% (Model 1) to 35% (Model 7) of the variations.

Table 18: Linkage to China (economic) and its influence on autocratization

	Liberal democracy index (inverted)											
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Explanatory variables	Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 2 years)
Trade	0.138* (0.070)	0.134* (0.068)	0.069 (0.048)	0.070 (0.046)	0.105 (0.079)	0.100 (0.077)	0.189** (0.089)	0.192** (0.089)	0.030 (0.050)	0.041 (0.049)	0.113 (0.168)	0.204 (0.159)
GDP per capita	0.032 (0.115)	0.023 (0.0116)					0.092 (0.100)	0.092 (0.109)			0.174 (0.134)	0.145 (0.148)
Former French col.	0.227 (0.136)	0.226 (0.137)					0.194 (0.127)	0.197 (0.129)			0.032 (0.172)	0.051 (0.171)
Urbanisation	-0.029 (0.181)	-0.016 (0.180)					-0.103 (0.182)	-0.104 (0.184)			-0.368** (0.170)	-0.371** (0.167)
Natural resources	0.213** (0.105)	0.212** (0.104)					0.196* (0.108)	0.183 (0.110)			-0.016 (0.184)	-0.046 (0.202)
Conflict	0.249*** (0.069)	0.239*** (0.071)					0.248*** (0.080)	0.252*** (0.070)			0.314** (0.133)	0.205 (0.141)
Linkage to the West	-0.205* (0.114)	-0.203* (0.116)					-0.338*** (0.111)	-0.336*** (0.115)			-0.462** (0.163)	-0.460** (0.167)
Constant	0.002 (0.115)	0.002 (0.115)	-3.26 (0.155)	-3.26 (0.155)	-5.03 (0.228)	-5.03 (0.228)	-4.39 (0.111)	-4.45 (0.111)	-1.01 (0.149)	-1.01 (0.149)	5.03 (0.168)	2.73 (0.173)
N of observations	847	847	552	552	282	282	307	307	184	184	108	108
N of groups: country	45	45	35	35	21	21	45	45	29	29	18	18
R2	0.255	0.245	0.005	0.005	0.011	0.010	0.349	0.337	0.001	0.002	0.493	0.447

Notes: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

3.1.2. Intergovernmental Linkage to China

Intergovernmental linkages (Table 19) measured with the frequency of political elite visits between China and Africa also show a positive and statistically significant influence on a 5% level in the gray zone models when the effect of an independent variable is delayed by two years (Models 2 and 8). Interestingly, this linkage type seems to lead to democratization in electoral authoritarianism (EA). However, coefficients remain statistically insignificant. In general, *it can be asserted that political elite visits between China and African hybrid regimes positively influenced the autocratization of hybrid regimes.*

Apart from the main explanatory variable, the natural resources keep their positive and statistically significant effect on autocratization across the models. Likewise, conflicts remain a strong determinant for autocratization yet again show positive statistical significance at a 1% level. The linkage to the West again negatively influences autocratization and remains statistically significant. Against expectations, the GDP per capita variable keeps its positive influence on autocratization, yet it remains statistically insignificant. Also, the French colonial legacy remains positive yet insignificant. Also, in the case of intergovernmental linkages, urbanization sustains its negative values, thus confirming the theoretical expectations. The models where the main explanatory variable keeps a significant effect can explain above 30% of the variation.

Table 19: Linkage to China (intergovernmental) and its influence on autocratization

	Liberal democracy index (inverted)											
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Explanatory variables	Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 2 years)
Elite visits	0.037 (0.043)	0.149** (0.056)	-0.065 (0.062)	-0.034 (0.086)	0.013 (0.061)	0.016 (0.090)	0.049 (0.047)	0.171** (0.064)	-0.025 (0.028)	0.006 (0.091)	0.016 (0.064)	0.030 (0.075)
GDP per capita		0.073 (0.089)						0.090 (0.095)				
Former French col.		0.183 (0.128)						0.185 (0.122)				
Urbanisation		-0.064 (0.185)						-0.068 (0.180)				
Natural resources		0.287** (0.129)						0.238** (0.102)				
Conflict		0.276*** (0.068)						0.262*** (0.070)				
Linkage to the West		-0.368* (0.156)						-0.317** (0.119)				
Constant	-0.053 (0.147)	0.080 (0.128)	0.033 (0.151)	0.039 (0.153)	0.005 (0.234)	-0.023 (0.238)	-4.52 (0.143)	-4.38 (0.110)	-1.01 (0.148)	-1.01 (0.149)	4.42 (0.243)	4.25 (0.243)
N of observations	393	350	240	212	144	129	307	307	184	184	108	108
N of groups: country	45	45	33	31	21	21	45	45	29	29	18	18
R2	0.001	0.321	0.004	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.002	0.334	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.001

Notes: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

3.1.3. *Technocratic and Social Linkage to China*

Technocratic and social linkage operationalized with Chinese migrant workers in Africa has a positive and statistically significant effect in all basic models (Table 20). However, when controlled for other variables, it retains its significance only in three models. The explanatory variable remains statistically significant at 5% in electoral democracies (ED) (Models 5 and 6). Thus, it seems that Chinese migrant workers have a positive effect on autocratization in more politically liberal regimes compared to electoral authoritarianism (EA). Also, Model 8 shows that the number of workers positively and significantly influences the whole gray zone of hybrid regimes. However, it shows the lowest level of statistical significance. In other models, the significance drops and even becomes negative in EA (Models 3, 4, 9, and 10). Thus, it can be stated that *Chinese migrant workers positively influence autocratization. However, this influence is limited only to electoral democracies and the gray zone when the time frame is restricted to Xi's rule.*

Besides the main explanatory variable, urbanization only has a positive and statistically significant influence at a 10% level regarding EA (Model 3). When ED is taken into account, the effect becomes significant and negative, as anticipated (Model 5, 6, 11, 12). Natural resources are statistically significant only in the gray zone (Models 1, 2, 7, and 8). Conflict again influences autocratization positively and keeps its statistical significance in almost all the models (except for Models 5, 6, and 12). Linkage to the West also demonstrates its anticipated negative effect on autocratization across all the models. The GDP per capita again shows the absence of statistical significance, and anticipated negative influence is only in the models including EA (Models 3, 4, 9, and 10). In all other models, its effect on autocratization is positive. The French colonial legacy positively influences autocratization in most models except those that include only EA (Models 3, 4, 9, and 10) but remains insignificant. The models where the main explanatory variable remains statistically significant can explain the variation in the dependent variable from roughly 30% (Model 8) to more than 50% (Models 5 and 6).

Table 20: Linkage to China (technocratic and social) and its influence on autocratization

	Liberal democracy index (inverted)											
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Explanatory variables	Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	ED regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 2 years)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 1 year)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 2 years)
Chinese workers	0.115 (0.086)	0.121 (0.085)	-0.053 (0.077)	-0.054 (0.077)	0.308** (0.130)	0.312** (0.140)	0.121 (0.075)	0.130* (0.077)	-0.034 (0.082)	-0.042 (0.081)	0.180 (0.208)	0.239 (0.173)
GDP per capita	0.065 (0.099)	0.062 (0.098)	-0.073 (0.138)	-0.063 (0.134)	0.094 (0.108)	0.082 (0.113)	0.079 (0.096)	0.079 (0.103)	-0.062 (0.131)	-0.063 (0.137)	0.169 (0.134)	0.136 (0.145)
Former French col.	0.178 (0.127)	0.165 (0.129)	-0.089 (0.102)	-0.071 (0.111)	0.072 (0.157)	0.078 (0.166)	0.159 (0.123)	0.162 (0.124)	-0.060 (0.105)	-0.071 (0.103)	0.070 (0.201)	0.086 (0.192)
Urbanisation	-0.093 (0.194)	-0.093 (0.198)	0.319* (0.183)	0.319* (0.184)	-0.390*** (0.133)	-0.365** (0.136)	-0.101 (0.189)	-0.106 (0.191)	0.276 (0.181)	0.287 (0.181)	-0.354** (0.160)	-0.347** (0.157)
Natural resources	0.270** (0.130)	0.267* (0.137)	0.203 (0.121)	0.213 (0.122)	-0.148 (0.165)	-0.124 (0.181)	0.219** (0.107)	0.204* (0.109)	0.145 (0.113)	0.151 (0.106)	-0.049 (0.201)	-0.077 (0.209)
Conflict	0.238*** (0.067)	0.237*** (0.065)	0.243*** (0.083)	0.257*** (0.078)	0.134 (0.101)	0.108 (0.110)	0.235*** (0.082)	0.234*** (0.070)	0.209* (0.106)	0.229** (0.084)	0.276* (0.152)	0.190 (0.140)
Linkage to the West	-0.286* (0.194)	-0.308** (0.163)	-0.475*** (0.164)	-0.501*** (0.167)	-0.536*** (0.137)	-0.523*** (0.149)	-0.306*** (0.125)	-0.305** (0.128)	-0.446*** (0.134)	-0.456*** (0.130)	0.483*** (0.163)	-0.470** (0.172)
Constant	0.050 (0.120)	0.067 (0.125)	0.154 (0.123)	0.187 (0.124)	0.247 (0.174)	0.272 (0.190)	-4.31 (0.113)	-4.37 (0.114)	-1.04 (0.117)	-1.03 (0.112)	5.04 (0.167)	2.61 (0.174)
N of observations	435	394	268	241	158	144	307	307	184	184	108	108
N of groups: country	45	45	33	33	21	21	45	45	29	29	18	18
R2	0.294	0.296	0.282	0.291	0.543	0.505	0.331	0.319	0.288	0.301	0.500	0.452

Notes: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

3.1.4. Information Linkage to China

Financial flows from China to the ICT sector in Africa (Table 21) have a positive influence on autocratization and are statistically significant at a 10% level in the gray zone (Models 1 and 2) and also those models limited to Xi's rule (Models 7 and Models 8). Based on the results, *it can be stated that Chinese ICT finances for African hybrid regimes positively influence the autocratization of African hybrid regimes.* Other variables emerged statistically significant besides the main explanatory variable. Natural resources again confirm their positive effect on autocratization, and the variable keeps at a 5% level of statistical significance across the models. Likewise, conflict positively and significantly influences autocratization across the models. In the case of linkage to the West, it remains a negative influence on autocratization. However, it keeps its statistical significance at a 5% level only in the models during Xi Jinping's government (Models 7 and 8). GDP per capita is again positive but statistically insignificant; the same goes for the former French colonies. Urbanization remains in anticipated negative values and is statistically insignificant in all models. The models in the regression can explain variation in the dependent variable ranging from 23% (Model 2) to 32% (Model 7).

Table 21: Linkage to China (information) and its influence on autocratization

Explanatory variables	Liberal democracy index (inverted)											
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
ICT finance	Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year) 0.042* (0.0245)	Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years) 0.050* (0.029)	EA regimes (lagged 1 year) 0.026 (0.031)	EA regimes (lagged 2 years) 0.030 (0.029)	ED regimes (lagged 1 year) 0.048 (0.062)	ED regimes (lagged 2 years) 0.039 (0.064)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 1 year) 0.068* (0.040)	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes (lagged 2 years) 0.086* (0.049)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 1 year) 0.009 (0.064)	Xi's rule; EA regimes (lagged 2 years) 0.012 (0.060)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 1 year) 0.064 (0.087)	Xi's rule; ED regimes (lagged 2 years) 0.019 (0.076)
GDP per capita	0.044 (0.111)	0.027 (0.114)					0.089 (0.095)	0.091 (0.102)				
Former French col.	0.209 (0.131)	0.209 (0.132)					0.159 (0.123)	0.162 (0.124)				
Urbanisation	-0.018 (0.179)	0.001 (0.179)					-0.072 (0.182)	-0.073 (0.184)				
Natural resources	0.235** (0.106)	0.236** (0.102)					0.243** (0.105)	0.229** (0.106)				
Conflict	0.259*** (0.073)	0.249*** (0.075)					0.264*** (0.081)	0.268*** (0.071)				
Linkage to the West	-0.187 (0.124)	-0.180 (0.125)					-0.308** (0.125)	-0.305** (0.129)				
Constant	0.001 (0.116)	0.003 (0.116)	0.000 (0.155)	0.000 (0.156)	0.000 (0.230)	-0.010 (0.233)	-4.36 (0.113)	-4.39 (0.113)	-1.01 (0.149)	-1.01 (0.149)	4.32 (0.243)	4.37 (0.243)
N of observations	810	847	527	522	271	268	307	307	184	184	108	1087
N of groups: country	45	45	35	35	21	21	45	45	29	29	18	18
R2	0.243	0.232	0.001	0.001	0.002	0.002	0.324	0.313	0.000	0.000	0.004	0.000

Notes: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

As the regression analyses show, *the bigger density of economic, intergovernmental, technocratic and social, and information ties leads to the autocratization of Africa's hybrid regimes*. This is particularly true regarding the gray zone, and, as expected, this effect increases under Xi Jinping's rule. However, except for technocratic and social ties in electoral democracies, this effect does not manifest itself in the specific regime types in the zone. More specifically, it was not demonstrated in electoral authoritarianism, where such an effect on autocratization should be expected. Indeed, although this may not be a trend across electoral authoritarianism in Africa, as shown in the following pages in the case study of Zambia, growing ties to China led to the regime's autocratization. In particular, their density increased as the country moved from electoral democracy to electoral authoritarianism in 2014. As demonstrated in the following pages, China's increasing engagement in all the dimensions of linkages contributed to the country's decrease in the quality of democracy. Moreover, the Zambian case also shows China's engagement was far more active than anticipated.

3.1.5. Zambian Autocratic Linkage to China

Sino-Zambian relations date back to the Zambian struggle for independence and the newly liberated Zambia in the early 1960s. Zambia became the first country in Southern Africa to establish diplomatic relations with China immediately after independence in 1964. Already in this early period of cooperation, Beijing represented an alternative development partner as some major projects, namely TAZARA, were implemented, thus helping the land-locked country surrounded by hostile regimes to secure transport routes to the port through Tanzania. It can hardly be emphasized enough how these early relations are important even nowadays in the cooperation between the countries and political elites and how frequently they are capitalized on. Most interviews conducted in Zambia started with reference to these early partnerships. For example, as stated by one of the scholars or political opposition leaders:

The relationship between Zambia and China is historical. It started even before independence. China offered education opportunities to liberation struggle to its leaders, and this kind of cooperation continued even after independence. And the major development project that China supported was the TAZARA. It was after the World Bank and other donors refused to support it.

So historically, China has a very strong relationship with Zambia (Respondent 7, 31. 8. 2020).

If you look at the history from the times when Zambia was independent, then [China] was a good friend, and the relationship was based on mutual agreement and cannot run away from the fact that China at that point did a lot. (...), Especially when we were facing those liberation wars and the borders were closed, so we had difficulties in bringing oil, so China came in and did that. Also helped us do the TAZARA railway, so they were very helpful. Remember, we were coming from a dark era when we were colonized by the Western world. So, for us to build it, we needed to ask another partner, and this partner was China (Respondent 14, 3.9.2020).

The nostalgia in the relations between the countries still plays an important role, and current and former Zambian political leaders have frequently referred to the historic ties. In 2007, on the occasion of China's anniversary, for example, Kenneth Kaunda released a statement celebrating the importance of long-term friendship by referring to the TAZARA construction:

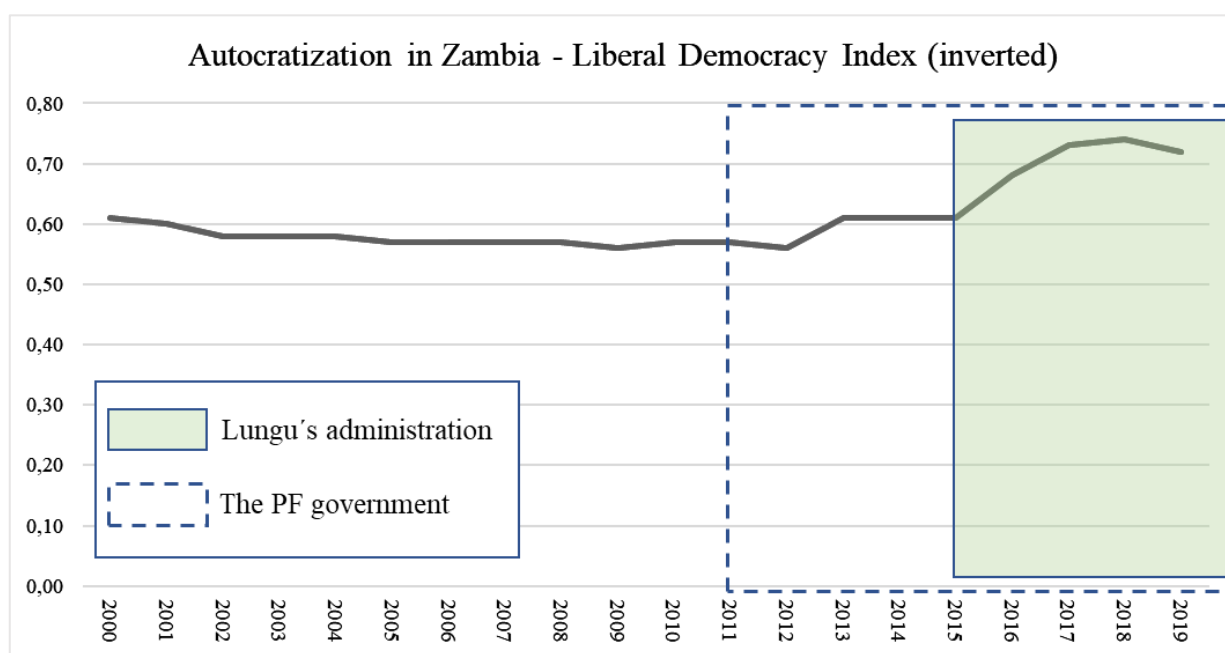
I recall how western countries poured scorn on the TAZARA railway project proposal and spurned our approach for assistance. I also recall Premier Chou's reaction after the presentation of our proposal. He said: "Go to your western friends first. If they refuse, we will build the railway". This was the UHURU railway, providing a new corridor to reduce Zambia's dependence on the Southern routs controlled by racist regimes. China understood Zambia's grave predicament as a landlocked country of very strategic importance of the liberation struggle aimed at establishing peace and stability in Southern Africa. Now thanks to Chinese leadership and the thousands of Chinese workers with their Tanzanian and Zambian comrades, the TAZARA corridor is now one of the most crucial instruments for strengthening regional integration of SADC (The Post, 1. 10. 2007).

In general, this early cooperation element is well-remembered and reminded in the Zambian press, where it has become a common part of the news stories about Sino-Zambian ties, especially in those articles framing China as a development partner (DP) or political partner (PP). The importance of this early cooperation also translated into tangible reminders. These included an entire section devoted to the TAZARA construction in the National Museum in Lusaka in 2017 (The State Council Information Office of the PRC 2017) (see Appendix 4), or, in 2014, the construction of a memorial site for Chinese engineers and experts who lost their lives during the construction of the railway (ZDML, 19. 6. 2014).

Since 2000, as in the rest of Africa, cooperation between Zambia and China has grown and intensified in all spheres. As will be demonstrated in the following pages, it is particularly under the PF government and Edgar Lungu's rule that this cooperation has reached unprecedented levels. These increasing ties did not grow only in terms of the economic cooperation manifested mainly in the boom of the construction industry in Zambia but also became observed through growing close elite visits and migration of Chinese nationals to Zambia (and also Zambians to China) as well as building partnerships in the ICT sector and media industry. These growing linkages have had implications for the quality of democracy in Zambia and, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter, cannot be all seen as entirely passive forms of external influence.

At the same time, this period of increasing cooperation with Beijing corresponds with the time when Zambia began to rapidly autocratize (Figure 10). Although the quality of democracy improved after Frederick Chiluba's rule in 2002 and the ascendancy of Levy Mwanawasa, Zambia was never considered a full-fledged liberal democratic country. As Levitsky and Way (2010, pp. 290–291) point out, even during this period, there were cases of harassment of the opposition, arrests, censorship of the media, and elections exhibiting both unfairness and unfreedom. However, it was not until the rise of the PF to power in 2011 that Zambia took a sharp turn towards autocracy, which only accelerated during Lungu's rule from 2015 to 2021 (Beardsworth, Siachiwena, & Sishuwa, 2022; Resnick, 2022).

Figure 10: Autocratization in Zambia

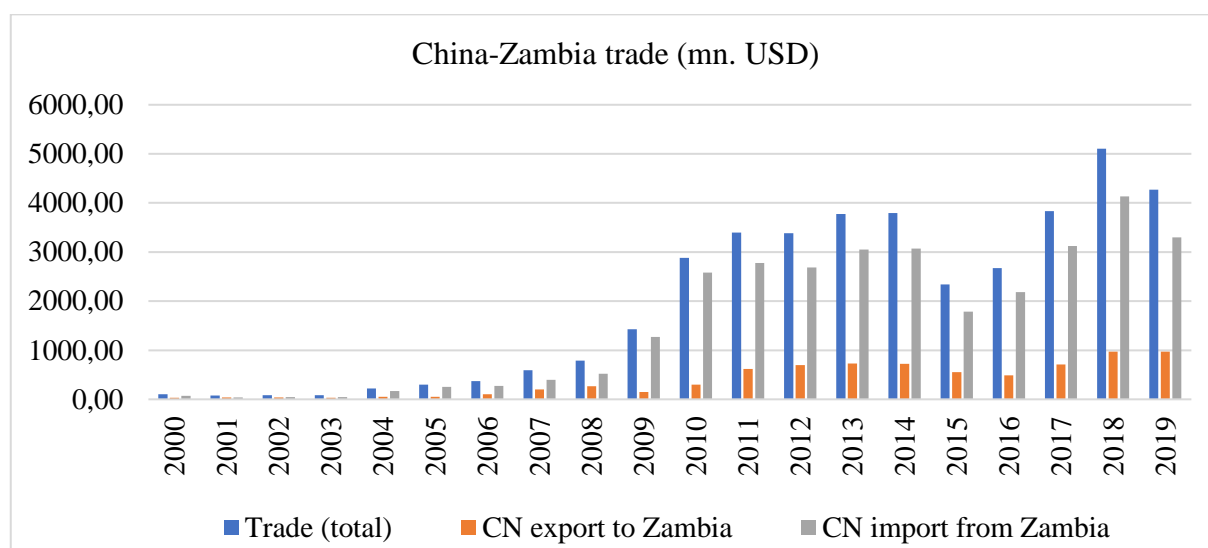


Source: V-Dem (Coppedge et al., 2023)

3.1.5.1. Economic Ties to China

As applicable to the rest of Africa, Sino-Zambian economic relations increased after 2000. Total trade between China and Zambia between 2000 and 2019 reached nearly 40 billion USD (Johns Hopkins China-Africa Research Initiative, 2022a). As illustrated in Figure 11, Zambia's exports to China have always exceeded China's exports to Zambia, thus going against the general trade imbalance favoring Chinese exports to Africa. Over the monitored period, China has become a major trade destination for Zambian products (ITC, 2023). Chinese exports to Zambia were dominated by electronics, diverse machinery, trucks, and construction materials. Exports to China included predominantly minerals, with copper being the main exported item, reflecting China's strong demand for the commodity and also the main area of its investment in Zambia.

Figure 11: Trade between China and Zambia (2000-2019)



Source: Johns Hopkins China-Africa Research Initiative, 2022a

The growth of Chinese trade and investment in Zambia has also been facilitated by major initiatives such as opening the first Bank of China subsidiary in Africa in 1997 in Zambia. To further demonstrate outstanding economic relations with China, in 2011, the Bank of China in Lusaka became the first African branch to provide banking services in Chinese currency, targeting Chinese investors in Zambia and Zambians who import goods to China. Over time, China has become a major provider of FDI in the country, with 5.3 billion dollars worth of investment in 2015 and 280 companies, the majority targeting the mining sector (Leslie, 2016, p. 92). Likewise, China has become a major lender, substantially boosting the Zambian construction sector. Regarding the Chinese state capital in Africa, Zambia, for its extensive cooperation with China, can be seen as a “critical case” for understanding these dynamics, as China’s footprint is deeper than elsewhere (Lee, 2017).

3.1.5.1.1. Chinese SOEs in the Mining Sector

The mining industry, a sector strategic for both states, has been dictating China’s economic interest in Zambia since the late 1990s. In time, China emerged as a key investor in the industry. Also, China entered the sector when it was facing a severe decline, reaching an all-time low in 2001 due to falling prices of copper (Lee, 2017). A Chinese company’s first substantial acquisition of a majority share in a copper mine goes back to 1998. This acquisition involved China Nonferrous Metal Mining (Group) Co., Ltd. (CNMC), a subsidiary of Non-Ferrous Company–Africa

(NFCA), and also other investments related to the CNMC's activities like setting up BGRIMM Explosives, the Chambishi Copper Smelter, and the Sino-Metals Leach and Acid Products Zambia Ltd⁷⁹ (Kragelund, 2009, p. 482). The mine in Chambishi became the first overseas mine ever acquired by a Chinese SOE (Lee, 2017, p. 25). It was bought for only 20 million USD, as the mine had been inactive for 13 years. Consequently, the CNMC invested 130 million USD in needed upgrades. China's demand for copper managed to put Zambian copper production on its feet in the following years by driving up copper prices on the international market. Zambian copper production thus recovered from a low of below 250,000 metric tons in the late 1990s to 976,000 in 2012, bringing output back in line with the boom years of the 1970s (Hess & Aidoo, 2015, p. 33).

In mining, China became an indispensable partner to the ruling elites. Unlike other foreign investors, Chinese SOEs were long-term oriented and interested in stable production, thus more resilient to fluctuations in the copper market prices and adaptable to the government's long-term development strategies – value addition and industrialization. These investors were not solely driven by profit-maximizing imperative but also reflected Beijing's strategic interests – stable access to natural resources and political influence (Lee, 2017, pp. 33–34). This became evident during the 2008 financial crisis, hitting hard copper prices and thus Zambia's most critical sector in terms of revenues and employment, with 30% of the total workforce in the mining sector losing jobs. However, this was not the situation in the Chinese SOEs. The NFCA publicly announced a three “no's” policy – no retrenchment, production reduction, or salary cuts (Lee, 2017, p. 41). NFCA even expanded its activities by buying an Israeli-British-owned Luanshya Copper Mine for 50 million USD in 2009 and invested 400 million USD in recapitalization (Li, 2010, p. 7). These measures had a much-needed stabilizing impact on the Zambian economy. Also, they helped the enterprise and China, in general, improve its severely damaged image after tragic accidents in the CNMC's mining site. Likewise, apart from seeing it as an excellent opportunity to expand its investment,

⁷⁹ Apart from the major player in the copper mining, CNMC, one may also mention Chinese SOE Jinchuan Group mining copper in Chibuluma Mines Plc. (ZCCM, 2023). There are also some private investors in mining, including Collum Coal Mine in Southern Zambia (Sautman & Yan, 2014).

CNMC manifested to the Zambian officials its will to support its economy and help resolve employment issues (Lee, 2017, p. 41).

This resilience and adaptability of the Chinese SOEs in the mining sector and their readiness to assist with implementing the Zambian government's long-term strategies was also evident from their stance on a new tax regime introduced right before the financial crisis. Its adoption was met with reluctance by foreign mining investors. However, NFCA did not join these objections and, on the contrary, complied with the regime. (Lee, 2017, p. 42). Similarly, the Zambian government's long-term plans involved a strategy to support the development of copper value addition and manufacturing by establishing a SEZ in Chambishi in 2007 (Brautigam & Tang, 2011). Other investors in the industry and the WB saw the idea as economically unviable. CNMC, however, did finance the SEZ in Chambishi and a subzone in Lusaka, although it admitted that the project might not be profitable. The SEZ was implemented with the outlook of deepening cooperation between the countries in the future (Lee, 2017, pp. 43–44). Likewise, when Sata became President, in his first year in office, he was proactively advocating better work conditions while pressuring the mining companies to increase wages – the Chinese NFCA agreed to a 22% pay raise, making it the largest among the foreign mining companies in Zambia (ibid., 83).

Although the great importance of Chinese investment in the Zambian mining sector cannot be denied, at the same time, increasing investment incidents appeared at the worksite of the mining companies, damaging the Chinese image and fueling the support for anti-Chinese campaigns (Aidoo, 2019; Hess & Aidoo, 2015; Leslie, 2016; Matambo, 2019; 2020; Matambo & Onwuegbuchulam, 2021; Sautman & Yan, 2012; 2014; Sibiri, 2021; Yan & Sautman, 2013). The most tragic incident happened in the Chambishi mine in 2005 when poor safety procedures led to an explosion in a dynamite factory partly owned by CNMC, resulting in the deaths of more than 50 Zambian workers, making it the deadliest industrial accident in Zambia's history. The tragic event branded the company as a “savage and reckless” employer, not only in Zambia (Lee, 2017, p. 31). Also, as a consequence, the issue of Chinese investment became politicized by Sata during the following 2006 and 2008 presidential elections (Matambo, 2019; 2020). The anti-Chinese sentiment

became a valuable instrument to mobilize voters and was further driven by other incidents at Chinese-owned businesses in Zambia. These included violent protests, mostly over poor working conditions in state-owned and private investors.⁸⁰

Given its strategic importance for both countries, the Chinese SOEs were willing to make some concessions in the mining sector, taking into account the long-term strategies of the Zambian governments as well as the grievances of the miners. So, while it can be argued that China has provided Zambian elites with a stable investment and will to make concessions given its beyond-profit-seeking objectives, the poor conditions in Chinese companies generated the anti-Chinese sentiment exploited by populist Sata that brought him to power in 2011. Under his rule, a period of excessive borrowing from external donors, a rise in corruption, and the gradual erosion of Zambian democracy slowly began. The rapidly growing cooperation in the construction sector then contributed substantially to this political and economic decay.

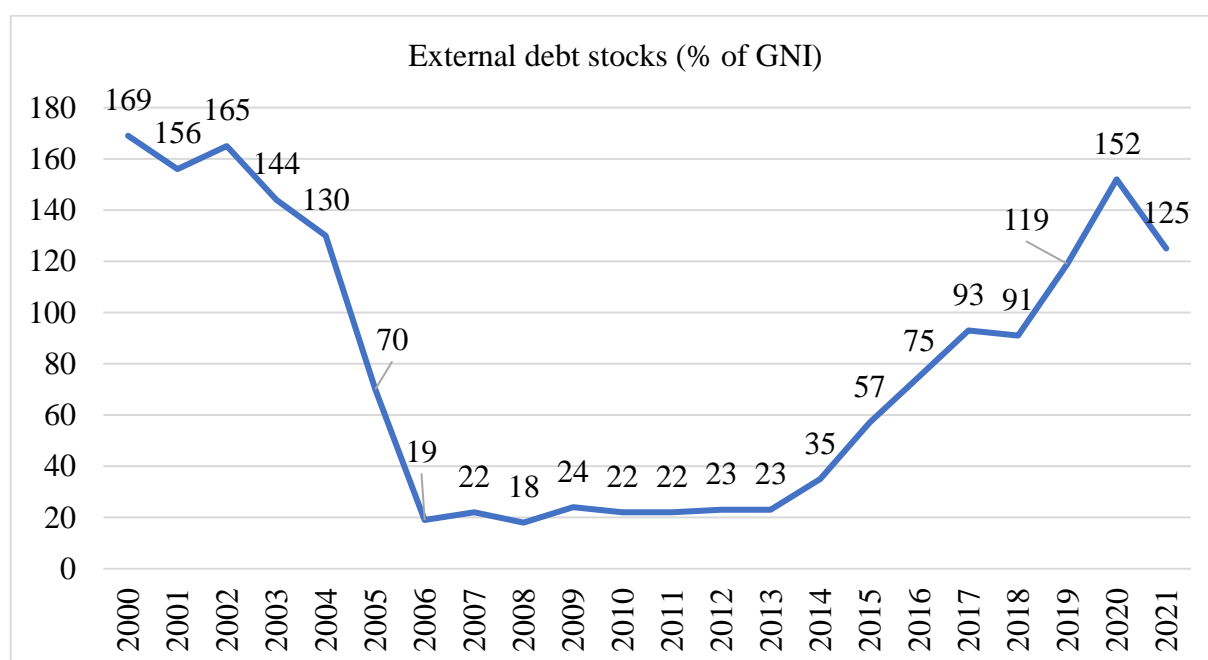
3.1.5.1.2. *On Paved Roads to Debt Default*

Several factors accelerated Chinese lending in Zambia. *First*, the mining industry's recovery and the rising copper prices allowed the government to borrow money to finance projects in the economic infrastructure. *Second*, in 2005, Zambia's external debt was significantly reduced after reaching the completion point of the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI) and the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. Zambia's external public and publicly guaranteed (PPG) debt stock fell from 5.84 billion USD in 2004 to just 962 million USD in 2006, making it sustainable after more than 20 years of struggling with the burden. Consequently,

⁸⁰ In 2008, protests erupted in Chambishi against low wages violating Zambian labor laws. As a result, two Zambian workers and one Chinese were injured, and hundreds of workers were dismissed by Chinese management (Leslie, 2016, p. 92). A Chinese private coal mine operating in the country's Southern Province, the Collum Coal Mine (CCM), has become notorious in Zambia. In 2010, protests in the mine over the low wages were met with a violent crackdown by Chinese management that injured or killed 13 protesters (Sautman & Yan, 2014). Protests continued even in the course of the following years. These can be put in the context of higher expectations after Sata became the President in 2011 and also by the publication of the HRW report the same years, labeling the Chinese mining companies in Zambia as the worst employers in the sector (HRW, 2011). In 2012, protests over the wage disputes erupted again in the CCM, leaving one of the Chinese managers dead (BBC, 2012). A year later, the Zambian government closed the mine due to poor safety and environmental conditions and unpaid royalties. The mining operations resumed in 2015 (Leslie, 2016, p. 93).

governments started to borrow loans from various creditors, including the Chinese ones. As Brautigam and Wang (2021, p. 3) noted, since 2005, Zambia and its SOEs have entered into at least 77 different loan contracts with Chinese financiers, many of which were at commercial rates. The debt stock initially increased modestly but rose sharply under Lungu’s rule due to excessive borrowing and falling copper prices. This was also projected in the external debt, reaching a 20-year maximum in 2020, as Figure 12 indicates.

Figure 12: Zambia’s external debt stocks (% of GNI)

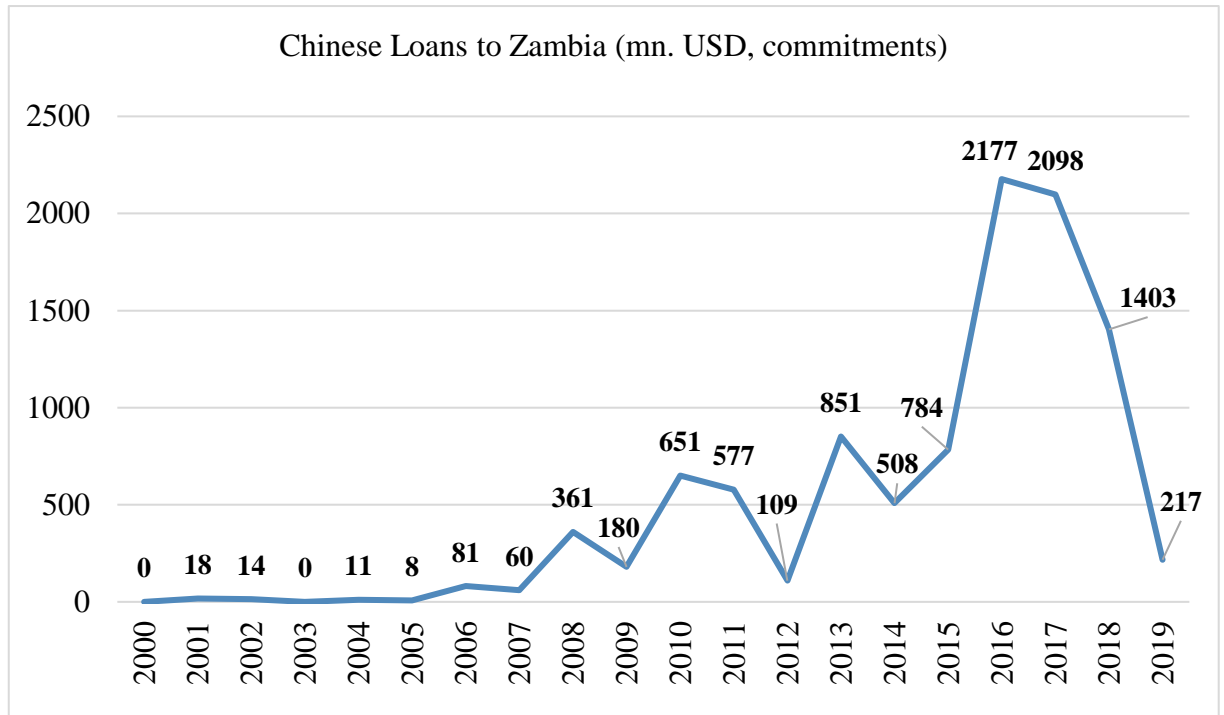


Source: World Bank, 2023

Third, since the 2000s, the easy availability of loans has also fueled Zambian borrowing. This accessibility was related to the Chinese government’s go-out policy and its extension via the BRI since 2013, driven by Chinese domestic production overcapacity (Zajontz, 2022, p. 20). Simultaneously, the very year the PF came to power in 2011, Zambia also achieved middle-income country status, making it more challenging to access multilateral and bilateral concessional loans. Therefore, to fulfill its ambitious campaign pledges, the PF government began utilizing Zambia’s newly gained creditworthiness to access external loans from the international bond market and non-Paris club sources like China. (Charles & Lascu, 2019, p. 7). Thus, in the 2010s, Zambia started to receive substantial Chinese funding (Figure 13), mainly for implementing projects in the transport and energy sectors (Figure 14).

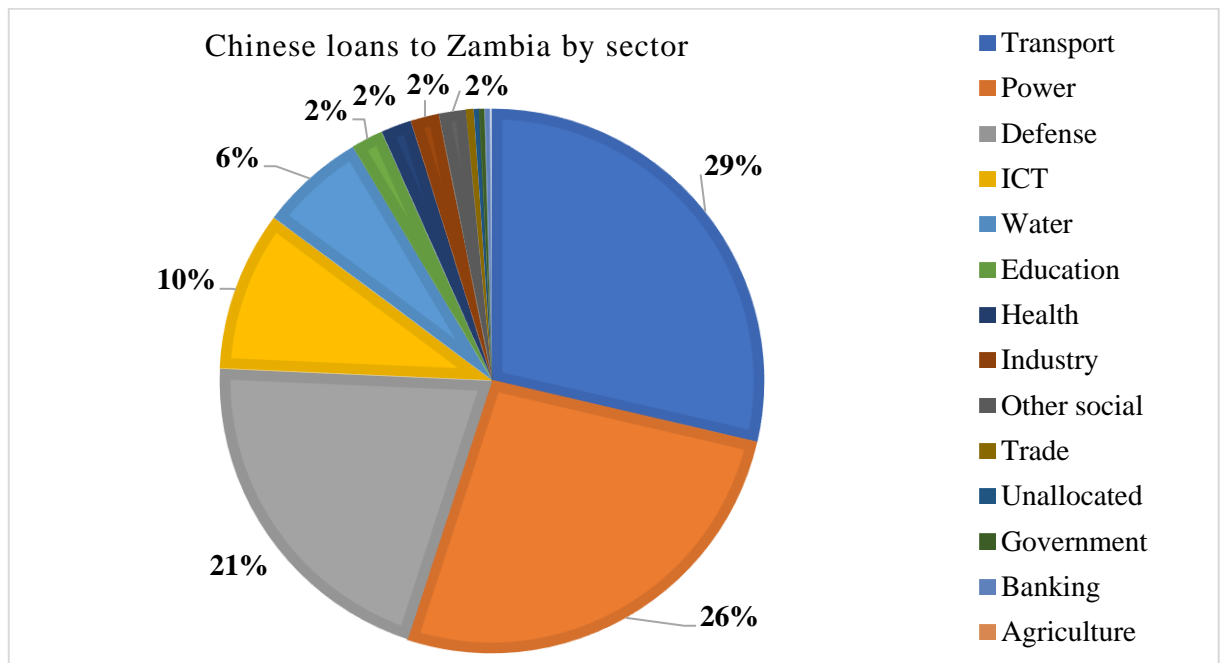
These made for more than half (55%) of all loans pledged by China to Zambia between 2000 and 2019, reaching over 10 billion dollars (Boston University Global Development Policy Center, 2022). Sata’s and Lungu’s governments then kept borrowing from China despite the falling copper prices (Figure 15).

Figure 13: Chinese loans to Zambia (commitments; 2000 – 2019)



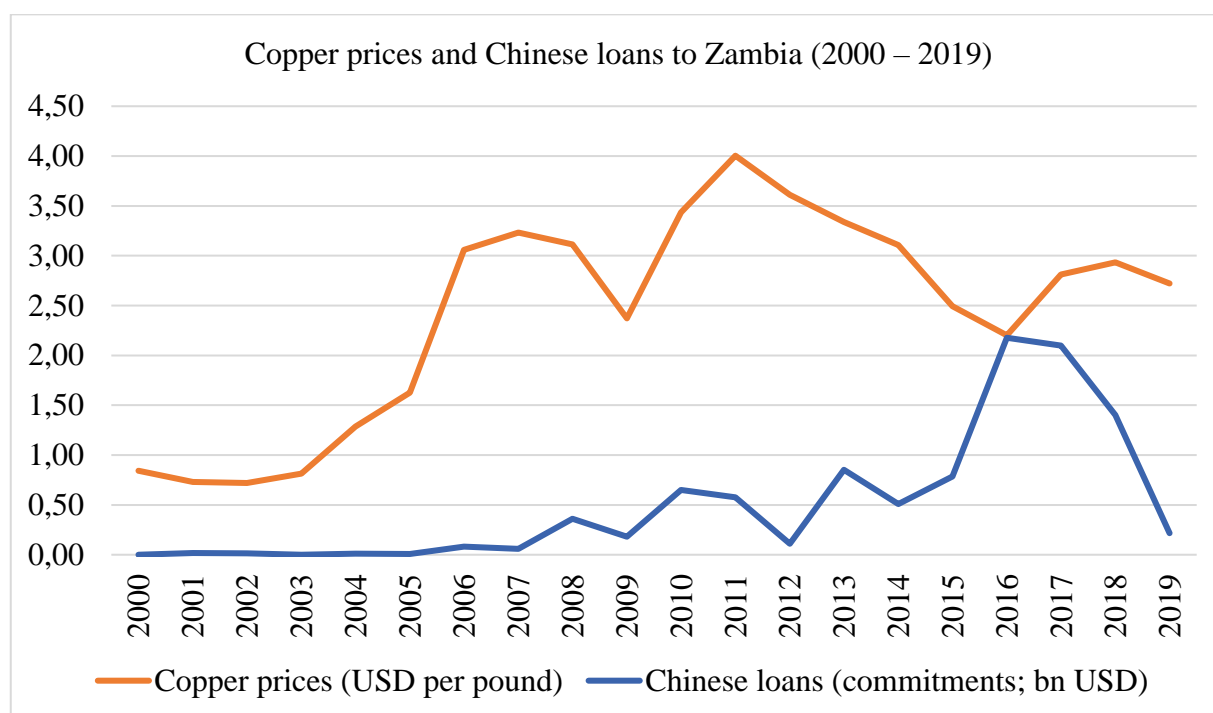
Source: Boston University Global Development Policy Center, 2022

Figure 14: Chinese loans to Zambia by sector (commitments; 2000 – 2019)



Source: Boston University Global Development Policy Center, 2022

Figure 15: Copper prices and Chinese loans to Zambia (commitments; 2000 – 2019)



Source: Boston University Global Development Policy Center, 2022; Macrotrends LLC, 2023

The Zambian government has long underscored the need to build transport infrastructure in its agenda. The official strategy adopted in 2006 – *Vision 2030*, emphasized the aspirations to become a middle-income industrial country by 2030. Apart from that, it also envisioned Zambia to become “economically, socially, and politically integrated within the region” with a “well-developed and maintained socio-economic infrastructure and a robust and competitive transport and communications network that services the region” (Republic of Zambia, 2006, p. 2). As mentioned by interviewed government employees in Zambia, China became seen as more responsive to those plans compared to the Western lenders, as it tended to overlook the economic viability of the projects:

China doesn't limit itself to what type of help it can give. The help that usually comes from the West in terms of services, social protection, health sector. But China is funding infrastructure. So, if you are an African country, you'd rather deal with China. Here in Zambia, the government, for instance, wants to do a road in a rural area, and the World Bank will ask you “What is the return from this road?”. China really does not look at this issue. (...), The West way of funding, you need to justify that there is a mine, then they can fund the road because there's raw material. If there's only people living in that area, I mean, there's a return on the

investment, but it may be difficult to quantify that in the short run, but if you look at the socio-economic impact, there are returns. (...), The Western countries are not interested in African infrastructure, [and] China can fund almost anything. Currently, China is more responsive to African calls than the West. (...), We have a development plan. And in the current development plan, the majority of themes that are in that plan are the infrastructure (Respondent 17, 28. 9. 2020).

Similarly, as strongly voiced (and demonstrated) by an interviewed MP from the PF, China is more responsive to the needs of the Zambians in terms of building stadiums, roads, and power plants:

The West was here for more than 100 years. Actually, 600 years ago, the West was here to take slaves. What did they leave behind? China has been here for 20 years. Have you seen what they left behind? Haven't you driven on a Chinese-built road with Chinese money with Chinese personnel? What did England leave here apart from the deep holes in our soils to extract our minerals? (...), I can now watch football in the most modern stadium! What did Britain leave here? How many years we have been with America? How many years has England been here? Have they built a stadium? China has built two! Have you seen the one in Ndola? It's a masterpiece, isn't it? It's a masterpiece. [*The respondent leaves the room to bring a large framed photo of the Levy Mwanawasa Stadium in Ndola*]. This is it [*showing the photo*], ok? How long has China been here? 20 years. How long has anybody been here? 600 years. They never left here anything like that. (...), They are responding to my needs. My people need the road. China built the roads. The West comes here to talk about good governance. (...), China is building now the biggest power station in Kafue Lower. I was there. It's the biggest. (...), I will always be closer to the one who's building my road because he's building it as a foundation for me to grow our economy (Respondent 19, 12. 8. 2020).

In a similar vein, the issue of responsiveness of the Chinese economic infrastructure was also mentioned by the foreign government representative interviewed in Zambia. Compared to the traditional donors, the respondent described Chinese projects as more long-term oriented yet, at the same time, not sustainable.

In a way, you can say that the Chinese development relationship has been more long-term, whilst the traditional donors are rather about how [they] could be helping people now. In this respect, we can see a lot of China's investment in what looks like a waste of money now, seeing a lot of roads, luxury hotels being built. These are all things that China doesn't really need them. Very interesting are the roads here in Lusaka. They've been upgrading roads all around here. But well, if you think you are a Chinese

corporation, you rather want roads in industrial states as it makes it easy to take their markets. So, the Chinese focus is long-term. (...), Sometimes, I think this is what we should be doing instead [of providing a traditional form of development assistance]. [Interviewer: So, do you find Chinese funding more responsive to Zambian needs?] I think yes. But it's a question of what the Zambian government wants than what they need. They are definitely more responsive to [what the government] wants. It's not responsive to the actual needs of the country. It's not sustainable (Respondent 21, 21. 10. 2020).

During the MMD rule, the projects in the transport sector were tied mainly to rehabilitating and upgrading the TAZARA railway. Besides this, one of the most notable projects ever constructed in Zambia has been the Mongu-Kalabo road in the Western Province, which commenced in 2010. For a long time, the road was planned by several governments. Still, due to the challenges in its construction through the terrain of a half-year-flooded Barotseland Plains with Zambezi River running through the area (the road includes 26 bridges), it was found too expensive and financially risky. It would never get funding from Western financial institutions for the lack of economic viability, considering the low population density in the area. (Lee, 2017, p. 49). In 2010, before the 2011 elections, Chinese AVIC, an SOE mainly operating in the aviation industry and inexperienced in road construction, took the chance to expand its activities in other areas. AVIC negotiated a loan from the Chinese EXIM bank for nearly 300 million USD to finance the facility (Brautigam, 2021, p. 18). The road was initially planned to link the provincial capital, Mongu, to Angola. However, it ended in a small town, Kalabo, just across the plains, only 70 kilometers from Mongu. During the visit to the facility by the author in July 2020, there was only a little traffic on the road that pedestrians mainly used, while its main bridge over the Zambezi River became a tourist attraction for locals and NGO staff working in the Western Province (Appendix 5). Thus, The project became economically negligible yet extremely expensive, leaving Zambia with substantial debt. For AVIC, however, this risky move paid off. The highly visible project left it with a significant footprint in Zambia. Also, it opened access to other road contracts, eventually making AVIC a major actor in the sector.

Under the PF rule, the main initiatives were undertaken to support the development of the country's economic infrastructure as formulated in *Vision 2030*. After taking office, Sata introduced several programs focused on road construction. In 2012, the

“Link Zambia 8000” program articulated the government’s plan to make the country a transport and energy hub within the Southern Africa region. It specifically included the construction of up to 8 thousand kilometers of roads, the upgrading of airports, and the energy sector (Brautigam, 2021, pp. 17–18). Chinese companies were tasked with major projects, including the construction of Ndola International Airport, Kenneth Kaunda International Airport in Lusaka, and hydropower station – Kafue Gorge Lower Project, with its price soaring to two billion USD (Boston University Global Development Policy Center, 2022). Sata also introduced another initiative – the “Lusaka 400 Project” that aimed to construct 400 kilometers of roads in the capital city financed through a 384 USD loan from the Chinese Exim Bank. The main contractor of the project became AVIC. (Zajontz, 2022, p. 20).

However, infrastructural projects were not always in line with the development priorities and strategies but rather responded to the short-sighted career ambitions of the ruling elites and the very Chinese contractors. As revealed in Lee’s research (2017, pp. 49–51), foreign contractors actively lobbied Zambian officials by proposing particular projects while promising to facilitate tailored and quick loans to finance their implementation. In these cases, the Chinese contractor decided what became constructed and for a price determined by its connection to the Chinese policy banks. Although Chinese loans in Zambia were profiled as concessional, they were less favorable than those offered by the WB.⁸¹ Moreover, infrastructure projects in Zambia have proven to be highly overpriced, which went hand in hand with the conditions Chinese companies dictated during negotiations – noncompetitive single sourcing. The final price often exceeded the project’s estimated cost by tens of percent. The result has been the most expensive road infrastructure in Southern Africa and a considerable debt burden.

Contracting Chinese companies in the construction sector often went directly through the top political elites, thus bypassing governmental agencies like the Road and Development Agency (RDA) and even the Ministry of Finance and their project appraisal evaluation and feasibility study that would eventually have driven the

⁸¹ Lee (2017, p. 48) argues that unlike the WB, Chinese financial institutions charge higher interest rates – 2% while the WB charges only 1.7%; at the same time, they contain a smaller grant element – 23% while the WB 35%; and they also differ in loan repayment period, which is 10 to 15 years for Chinese finance while the WB loans mature in 20 to 50 years.

project prices down. Only details were left for the designated technocrats to negotiate as the price had been set. Lee estimated that up to 20% of the projects implemented in Zambia had no immediate economic benefits. Yet, these institutions were forced to proceed with them as they were directed to do so by the top politicians while not knowing why such projects had been signed in the first place (Lee, 2017, p. 50). Over time, the consequences of irresponsible borrowing and lending practices led to a substantial halt in Chinese funding in the late 2010s (Figure 13). This should be understood in the context of the increasing struggle of the Zambian government to repay the loans, as the IMF already labeled the country at high risk of debt distress in 2017 (IMF, 2017). Yet, Lungu's government continued to borrow from the Chinese creditors even after the IMF's disturbing prognosis.⁸²

Despite the existence of development strategies, many of the projects in the construction sector were prompted by the ruling party's political calculus to retain power through road building to gain political support. As will be shown in detail in the section examining *extraversion*, Lungu's 2015, 2016, and eventually 2021 election campaigns relied heavily on demonstrating the built infrastructure. This became possible in collusion with numerous Chinese companies seeking to obtain Zambian government contracts and funding from Chinese banks, thus co-creating substantial debt distress⁸³ that led Zambia to default on its debt in November 2020 (Williams, 2020). The recklessness of self-serving borrowing by the PF politicians

⁸² As noted by Brautigam (2021, p. 4), due to such excessive borrowing, Zambia became an outlier case in the African context – while the Chinese loan commitments in Zambia accounted for 43% of Zambia's GNI at the end of 2019 (increasing by more than 20% since 2014), the African average stood at only 10% of GNI.

⁸³ Zambia should be understood as an outlier instance also with respect to the number of contractors and the Chinese financial institutions involved in excessive lending. As emphasized by Brautigam (2022) for many Chinese contractors implementing the projects in Zambia, the oversight of Beijing over their activity is not probable, thus even the eventual accusation of China deliberately trapping Zambia into debt to get control over its critical assets and SOEs, is unfounded. In this regard, Brautigam highlights the uniqueness of the Zambian case involving the largest number of distinct Chinese lenders since 2000 (18) and the second-largest number of different Chinese contractors winning Chinese loan-financed projects (29), after Angola. This situation has, according to Brautigam (2022, p. 1347) created "fierce and unregulated competition for infrastructure contracts in Zambia." Combined with the government's economic infrastructure strategies and the sheer career ambitions of Zambian politicians, it led to unsustainable debt. This unsustainable indebtedness in Zambia became thus co-created by Zambian politicians as well as Chinese companies, yet, it should not be seen as Beijing's top-down controlled initiative.

was also brought up by an opposition party leader who mentioned overpriced and corrupt deals and a lack of thorough control over them:

At that time the PF took over our external debt was very, very low. Our reserves were very high. This PF government decided that they're going to undertake some politically motivated developmental projects. But not only motivated on the basis of politics but also gave them the opportunity to raise money for themselves as individuals for their party, and they found that the Chinese were quite willing to accommodate it. And the road to do this was infrastructural development. (...), The Chinese are fully aware of our capacity to pay it back, they are fully aware, but despite that, they have been willing to give this money in for very expensive projects. Where a project should cost 400 million, 300 million dollars, they are prepared to fund it to the extent of 1.2 billion. For example, the Lusaka-Ndola highway. We think that should cost no more than 400 million dollars. But they are prepared to give Zambia a loan for 1.2 billion, three times more than the project is worth,⁸⁴ (...), So we see very expensive roads that are being constructed. All that road that you can see, just look at the kilometer. How much is Zambia paying? (Respondent 15, 7. 9. 2020).

Brautigam and Wang (2021) estimated that Zambia's outstanding external debt to all Chinese financiers, official and commercial, was approximately 6.6 billion USD at the end of the PF government in August 2021. Their findings were in sharp contrast to the official numbers acknowledged by the Zambian government – 3.4 billion USD, thus revealing a severe issue of hidden loans.⁸⁵⁸⁶ The level of

⁸⁴ The 327-kilometre Lusaka-Ndola Dual Carriage Way project only started to be implemented under Zambia's current UPND government in 2023. While the new UPND government has cancelled the original overpriced deal, it has been looking for ways to implement the road due to its importance. The price of the project that had been initially untenable reaching over 1 billion USD has been reduced by half to 577 million dollars. The deal simultaneously includes the rehabilitation of the 45 kilometers Luanshya-Fisenge Masanganano Road. The deal is a Public Private Partnership (PPP) agreement with the Chinese Macro-Ocean Investment Consortium (under which falls also AVIC), which is responsible for financing, construction, operation and maintenance. The partnership is expected to recover its investments under a 22-year concession following a three-year construction period (Mushinge & Jalloh, 2023; Lusakatimes.com, 2023).

⁸⁵ The higher figures of Zambian indebtedness to China were also admitted by the newly elected President Hakainde Hichilema who commented on the empty treasury and the rampant corruption in the country revealed after the PF left the office, with words "If you saw what I'm seeing now, you would fall off your chair." (Pilling & Cotterill, 2021).

⁸⁶ However, it must be emphasized here, that Chinese loans became only one of the problems concerning the country's debt sustainability. Around 30% of Zambia's total loans are owed to China making it the most significant bilateral creditor. However, the same share was owed to the private creditors via Eurobonds, and around 19%, was owed to development banks – mainly WB and AfDB (Ryder, 2022).

indebtedness, the opacity of the deals negotiated with China, and the extent of corruption in the overpriced projects gave rise to the debt-trap rhetoric in Zambia. These were fueled by the accusation by John Bolton in 2018.⁸⁷ Although unfounded, the rumors widespread anxiety among Zambians. Some of the respondents also mentioned the issue interviewed, expressing their concerns about China's motivations in the country:

When we look at what has happened elsewhere. When the Chinese got there and built certain things, like Sri Lanka, that built that second port [Hambantota], they were fully aware that Sri Lanka will not be able to pay. (...), We have seen that in Djibouti, where similar things happened. And people are talking about Zambia. This infrastructure that we have, very expensive, has fueled our corruption, and the Chinese knew we are not able to pay. Why did they give us money? We know that they are requiring some assets. For example, ZNBC, a broadcaster, they now own Topstar [a company created via a partnership between the Chinese Star Times and ZNBC], 60% of the company, so Zambia lost it. The Kenneth Kaunda International Airport, we know that they came up with a scheme to own it. And even this [Lusaka-Ndola] dual carriageway, I'm sure they will come up with a scheme, "We should own this road for so many years, and all the toll fees will come to us." So all these things point to not only having this sphere of influence but also to the possibility of countries like Zambia losing their sovereignty (Respondent 15, 7. 9. 2020).

In 2018, in response to the increasing fear of unsustainable indebtedness of Zambia to China, the Chinese ambassador, Li, stated that China was a responsible lender that endeavors to mitigate the financial risks in the agreements with Zambia:

China always insists on putting the interests of the Chinese and Zambian people first. China has always adhered to the principle of mutual respect and win-win co-operation and is committed to the spirit of consultation. (...), China neither attaches political strings to its assistance to Zambia nor does it seek selfish gains in investment and financing agreements. (...). China is a responsible partner which provides financial support to Zambia and other African countries. (...), China ensures that it prevents debt risks and financial burden on Zambia in its co-operation agreements. (...), China attaches great importance to the sustainability of Africa's debt to ensure that the loans given to countries on the continent are interest-free (ZDML, 15. 9. 2018).

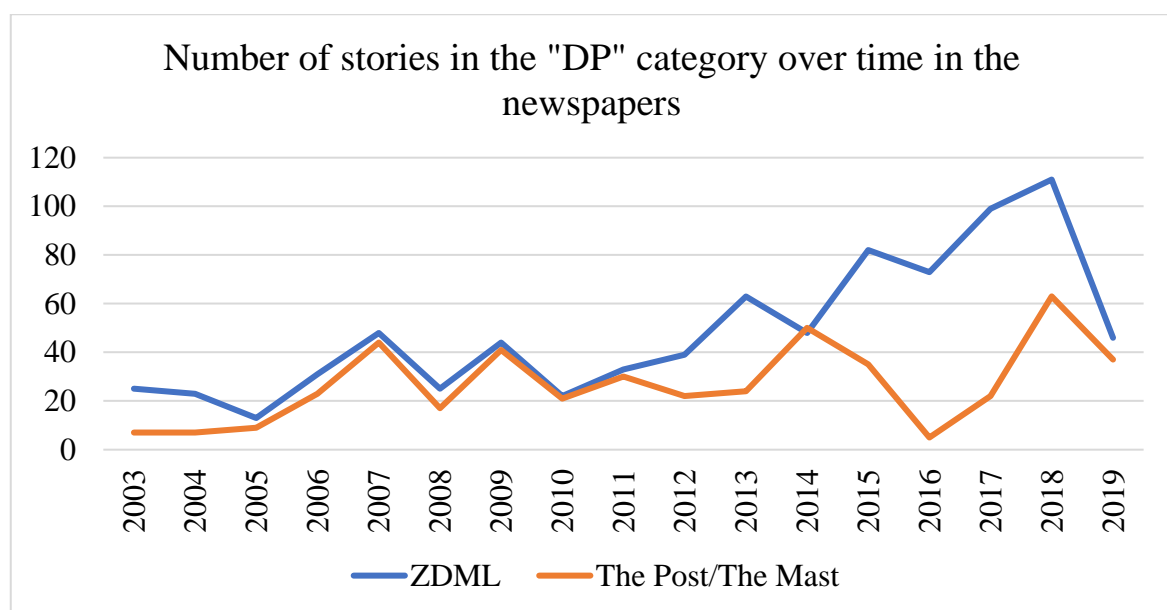
⁸⁷ The then-US national security advisor stated that China would take over some of the Zambian assets should the country default on its debt (Servant, 2019).

Such statements about China’s lending practices then raise questions about the extent to which Chinese investors and Chinese financial institutions, including policy banks, are uncoordinated in their operations in Zambia, as argued by Brautigam (2021; 2022). On the other hand, Li may lack information on the level of indebtedness and the content of the loans negotiated if Chinese companies are bargaining for them without Beijing’s oversight. Whatever the case, given the level of Zambia’s indebtedness to China that has come to light in subsequent years, such statements about China being a coordinated actor that has insight into the volume of provided loans only tend to create further panic about the deliberate indebtedness and thus support the narrative of a debt trap that Beijing has plunged Zambia into.

3.1.5.1.3. *China as a Development Partner and Exploiter in the
Zambian media*

The economic linkage to China was demonstrated in the largest category, framing China as a *development partner* (DP) in the Zambian newspapers (see Figures 8 and 9). The density of these ties can also be demonstrated by the increasing number of items in the category in time, regardless of the newspapers (see Figure 16). Also, on this trend, a substantial drop in the number of stories in 2019 is visible, reflecting the worsening economic situation and decrease in Chinese lending.

Figure 16: Number of stories in the “DP” category over time in the ZDML and The Post/The Mast (2003 – 2019)



Source: Author

The DP frame dominance applies to the state-owned newspapers as well as the private ones, thus representing 55% of observations in the ZDML and 49% in The Post/The Mast (Figures 8 and 9). In both newspapers, regarding the identified sources, government officials' statements of both countries (ZGOV and ChGOV) dominated the stories (Tables 16 and 17). Together, they accounted for 62% of all sources in the ZDML, while 46% of sources in The Post/The Mast. The Chinese companies were similarly represented in this category, with 8% of sources in the ZDML and 7% in The Post/The Mast. The private press then relied on a more diverse range of voices, giving more space to the Zambian political opposition (ZPO) with a 6% share of sources in this frame. It also relied more on information from international organizations and financial institutions, comprising 5% of sources (IOs and IFIs). This diversity of voices may explain why the framework is less positive in private newspapers than in ZDML (see Tables 14 and 15).

Typically, in the DP frame, China is defined as a development partner that shares its wealth, technology, and expertise to help African states develop. The stories announce some tangible support from China to help Zambian development; for instance – “The People’s Republic of China has given Zambia a grant of about US \$1.1 million, which will go towards infrastructure development and movement of food from rural farmers.” (The Post, 18. 2. 2004), or summarize China’s overall investment in Zambia over the years and their results – “China has invested over US\$3 billion in Zambia, creating more than 50,000 jobs. Ambassador Yang said China had supplied loans and grants for Zambia's infrastructure development.” (The Post, 7. 6. 2015).

As demonstrated by the share of sources, the main agents in this frame are the ruling political elites from both states. The cooperation usually results from official meetings of the political representatives signing agreements and deals in development cooperation. For instance – “The ZCCZ is the first overseas economic and trade cooperation zone established in Africa following one of the measures announced by the Chinese President Hu Jintao at the Beijing [FOCAC] Summit in 2006.” (ZDML, 28. 12. 2012). This partnership in terms of development was then possible thanks to China’s economic progress and its will to share the material benefits through Beijing’s initiatives like, for example, the

BRI – “In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed a new strategy for China’s new role in global economic development while visiting Kazakhstan. (...), With US\$4 trillion in China’s strategic reserves comfortably stashed away in banks, which African country would not want to be on the Silk Road?” (ZDML, 1. 10. 2016).

China in the DP frame is typically commended as a committed long-term and all-weather friend benefiting Zambian development. Chinese financial support is welcomed and appreciated in the country, as expressed by President Mwanawasa in 2008 – “I am extremely happy that you have given us a grant of US\$6 million and this shows how China was committed to helping our country to develop and it also has shown how the two countries enjoy bilateral and trade relations.” (ZDML, 27. 2. 2008). Also, Chinese SOEs operating in Zambia were praised, as was the case of the Chinese NFCA just five months before the tragic explosion that killed 50 Zambians:

As a symbol of cooperation between China and Zambia, Chambishi Copper Mine is highly recognised globally. Led by wise managers, NFCA only achieved profound success in many fields, such as mine maintenance, rehabilitation, operation and international marketing but also accumulated valuable experience and practical significance for the Chinese enterprises overseas. (...), NFCA always stresses on in-phase development of social benefit and it practices actively in such public welfare cause as hospital, water providing and municipal construction to return local society with great effort (ZDML, 3. 11. 2004).

The economic partnership with China became mainly appreciated during the financial crisis for its continuing relationship. Unlike Western countries, China was portrayed as a successful, resilient investor. “Even in the face of the global economic crisis, Chinese investment has remained the most sought after across the globe. Big economies like the United States of America and Britain are dashing to China for investment opportunities. (...), Zambia is lucky because the Chinese Government has a soft spot for the country and a lot of Chinese investors are willing to set up businesses in the country.” (ZDML, 9. 11. 2009). Eventually, Zambian ruling elites often defended Chinese investment in the mining sector against criticism from the political opposition. This was the case of Mwanawasa’s encouragement to disregard Michael Sata’s controversial and ungrateful statements against the Chinese investors who bring benefits to the Zambians:

Mr Mwanawasa appealed to the public not to issue negative statements against the Chinese government, especially on the Copperbelt because they were benefiting from the massive investment from China. He said demonstrations that were staged at the Chinese Embassy by alleged Patriotic Front cadres were embarrassing to the two governments and did not show appreciation for the contributions China made (ZDML, 26. 1. 2007).

In the same vein, an author of a ZDML commentary portrayed Chinese cooperation with African countries as an alternative to the one of the West, bringing sustainable investment without strings attached while defending the ties against any criticism:

There are some countries, companies, organisations and indeed individuals who will at every opportunity try to pour scorn on China's unprecedented push for economic partnerships around the globe. (...), Now these [developing] countries have an alternative source of investors whose terms are much more tolerable. In the past, the help, if and when offered, has so many strings attached that it left many countries, like Zambia, tangled in worse problems. (...), Today, China is offering much, much better conditions for its investment. It is the kind of investment that cannot possibly push Zambia back into the abyss of indebtedness, unless there is just gross mismanagement of resources. But who would allow that to happen again? (...). Those that can't bring themselves to accepting this fact, should at least just keep quiet (ZDML, 8. 7. 2007).

The negative judgment about the cooperation became rather mentioned in the private media, emphasizing its worrisome aspects. These included the lack of benefits for the Zambians from the partnership, as “most people have expressed disappointment that the investors do not plough back the huge profits they make in the local communities.” (The Post, 5. 10. 2006). The fear about the impacts of economic cooperation with China on society in Africa due to lack of transparency, accountability, and corruption issues related to the nature of the relationship and China's motives became repeatedly expressed in the stories. Already in 2006, this was voiced in The Post – “Some people have been complaining that some apparently generous grants given to developing countries by China have been nothing short of being corrupt. That, though it is generally believed and said that China provides loans with no strings attached, the loans and grants have actually been craftily used as a carrot to provide a near-diplomatic status to Chinese nationals in recipient countries.” (The Post, 1. 11. 2006). The issue then frequently emerged during Lungu's rule when the number of contracts with China increased,

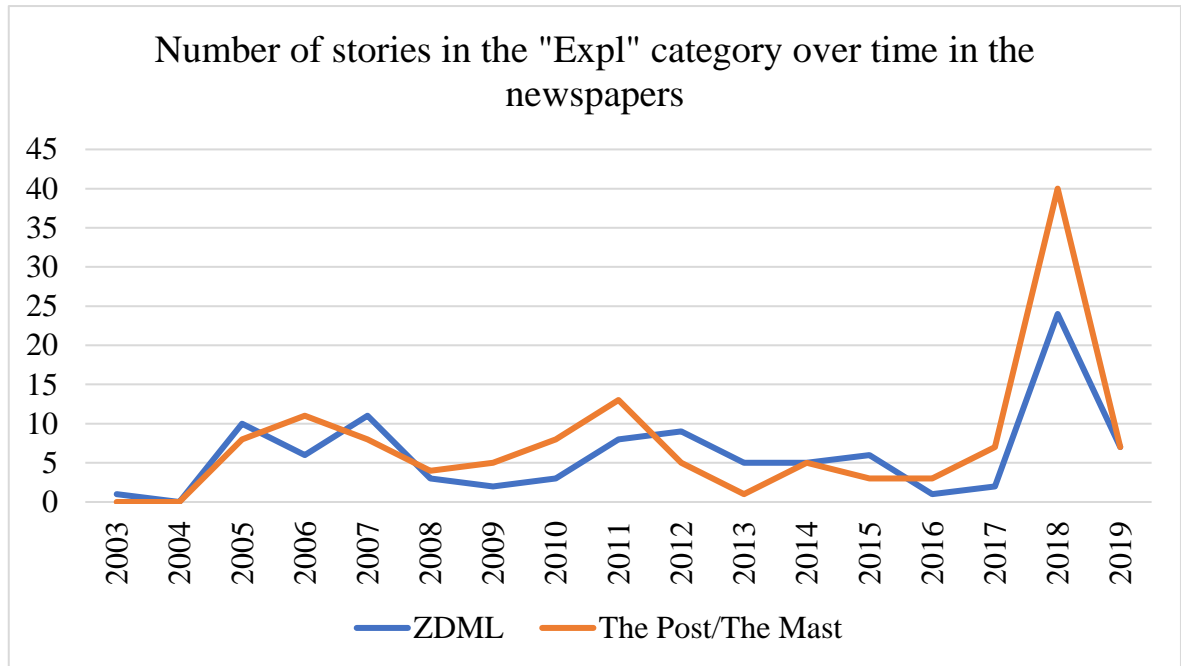
and so did the concerns about the debt burden and the opacity of the agreements, as “The lack of details about terms and conditions of many Chinese loans limit the ability to sufficiently analyse their economic impact and the seniority of claims, particularly in a debt restructuring scenario. A substantial portion of Chinese loans to Africa is non-concessional, raising concerns about rising and unsustainable external debt burdens in the medium term.” (The Mast, 6. 6. 2019).

Typically, the remedies suggested in this category call for the continuation of the economic cooperation between the countries and deepening the ties that are already in place, stating vaguely that the “Zambian government is determined to continue attracting more FDI into the country and is focusing on south to south investment” (The Post, 27. 3. 2009), or similarly – “Mr Kalaba [Minister of Foreign Affairs] said the organisation [Zambia-China Association] will create linkages for both Zambian and Chinese businesses to interact at a much greater scale and that this would lead to increased Sino-Zambian trade and investments.” (ZDML, 4. 11. 2015). However, some articles called for greater caution regarding the inflow of Chinese investment while underscoring the need for scrutiny of investors’ compliance with the country’s laws – “We need to reflect carefully on what explains China’s success and Zambian authorities should exercise caution as they acquiesce to Chinese investments by putting in place sufficient controls to mitigate any unintended consequences (...), It is therefore up to the recipient country to strive to achieve a balance between the national interest by not allowing too much of any sector to be owned or controlled by companies of one foreign country.” (The Post, 12. 2. 2007).

DP frame is not the only one identified in the press that reflects increasing economic ties between the countries. Another category (the second most numerous in the private press and the third in the ZDML, as indicated in Figures 8 and 9) frames China as an *exploiter* (Expl) for abusive working conditions, mainly in the mining sector, breaching labor and environmental laws, while seeing China as a potentially new colonizer. Over time, this category also involved articles warning against China’s endeavors to debt-trap Zambia and colonize the country. This trend can be seen in Figure 17. Here, one may observe that the category started to emerge in the Zambian media with the tragic BGRIMM incident in April 2005 and increased

during the Sata's populist campaigns in 2006 – 2008 and 2011. The 2018 spike can be attributed to the very heated debate about China's intention to exploit Zambia's indebtedness and take over its assets.

Figure 17: Number of stories in the "Expl" category over time in the ZDML and The Post/The Mast (2003 – 2019)



Source: Author

In the state-owned newspaper, with 75 articles identifying China as an exploiter, the category is the third largest, including a 6% share of all articles collected. The category builds on the stories, again by large, dominated by the Zambian government sources (ZGOV) with a 34% share (Table 16). The situation is substantially different regarding The Post/The Mast (Table 17). Although also the private press relied on the Zambian government (ZGOV) sources (21%), unlike the ZDML, it built the stories mainly on the voices of those directly affected by the Chinese investment – the workers and their representatives in the unions (U&A&W), making 22% of all sources. The private press reserved a larger space for the voices of the political opposition (ZPO), whose share was 11% of all sources in the frame (compared to 3% at the ZDML). When it comes to the tone of the frame, there is also a stark difference in the proportion of the tone types based on the different types of newspapers. As indicated in Table 14, in the state-owned media, the tone was mainly negative (43% of the stories in the frame). Yet, some

stories downplayed the negative impact of some business practices of Chinese companies in Zambia and marginalized the voices of those directly affected by the investors' misconduct. Consequently, China as an exploiter is in 38% of items described positively in the ZDML. In the case of the private press, the positively toned items were absent (Table 15), and the negative tone dominates with 88%. This, again, can be attributed to the sources used in the stories.

In this category, China and its presence in Zambia are usually seen as exploitative, taking advantage of Zambian workers by neglecting safety measures and paying low salaries. This included, for example, an announcement that the infamous "Chinese-owned coal mine in Sinazongwe has been suspended following revelations that workers were being subjected to slave conditions." (ZDML, 7. 7. 2006). The exploitative conditions then did not only concern the mining industry, as it was announced in 2014, "About 450 workers at Sino Hydro, a Chinese firm constructing the US\$250 million Itezhi Tezhi hydroelectric power plant, have gone on strike in protest against wages they claim are below the statutory minimum wage." (ZDML, 11. 6. 2014). Over time, the narrative about China taking over Zambian assets and undermining the country's sovereignty via exploiting the increasing indebtedness emerged in this category. The issue became especially voiced in the private press by the Zambian political opposition during Lungu's rule – "UPND leader Hakainde Hichilema says he is worried with rate at which the PF and its leader President Edgar Lungu are selling the country's strategic assets and land due to corruption and debts to foreigners." (The Mast, 21. 10. 2018).

The causes of the problem were mainly seen in the irresponsibility of the Chinese investors, who created bad working conditions and were reluctant to respect the local labor laws. Thus, in a Chinese mine, "Violence erupted following management's announcement that workers would receive old salaries despite a new collective agreement to increase their salaries by 21 percent effective January 1." (ZDML, 26. 7. 2006). Also, the Zambian government became seen as an actor standing behind the problem by not taking an interest in the welfare of the miners, as mentioned in The Post just a few days after the tragic explosion at BGRIMM in 2005 – "We blame the government because they were party to the sale of the mining assets of Zambia, yet showed little concern for the welfare of the citizens

who work for the mining companies. The Ministry of Mines and the Ministry of Labour bear much of the responsibility for the way in which they neglected and abandoned the interests of the workers in the industry.” (The Post, 28. 4. 2005).

The Chinese investors and managers were described as not respecting local law or culture and taking advantage of their workforce – “But what is disturbing is the manner most of these Chinese investors treat African workers. (...), The African culture and social setup seems to be unfriendly to them hence their reluctance to follow certain legislated procedures in the country.” (The Post, 20. 6. 2006). The disinterest of the Chinese managers to learn the local languages to improve communication and prevent conflict was voiced in 2012 as “Most Chinese managers have never bothered to either learn English,(...), The fracas could have been avoided had the Chinese invested in communication because the workers who rioted might have misinterpreted management's position on the revised minimum wage, which has triggered a heated debate countrywide.” (ZDML, 19. 8. 2012).

Again, the close ties between the governments emerged by defending the Chinese investors against rioters and assuring them about their safety and support. In 2008, this became the case of the protests over wages disputes in Chambishi, where the Copperbelt permanent secretary, Jennnifer Musonda, rushed to the scene and condemned the workers for damaging Chinese company property while stating that “What happened is shameful, but as a Government, we would like to assure the Chinese people and Government of our continued support and that their investment is protected.” (ZDML, 5. 3. 2008). Similarly, in ZDML, with increasing indebtedness, the excessive borrowing from China was defended as sustainable, assuring that there were no colonial endeavors on its part. China was instead portrayed as a victim of rumors about debt trapping. In 2018, Zambia’s former High Commissioner to Australia, George Zulu, advised Zambians “not to fall prey to propaganda that China wants to colonize Zambia,” as “There is a dangerous paid-for propaganda doing rounds that China wants to buy Zambia. As a diplomat, I know that China loves Zambia and cannot colonise us.” (ZDML, 20. 9. 2018). On the contrary, in the private newspapers, China was portrayed as a new colonizer by giving voice to political opposition. For instance, in 2019, Harry Kalaba, then Democratic Party leader, stated that China took over the country, making it its

province – “Icalo naciya (the country is gone)! We’ll be like Sri Lanka that was ‘taken over’ by China or we’ll be like Djibouti that was also taken over by China. We may start working for China! We have become a province of China umulandu wakutila tulekongola ukwabula plan (because we are borrowing without a plan).” (The Mast, 27. 7. 2019).

The remedies suggested in this category usually require some intervention from the government and other stakeholders like unions and the very management of Chinese companies to observe the labor laws in the country. This concerned the re-opening of infamous China’s Collum Coal Mine where – “Following the resumption of operations at the mine, it is hoped management, the unions, and Government will put in place measures that will seal all loopholes that may lead to recurrence of any fatal confrontation because the investment must benefit both the investors and employees on win-win basis.” (ZDML, 19. 8. 2012). At times, more extreme measures were suggested as a reaction to the increasing Chinese presence in the country, including mobilization and protesting – “If the government gives KCM [a copper mine] to the Chinese, owing to their bad working and investment culture, it was better to go on the street and demonstrate all over Zambia.” (The Mast, 6. 7. 2019).

The media reflection on economic ties offers insight into the intensity and simultaneous controversy of this relationship between Zambia and China. The economic linkage to China brought development through investment in the mining and construction sectors, but it also brought dangerous debt, non-transparent practices, and corruption. The cooperation that unfolded, as evident from the sources in the media stories, took place mainly between the political elites of the two countries, from whose initiatives and meetings the linkage grew. Disturbingly, as demonstrated by some scholars (Lee, 2017; Brautigam, 2021; 2022), this was often not monitored by designated authorities and, thus, without proper assessment. The close economic ties between the countries contributed to such an unsustainable debt burden that it took the new UPND government nearly two years to reach the deal to restructure the 6.3 billion USD debt that came as a legacy of the PF overborrowing, both from the private lenders as well as from China. In June 2023, when the deal was reached, Hichilema commented on the lengthy negotiating

process as “difficult, it was like a mission impossible” because of the “debt which was of a mountain proportion, humongous debt, the debt was borrowed recklessly,” while pointing finger to the PF corrupt practices including scheming off the finance – “We all know what happened to that money.” (Siandizya, 2023). The earlier quoted ZDML commentary, portraying China as an alternative partner that, unlike the West, would not lead the country into debt “unless there is just gross mismanagement of resources. But who would allow that to happen again?” (ZDML, 8. 7. 2007), seems particularly ironic in the light of increasing and corruption-ridden economic ties with China.

3.1.5.2. *Intergovernmental Linkage*

Intergovernmental relations between China and Zambia have shown remarkable stability since independence and the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1964. The relationship between the first Zambian President, Kenneth Kaunda, and Mao Zedong was already very close. Taylor (2006) explains the importance of China’s relations with Zambia by two factors. *First*, it was Zambia’s geo-strategic location as “the most strategically positioned and dangerously exposed host state engaged in the liberation struggle in Southern Africa.” (Taylor, 2006, p. 165). *Second*, the very personality of Kaunda, with a reputation of an “honest broker in the Southern African milieu” and his political orientation built on the idea of humanism and non-alignment in the times of the Superpower competition contributed to building the strong relationship (ibid.). In these times, China became not only an alternative source of financial assistance, best demonstrated with the construction of TAZARA, but also an important ally heavily involved in the anti-apartheid campaign and an actor counterbalancing the relations with the USSR and the Western countries (Kopinski & Polus, 2012). In return, China gained support in its bid for the permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council.

Kaunda also described the relations between the PRC and independent African countries as an “all-weather friendship” (Kopinski & Polus, 2012). This term is still extensively used today to describe the relationship between the two countries, as stated by Mwanawasa: “My Government values the all-weather friendship and cooperation with China (...), China had always been a friend not only to Africa, but for the Third World at large, (...), a few countries have done more to foster unity

and common purpose of the Third World.” (ZDML, 7. 11. 2006). In general, this early inter-elite cooperation is still remembered and regularly reminded in the debates about the nature of the relations between the two countries. For example, during Hu Jintao’s visit to Zambia in 2007, both presidents, Hu and Mwanawasa, referred to the long relationship and shared history of liberation struggle:

China is happy to have Zambia as a good friend, a good brother, [and is a] natural ally because both [countries] shared a similar background of colonialism, imperialism, socialism and new economic development challenges in light of globalization (The Post, 5. 2. 2007).

We, in Zambia, took a firm stand that all people in the region and indeed in the world have the right to fight for self-determination and self-rule, at a time when our neighbors faced colonial rule and internal conflict. This position could not have been sustained without the support of great friends such as the people of China and their visionary leaders (ibid.).

Likewise, Kaunda played a prominent role in Sino-Zambian relations until his death in 2021. He was often invited to or at least mentioned at official events celebrating relations between the countries. In the words of the former Chinese Ambassador Yang, Kenneth Kaunda “is special and means a lot to China and the Chinese people.” (The Post, 22. 4. 2015). Some official events were held exclusively in his honor, further commemorating his historical role. For example, on the occasion of Kaunda’s 90th birthday in 2014, Chinese Ambassador Zhou celebrated the former Zambian leader, stating, “If everybody behaves like you, the world would be a better place to live in, you are a great friend of China. You are the richest man in terms of friendship (...), We are hosting this for the purpose of expressing love, respect and admiration.... for a great friend of China.” (ZDML, 28. 4. 2014). Kaunda then often expressed his admiration for China’s economic progress on various occasions while recalling his close ties with China’s political elites going back to the 1960s, as was the case of China’s anniversary in October 2007:

When I first visited Beijing in 1967, Zambia was among the first few African states fighting for the admission of China in the United Nations to unseat Taiwan which enjoyed support from western countries. Since then, I had the privilege of visiting the country in 1974 and 1980. My last visit in 2003 was private. During these visits there were signs of major socio-economic transformation of a great country. My historic meetings with founding fathers – Chairman Mao Tse Tong and Premier Chou Enlai – and their successors whom it was a singular honour and

privilege to meet and tell a story of visionaries, determined men and women committed to a great and united China (The Post, 1. 10. 2007).

The warm elite-to-elite relations continued even when the MMD came to power in 1991. As for many other African states, these ties have intensified mainly after 2000 with growing economic cooperation fueled by the story of the Chinese economy's success. This was further accentuated during the 2008 financial crisis and, at the same time, by the West's resignation on the development of Africa as it became labeled a "hopeless continent" (The Economist, 2000). The standpoint resonated on the continent and contributed to increasing orientation to Beijing. As stated by Levy Mwanawasa in 2007 during the African Business Forum, "We only turned to the East when you people in the West let us down" (Lusakatimes.com, 2007).

Cooperation at the level of elites via political parties has already been demonstrated in the context of active influences in the chapter on autocracy promotion, so it will not be further detailed in this part of the thesis. This form of cooperation, as described earlier, demonstrated the CCP's willingness to share its experience in party governance and simultaneously the interest and willingness of members of the ruling political parties in Zambia to gain knowledge from their Chinese counterparts. In other words, it also shows the agency on the part of Zambia's ruling elites to learn from China. Apart from inter-party relations, other intergovernmental ties manifest the close nature between the political elites. According to *Development Reimagined* (2018), between 2007 and 2018, China's political leadership made 79 visits to 43 different African countries. With seven trips, South Africa became their primary recipient, and the other five African countries received three or more such visits, including Zambia.⁸⁸ Between 2010 and 2019, AidData (2022) counted up to four official visits by Zambian Presidents to China – in 2010 (Rupiah Banda), 2013 (Michael Sata), 2015, and 2018 (both by Edgar Lungu). In addition to these trips, one also needs to include the visit to China by Levy Mwanawasa in 2003 (ZDML, 11. 11. 2003). Of these visits to China, some gained particular attention. For instance, Michael Sata's 2013 trip lasted seven days. The significance of this visit in April 2013 lies not only in the fact that Sata was known for not being a proponent of foreign trips, yet adhered to the invitation by Xi

⁸⁸ The other countries included Tanzania, Namibia, Senegal, and Chad (ibid.).

(Matambo, 2019, p. 55), but also, as explained by the Chinese ambassador in Zambia, Zhou, “the invitation of a state visit to China extended to the Zambian president by President [Xi] Jinping barely twenty days after the inauguration of the new Chinese leadership indicates the great importance China attaches to its relations with Zambia.” (Lusakatimes.com, 2013). The only visit to Zambia by the Chinese was in 2007 when Hu Jintao visited the country during his eight-nation tour of Africa. The significance of this visit rests in the fact that Hu’s stay in Zambia was considerably longer than in any of the visited states. As put by Davies et al. (2008, p. 45), this was interpreted as a “clear indication of the importance China attributed to its relations with Zambia.”

During this period, however, the Sino-Zambian relationship faced severe challenges from the political opposition, especially the PF and its leader, Michael Sata. With increasing investment in mining, the country has seen several tragic accidents in Chinese-owned mines due to work safety negligence by the investors and violent incidents between the Chinese management and the Zambian workers. These events gave rise to “anti-Chinese populism” (Aidoo, 2019; Kopinski & Polus, 2012; Sibiri, 2020) or “choreographed Sinophobia” (Matambo, 2020) by the political opposition. In this respect, it became mainly Sata and his PF who were running campaigns profiting from (and further fueling) anti-Chinese sentiment in the country.

Sata’s campaign notably escalated in the run-up to the 2006 elections when he claimed that 80,000 Chinese were “infesting” the country (Postel, 2017, p. 156) and that Zambia needed a partner that “would respect and not enslave the locals” (The Post, 1. 9. 2006) while accusing the Chinese government of “campaigning on behalf of the ruling MMD.” (ZDML, 30. 8. 2006). It was, however, mainly his proclamation about official support to Taiwan if he was elected that provoked a strong reaction from Beijing. In response to Sata’s remarks, China did not stop at the rhetorical condemnation but also adopted more tangible measures halting further investment in Zambia due to the “uncertainty surrounding the bilateral relationship between China and Zambia.” and declared to be ready to eventually “cut off bilateral ties with Zambia should Patriotic Front president, Michael Sata win the September 28 election and establish diplomatic relations with Taiwan.” (ZDML, 5. 9. 2006). Chinese Ambassador claimed – “How can we continue

supporting Zambia's development projects, when our bilateral relationship with this country has been threatened. Some of these political statements will put the country's development projects at risk" while adding that some of Sata's statements "continued to injure the feelings of Chinese people and the business community in Zambia." (ibid.). By conditioning Chinese investment in the country based on the outcomes of the 2006 elections, China breached one of the essential and long-standing principles of its foreign policy – non-interference in the internal affairs of a foreign country. However, just on the eve of the 2006 elections, the Chinese embassy issued a statement assuring adherence to the principle of non-interference in Zambia's internal affairs and cooperation with the winner of the elections as it "respects the choice of Zambians over political leaders they want to put into office and will not interfere in the internal affairs of the country," while stating that "it was Beijing's aspiration to develop warm relations with all political parties in Zambia." (ZDML, 27. 9. 2006).

Sata lost the 2006 elections but was able to mobilize voters in the country's most populous regions, Lusaka and Copperbelt, where the Chinese presence was felt the most. This success made him a serious competitor for the ruling MMD in the following elections. The echoes of his anti-China attitude that he was able to unleash in the country also negatively marked the official visit to the country by Hu in 2007 as he had to adjust the visit to the security situation affected by the outbreak of protests against the Chinese presence in Zambia. Thus, although the Chinese President planned to visit the Copperbelt Province, he had to cancel the trip (Al Jazeera, 2007b). Also, due to the PF's anti-Chinese stance, unlike other Zambian opposition parties, its leadership was not invited to attend public events related to Hu's visit "because they do not recognise the Chinese people." (Shacinda, 2007).

In the upcoming years, Sata's campaigns against China's presence in the country became more moderate as he found a new theme for mobilizing supporters – corruption among the MMD elites. The topic emerged after Mwanawasa's death and Rupiah Banda's succession to power in 2008.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, it should be noted that

⁸⁹ During the Mwanawasa presidency, it was not possible for Sata to use a populist theme such as fighting corruption because the MMD advocated an uncompromising stance against corruption. Thus, Sata started pushing anti-China rhetoric instead (Matambo, 2019, pp. 53–55). This, however, changed drastically under Banda. Most notably, in 2010, in the wake of Banda's corruption scandals,

Banda made it easy for Sata to take his populist anti-Chinese stance. For example, the closeness between the Zambian ruling elites and Beijing was reflected in Banda's attitude as he stood up for the Chinese investor in an accident in the CCM in October 2010. Banda was accused of trivializing the accident and defending the investor, as expressed in a The Post comment:

I would like to find out from the President why he seems to be a supporter and a defender of Chinese investors who have just recently come into this country to exploit the already suffering Zambians? (...), What this country needs is a firm president. If Rupiah [Banda] defends Zambians when they are shot at for no apparent reason by these Chinese, it's better for him to step down (The Post, 27. 10. 2010).

Nevertheless, in 2011, when Sata finally came to power, his stance towards China changed virtually overnight. The Chinese Ambassador Zhou was the first diplomat to visit Sata in the State House. During his visit, Sata said that Zambia and China have been "close friends and there were certain misunderstandings that will have to be corrected" (The Post, 27. 9. 2011). Although Sata himself visited China only in 2013, he sent Kenneth Kaunda to China to restore relations with Beijing in November 2011 (Lusakatime.com 2011). Sata also immediately supported the One-China policy adherence, stating that Taiwan is a part of the PRC and even offering Zambia's assistance to China to become even more united, saying that "we totally agree that Taiwan or Taipei, Hong Kong and Beijing are all Chinese people and nobody should divide you. If there is anything, we should assist to consolidate so that you become more united than you have ever been before." (The Post, 27. 9. 2011). The all-weather friendship restoration was also welcomed by Ambassador Zhou, leaving the "misunderstandings" in the past:

You may recall that President Sata had made some anti-Chinese political statements during the campaign but that is in the past. I am the first diplomat he called to State House two days after he was sworn in and he said to me "let's open a new page and work together", but I guess the message was not so clear when he did this, hence the reason he met Chinese businessmen on October 29 for Lunch.... to tell the world that Zambia and China had mended fences and were willing to move forward mutually (The Post, 10. 11. 2011).

Global Fund even suspended aid to country's health sector to fight AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. The EU then stopped aid to the country's road construction in the same year (Mfula, 2010).

As the interviewed MP from the PF underscored, Michael Sata's populist rhetoric did not matter. After winning in 2011, he changed his stance to the Chinese, and the PF became a "different party." Thus, nothing has changed in Zambia's relation to the PRC:

You see, policy shouldn't change with individuals in the office. (...), It shouldn't change with the first person in the office. It has to be sustainable. (...), When Sata went into office, who were the first people he met? The Chinese! You see, when you are in government, you are a different party. Party policy, it's party rhetoric, its populist rhetoric. (...), Now, tell me, did anything change? No. The spirit of that relationship has never changed. (...), Michael Sata was saying those things as a populist politician! Did he say that as a President? No! (Respondent 19, 12. 8. 2019).

Indeed, under the PF, the relations between the countries further intensified on the elite level. Already in 2013, Chinese Ambassador Zhou stated that the PF has been in touch with China more than the MMD – "In just two short years the PF has been in power, relations between China and Zambia have deepened more than ever." (ZDML, 10. 12. 2013). These close ties between political elites were also demonstrated in 2016 when Zambian MPs, together with MPs from five other African and Asian countries, visited China for a series of capacity-building programs as a "way of uniting parliaments in Africa and Asia." (ZDML, 22. 3. 2016). This initiative was expected to help participating countries implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) while, as reported in media, having "in-depth discussion around global issues that included democracy, human rights and international law." (ibid.).

Lungu himself visited China twice. The 2015 visit gained much attention as China became the first country he visited outside Africa as President. Consequently, Chinese officials saw this with a "far-reaching significance" (ZDML, 1. 10. 2015). Indeed, for the PF and Lungu's increasingly close relationship with Beijing, China became accused by political opposition of supporting the PF and interfering in Zambian internal political affairs (The Mast, 14. 7. 2018). These close ties were further demonstrated later in 2018. In mid-September 2018, during the official opening of Parliament, Lungu was expected to address severe economic issues,

corruption allegations,⁹⁰ and the increasing indebtedness mainly to China. Instead, Lungu took a stance to defend China's presence in Zambia passionately. Thus, rather than representing the interests and addressing the concerns of Zambians, Lungu began to downplay the problematic nature of the relationship as being only a "propaganda" of the West and the opposition – "Our friendship with China is mutual, and no amount of reckless propaganda will deter us from entrenching this relationship." (The Mast, 15. 9. 2018). Lungu was criticized for his statement, and the day he gave the speech, September 14, 2018, became labeled by the media as "the day President Lungu went to Parliament to defend China, represented a dark day for Zambia." (The Mast 21. 9. 2018a). His statements in Parliament were sharply criticized even by the PF members. For example, in 2018, the former PF Minister of Foreign Affairs (then still a PF member), Harry Kalaba, expressed his regrets that Lungu went to Parliament "mainly to defend and advocate Chinese interests in Zambia," calling the leadership of the PF a "failed," while encouraging the Zambians to "rise against the leaders they elected." (The Mast, 19. 9. 2018). Kalaba also voiced his concerns about the closeness between Lungu and the Chinese, noting that:

I looked in the gallery and I saw [that] His Excellency the Chinese Ambassador was there. (...). I thought the President should have been very measured in the way he came out. He needed to talk for the youths [but] he didn't talk for the youths in that Parliament – the President talked for the Chinese. He needed to talk for the women in the Parliament [but] the President was an advocate for the Chinese (ibid.).

Only a few days later, after the infamous speech, the PF went so far as to defend China's presence in the country by having a Kenyan scholar who was due to deliver a lecture on Sino-African cooperation deported from the airport in Lusaka. Civil society commented on this as a step that "had cast another dark cloud on Zambia's road to democracy." (The Mast, 30. 9. 2018).

⁹⁰ It should be noted that the part of the speech devoted to corruption in the country did not "age well". Lungu claimed how the fight against corruption remains a priority for him and his government while deeming the allegations as malicious. But just days after his speech, the British government cut off aid to Zambia "following reports of massive corruption." (The Mast, 21. 9. 2018b).

3.1.5.2.1. Material Support to the Government and Defense Sector

In the period covered in this thesis, it is possible to come across significant material support China provided to the Zambian government, whether through grants or loans. Some of these financial flows in support of ruling parties have already been discussed in the chapter on democracy resistance, showing China's will to finance the ruling party's repressive initiatives, whether in terms of delivery of surveillance devices and know-how or police equipment scheduled for the 2021 elections. It has also been described how China supported governments before elections through donations or the provision of hidden loans – in 2006, 2011, and 2021, thus supporting ruling parties' agencies to retain power. Apart from this, there were other tangible initiatives between the political elites of the two countries.

AidData (Custer et al., 2021) shows that China provided the first material support to the Zambian National Assembly as early as 2000, the details of which are unknown. The following year, China gave financial assistance and office equipment to the Zambian government in preparation for organizing the OAU summit. In 2002, the Zambian government signed an interest-free loan to construct the Kamwala Government Complex; the project was refinanced over time through additional loans and was not officially completed until 2012. In the following years, the Chinese government donated office equipment to the Zambian police, the Immigration Department, or the Supreme Court of Zambia. Then, in 2012 and 2013, the Chinese government donated dozens of vehicles worth 6 million USD to Zambia to provide a standing protocol fleet to receive foreign delegations (ibid.).

In addition to government support, cooperation with China played a significant role in Zambia's defense sector. Over the years, Zambia has become one of Africa's largest recipients of military loans in terms of their number and volume (Hwang, 2020; Link, 2019), supporting facilities with defense and domestic security objectives. As the Boston University Global Development Policy Center (2022) reported, from 2000 to 2019, Zambia received 13 loans from China to support this sector, reaching more than 2 billion USD. Eight of these loans were signed during

Lungu's rule.⁹¹ The Zambian interest in Chinese products in this sector is mainly driven by Beijing's ability to offer favorable prices for its projects.⁹² The domestic political economy also plays a role in boosting the Zambian military sector. Zambian Defence Forces (ZDF) became a major employer in the formal sector, as well as a housing and property development provider, employing a workforce of 15 thousand active duty personnel, of which 1,600 are only in the airforce (ZAF) (Hwang, 2020, p. 12). It is then mainly the ZAF section of the ZDF leadership that has considerable sway within the Zambian government and the business community and can get funding through loans from China. In addition, the deals with China, in general, lacked transparency, and some became highly controversial for their impact on local communities and corruption benefiting ruling elites, as revealed soon under the UPND government.⁹³

3.1.5.2.2. *China as a Political Partner in the Zambian Newspapers*

In the newspapers, intergovernmental ties emerged in the category that frames China as a *political partner* (PP). The items number in the PP category increased over time, eventually dropping with the decreasing cooperation in 2019 (Figure 18). The observations also reflected the major events in Zambia regarding the political

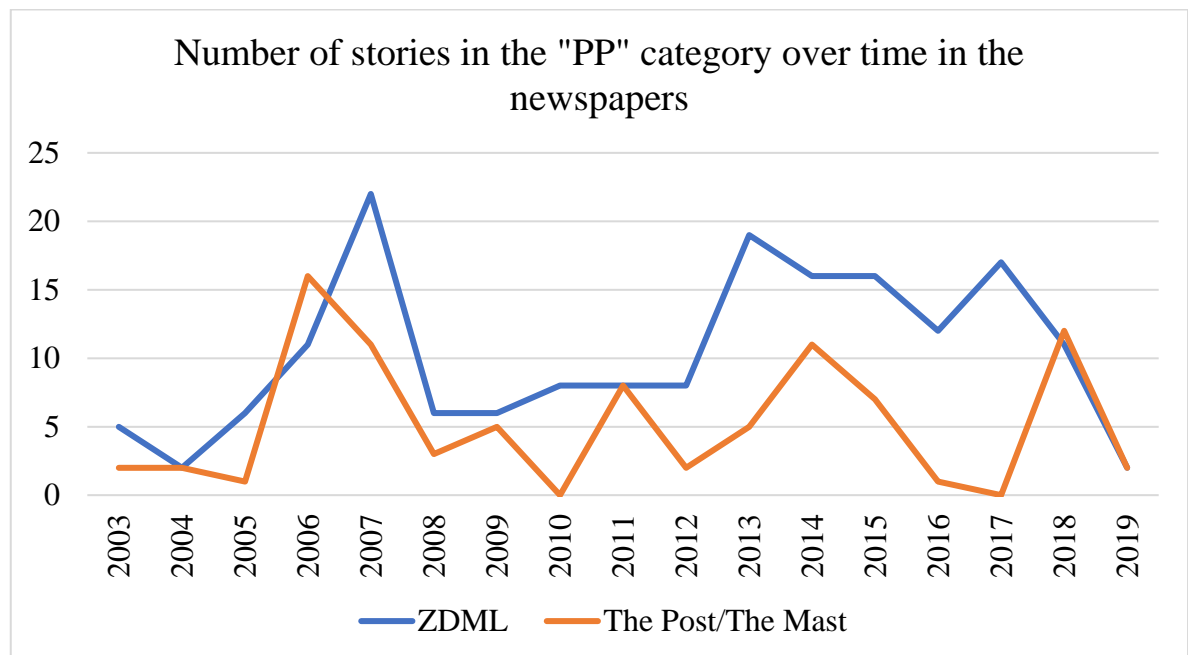
⁹¹ During this period Zambian governments borrowed finance for projects that included the construction of military and police barracks and other housing units and various military equipment. The financially most demanding initiatives concerned the purchase of aircraft, including passenger and cargo planes, and 14 jet trainers (Boston University Global Development Policy Center, 2022). In addition to the above-mentioned purchases, AidData informed that in 2013, following Sata's visit to China, China North Industries Corporation (NORINCO) agreed to lend 19.5 million USD to the Zambian government to recapitalize and revitalize an ammunition manufacturing facility (Custer et al., 2021). Also, apart from loans, Beijing provided grants to the Zambian government targeting the military sector. Already in 2001, it donated 1.2 million USD to Zambian armed forces, the purpose of this finance is however unknown as finance was not tied to any specific project. In 2012 a grant was provided for the rehabilitation of two military hospitals.

⁹² Hwang (2020) notes that every purchase of aircraft includes financial support, allowing the customer to acquire goods and services without having to pay upfront. Apart from that, the Chinese equipment is rugged, and simple to operate and maintain.

⁹³ One of the most controversial projects was the housing project Kingsland City built in Lusaka. The project was a PPP between the ZAF and a Chinese Sun Share Group. There were several controversial issues regarding the implementation of the facility. In 2018, Lusaka residents petitioned Lungu over the fears that it will lead to the depletion of groundwater resources in the city (Lusakatimes.com, 2018). This was followed by a lawsuit filed by Chalimbana River Headwaters Conservation Trust and traditional leaders (Mbewe, 2019). In addition, when completed some corruption cases emerged including the PF political elites and the PF connected business people (Lusakatimes.com, 2022; Mbewe, 2021; Chisola, 2023).

ties to Beijing. Thus, both newspapers reflected the 2006 populist campaign by Sata menacing the diplomatic ties with China, as well as the 2007 visit by Hu. The increase in observations after 2012 (mainly in the ZDML) can be attributed to both the visit by Sata to China in 2013 and also, in general, deepening cooperation between the countries under PF rule.

Figure 18: Number of stories in the “PP” category over time in the ZDML and The Post/The Mast (2003 – 2019)



Source: Author

The PP category was one of the most frequently used ways China became framed in the newspapers. It was the second largest category in the ZDML (11% share) and the third largest in The Post/The Mast (9% share) (see Figures 8 and 9). In all newspapers, the PP frame builds nearly equally on the statements by the Chinese (ChGOV) and the Zambian officials (ZGOV) (Tables 16 and 17). This only emphasizes the nature of the relationship concentrated on the ruling elites, who are the primary agents in this category. The political partnership often emerges from the high-level meetings, visits, and/or statements and correspondence of the officials addressing each other. Both newspapers framed China mainly in a positive way. The positive tone especially concerns the ZDML, with 87% of items coded as favorable compared to 62% in the private-owned media (Tables 14 and 15). This higher share of neutral or negative frames can be attributed to the higher number of

sources from the political opposition (ZPO) commenting on the relationship with China (reaching 15% of sources). The instances of these negatively toned articles included Sata's critique of China and its collusive relationship with the ruling MMD.

This category typically includes articles that portray China as a partner supporting Zambia on political issues and vice-versa – e.g., Zambian political elites endorsing China's One-China policy or seeking support from Beijing in the matter of representation of Africa on the UN Security Council, as voiced by Levy Mwanawasa in 2007:

Zambia has no interest in vying for a permanent UN seat, but that position she has taken is one of principle and a matter of justice. We believe that Africa's acquisition of UN permanent seats will be to the advantage of countries like China, with whom we share so much in common on matters of the agenda of the UN. We also believe that an unequivocal statement from China supporting Africa's wish for the two permanent UN seats with veto, would be very helpful, as it will put pressure on the other permanent members (The US, UK, France and Russia) to also come out in the open and indicate some flexibility (The Post, 5. 2. 2007).

In this frame, China was often defended by Zambian politicians against the critique from the West. For instance, in 2011, during the CPC's cadres visit to the country, Banda "defended China on the recent concerns raised by United States Secretary of State Hilary Clinton that China is not transparent in its dealings with other countries and it does not observe the principles of good governance." (ZDML, 17. 6. 2011). The same year, Vice Premier of the PRC, Hui Liangyu, expressed gratitude to Zambia for supporting Beijing on the issues regarding its human rights record – "As all-weather friends, we always relentlessly render each other help on the issue concerning our core interests. We sincerely thank Zambia for its firm support on the issue of Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, human rights and 2008 Beijing Olympic Games." (ZDML 10. 1. 2011).

China is then depicted as a friendly and welcomed alternative political partner that is also feared and unjustly demonized by the West that had, unlike China, failed Africa in the past. A partner whose diplomacy towards the continent is free from lecturing on good governance. This was voiced in a comment printed in the ZDML:

However, what is the real truth behind the veneer of alarmist rhetoric emanating from Western capital cities? Why are Western politicians and their allies in the media so apprehensive with the growing influence of the People's Republic of China in sub-Saharan Africa? Why do Western governments relentlessly accuse the Chinese government of not "responsibly" using its privileged position on the UN Security Council to push "naughty" African leaders deemed to be guilty of "Bad Governance"? The answers to these questions can be summed up by one phrase: "Strategic Decline" Western politicians and academics have suddenly discovered that, contrary to their apocalyptic predictions of the 1990s, that Africa was "doomed" continent full of "failing states", the continent has immense geo-strategic value after all. (...), China's diplomacy is refreshingly different. Instead of lecturing African countries on good governance in "hard power" language, i.e. threats and ultimatums, China uses gentle language of mutually beneficial development cooperation and political dialogue in its discourse with African countries (ZDML, 14. 8. 2012).

The remedy suggested in the PP frame typically included vaguely formulated commitments about the continuation of the partnership wherein "Zambia will continue supporting the one-China policy" (The Post, 11. 1. 2011) and further bilateral cooperation as "there is need for the two countries to grow people-to-people cooperation as the relations between the two countries are much more than about governments." (ZDML, 28. 4. 2014).

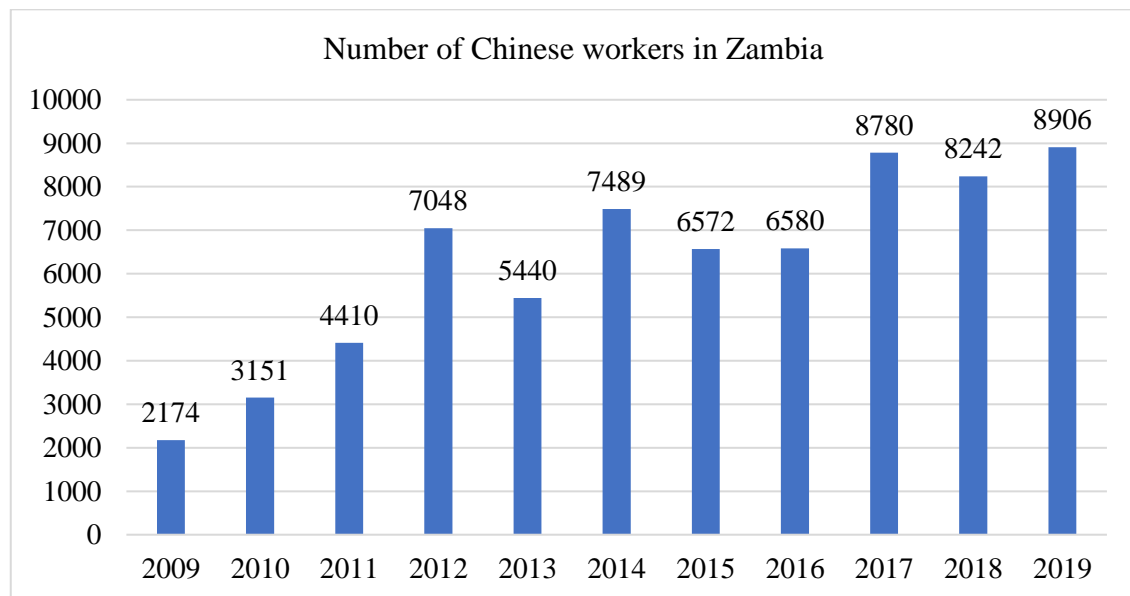
The Zambia-China intergovernmental linkage has illustrated the growing ties between the countries through the increasing engagements of its leaders. Apart from the mutual verbal support between leaders, China has repeatedly expressed its readiness to tangibly support the ruling parties in Zambia through financial and material support ahead of the elections in a bid to strengthen the incumbent party against competitors. In 2006, Beijing even violated one of the basic principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of foreign countries when it conditioned its investments in the country on the incumbent's victory in the elections. China has thus become a source of support for the Zambian elites regardless of the ruling party. Zambian ruling elites then repeatedly defended Chinese investment and engagement in the country, often at the expense of their own country's interests and stability (political and fiscal), showing greater accountability to Beijing than to the citizens who elected them.

3.1.5.3. *Technocratic and Social Linkage*

China's increasing engagement in Africa, specifically Zambia, has increased Chinese migration. However, there is a big discrepancy in their exact numbers. Howard French (2014), for example, estimates that there are as many as 100,000 Chinese in Zambia, which would make them one of the largest migrant communities in Africa; Michael Sata then used the figure of 80,000 during his campaign (Postel, 2017, p. 156). Nonetheless, both of these figures seem to be exaggerated. Determining the exact number of Chinese nationals arriving and living in Zambia is complicated by unreliable data. Nonetheless, some scholars (Postel, 2017) estimate way lower figures of 22,000 Chinese migrants in Zambia in 2012. This would still be a substantial growth from just a few hundred Chinese nationals in Lusaka who "all knew each other" in the 1990s (*ibid.*, p. 171). The number includes those arriving with Chinese companies to work on construction projects, individual entrepreneurs arriving in Zambia to open their businesses, and doctors, diplomats, or students. Postel also notes an extremely high admission rate for Chinese migrants to Zambia, with only 1% of applications rejected in 2012. Up to a third of those admitted migrants were designated as "managers" the same year, which fits the Zambian immigration policy, preferring highly educated foreigners (*ibid.*). However, the finding became disputed by some other scholars (Lee, 2017), demonstrating how Chinese companies employ expats for positions that do not require higher education or some advanced skills (e.g., cooks, accountants, drivers) that could not be found in the Zambian population. This is accomplished by bribing immigration officers (*ibid.*, p. 62).

It can be assumed that the number of Chinese nationals increased since Postel's research. According to the data of Johns Hopkins University CARI (Figure 19), there has been an increase in Chinese employed by Chinese companies in Zambia. This, of course, has to be understood in the context of the rapidly growing lending in the construction sector.

Figure 19: Number of Chinese workers in Zambia (2009 – 2019)



Source: Johns Hopkins University CARI, 2022b

In fact, Aidoo and Hess (2015, p. 35) attribute the rise of anti-Chinese populism in Zambia, among other things, to the increase in Chinese migrants. Not only did the Chinese nationals occupy work positions that locals could do, but they also started businesses in the sectors reserved for the locals by law. This concerned the petty merchants in Zambian town markets. China's entrepreneurs pushing the locals out of the market also became a part of Sata's political campaigns in the 2000s. Already in 2004, Sata "condemned the allocation of market stalls to foreign nationals at the expense of many poor Zambians. 'The MMD government is removing you from the markets and bringing the Lebanese and Chinese because they think you are fools,' he said." (The Post, 17. 8. 2004). During the 2006 campaign, Sata "told the rally that Zambians needed to be empowered and run indigenous businesses. He said he would not allow Chinese and Lebanese nationals to run businesses in markets." (The Post, 24. 9. 2006). For Sata's populist campaign, targeting urban Chinese paid off. In Lusaka Province, his support increased from 4% in 2001 to 49% in 2006 and, eventually, 56% in 2011 (Aidoo & Hess, 2015, p. 35).

The issue of the Chinese nationals occupying jobs that can/should be done by the Zambians was also mentioned by interviewees in Zambia, whether scholars or political opposition leaders:

When you go to the community you find the Chinese they have settled there. What are they doing? They are not part of the people

that are engaged in these development projects or these construction projects, they are just doing business and sometimes they are doing a business which an ordinary Zambian can do. And people are asking, “Can you call this person an investor? Is this person just like a marketeer, like any Zambia marketeer?” It is a source of conflict between people on the ground (Respondent 7, 23. 7. 2020).

(...), even in the time of the first President, Doctor Kaunda, the Chinese were here, but it was only those Chinese who were necessary were here. But now, especially under President Lungu, it is worse. I was asking the chief immigration officer when I found the Chinese at a densely populated market called Soweto, and they were selling broiler chickens. I was lost in amazement. (...), There’s no corner in Zambia you go to and don’t find Chinese. And most of the jobs they do are ordinary jobs (Respondent 14, 3. 9. 2020).

In Africa, Chinese migrants tend to become a part of various associations. These provide them with accommodation, connections, and other services, including guidance regarding their rights in the host country, security, and problem resolution between the companies. In Zambia specifically, most of these associations in Zambia were founded after 2014 (Li & Shi, 2020, p. 155). Some of these are organized based on identity – including migrants from the same clan, hometown, province, or county in China. In Zambia, the hometown associations from Henan and Jiangxi provinces have already built on the Chinese provinces’ support in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, this cooperation also relies on individuals who stood in Zambia after implementing the development projects and continued to help recruit workers from their hometowns for Chinese companies. Li and Shi (2020, p. 156) find that the Jiangxi province association today includes 4,000 migrants who own over 100 firms.

Other associations are more politically organized, subjected to the Chinese embassy’s supervision, and involved in China’s domestic political economy. These usually include various business, industry, cultural, and gender-oriented associations that may overlap with the memberships in the hometown associations. Despite some differences between the associations, Li and Shi (2020, pp. 158–159) observed that all the 20 Chinese associations researched in Zambia have undergone a certain degree of politicization. Some of these associations are taking orders from their homeland governments and promoting subnational and party policies within

the Chinese community in Zambia. Some are even incorporated as part of the overseas United Front of the CCP. Their leaders frequently meet the Chinese ambassadors who give them guidelines and suggestions, for instance, to participate in official Beijing activities like the BRI. Some official leaders also serve as “unofficial employees” of the embassy, even disciplining their members following the embassy requirements. Associations thus became channels for the Chinese government to obtain a better understanding of the Chinese migrants and also information on the host country (ibid.)

Even associations oriented on a hobby (Sino-Zambia Golf) or gender (Chinese Ladies’ Union) became involved in Zambian politics (ibid., p. 160). In the case of the Chinese Ladies’ Union, its honorary president is the Chinese Ambassador’s wife. Its activities are reaching Zambia’s top female officials and the first lady. In 2017, Zambia’s First Lady’s Foundation received a donation of 200,000 Kwacha from the Chinese Ambassador’s wife. This was particularly perceived among Zambian political opposition as a step against diplomatic convention practice and a sign of corruption. In reaction to the donation, Wynter Kabimba, Secretary General of Rainbow Party, wrote a letter to the Chinese embassy raising his objections, seeing it as financial support to the ruling PF and political interference in Zambia’s domestic affairs, stating that “a donation coming from a foreign embassy and/or government to a personal charity led by a First Lady is not only wrong, improper and unethical, but wholly outside the purview of the normal diplomatic conversions and practices,” while understanding the donation “as nothing but the financing of PF as a political party by your government through this foundation which is not accountable to any established board of trustees or subject to any rules and regulations, (...). This is, therefore, political interference by your government in the domestic affairs of another sovereign state.” (Lusakatimes.com, 2017a).

Chinese associations in Zambia also have been playing an important role in ensuring the safety of Chinese nationals. Along with the increase of migrants, violent attacks and robberies against them erupted, aided by the anti-Chinese campaign of some opposition politicians. In 2015, the Chinese community living in Zambia was publicly assured by the Zambian police of increased security for their businesses after a meeting between senior police officers and the Zambia China

Association (ZCA). Zhang Jian, the president of ZCA, then proclaimed that ZCA “will work closely with the police so that the safety of its members and business interests are secured,” while realizing “the good relationship that the two governments have enjoyed over years and so as ZCA, we shall take advantage of this situation to grow these relations as well as enhance business interests.” (ZDML, 28. 12. 2015).

The close cooperation between ZCA and the Zambian police intensified in the following years. In 2017, this endeavor to ensure security led to the commissioning of eight Zambia Police reservists from the Zambia-based Chinese community. The ceremony, during which it was reported that the Chinese nationals also donated two vehicles to the Zambia Police Service, took place at ZCA offices in Lusaka. Although unarmed, the officers had the power to arrest and detain any suspects (Lusakatimes.com, 2017b). This initiative led to severe public backlash. As commented in *The Mast* after the commissioning ceremony – “Our Chinese brothers have taken our land, taken over our Mukula tree, taken over our road contracts and now are taking over our police,” calling the step unconstitutional and discriminating against the Zambian nationals (*The Mast*, 20. 12. 2017). This was because the Zambian constitution stated that Zambians with dual citizenship could not join the Defence Force and Security Service. Yet, the Chinese nationals became allowed to – “So you stop your own citizens from joining the police because they have dual citizenship and yet you allow Chinese who have no links whatsoever to this soil to be part of the same police service.... food for thought.” (ibid.). Although the adverse public reaction was so powerful that the Chinese reservists lost their jobs the day after the ceremony, Li and Shi (2020, pp. 163–164) show that the associations continued to support the police materially as encouragement to resolve crimes against the Chinese nationals swiftly. Moreover, they also show that Chinese associations used their connections with politicians to negotiate the release of Chinese citizens arrested for their illegal activities in the country.

In line with Li and Shi’s (2020) findings on the politicization of the Chinese community in Zambia and close relations with the political elites, there were also criminal cases of Chinese business persons publicly accused of colluding with political elites through the provision of bribes and material assistance. This was the

case associated with the 2011 elections when former President Banda was charged with concealing gratification of motor vehicles valued at 360,000 USD received from Chinese companies and which were “alleged to have been an inducement or reward for Banda in return for his favourable treatment of the companies in the dealings with the government of Zambia.” (The Post, 26. 4. 2016). In a similar vein, one of the interviewed Zambian scholars referred to an experience with a worker from a private Chinese company that was financially supporting the MMD before the 2011 elections:

I have built a very good relationship with this Chinese worker, who used to work for one of the Chinese firms here, and this Chinese worker revealed to me that his company, during the previous election [2011], had given that time the ruling party [MMD] some money as campaign support. So when the government begins to receive money from foreign companies like that, it makes you wonder how next time they can stand against the interest of that company, so the thing is that they get compromised (Respondent 8, 26. 7. 2020).

Under the UPND government, it was revealed that Chinese companies became closely connected with the former PF government. One of the major cases was associated with former Minister of Justice and the acting PF President, Given Lubinda, who was accused of receiving 50,000 USD from China Africa Cotton Limited in 2018 and a year later, a total amount of 230,000 USD from three other companies – Qingdao Ruichang Cotton Industrial Company Limited, and Sunshare Investment “as part payment towards the purchase of property no. C1,56# situate at Kingsland City in Lusaka, property reasonably suspected of being a proceed of crime.” (Chisola, 2022).

In general, for the very close relations between the Chinese community and the top officials in Zambia, including the very State House, Li and Shi argue that these connections are potentially running against the very principle of non-interference and associations should not be seen as independent non-state actors as they became participants in China’s public diplomacy (Li & Shi, 2020, p. 164). This larger interest in homeland affairs and sustaining and even deepening the connection can also be attributed to a generally lower integration of the Chinese communities living in Zambia compared to other foreigners (Postel, 2015). This has led to deeper

isolation⁹⁴ of the Chinese community, which only intensified with the attacks and criminal activities against it and the rise of anti-Chinese populism in the country.

3.1.5.3.1. *Encountering the Chinese migrants in Zambian media*

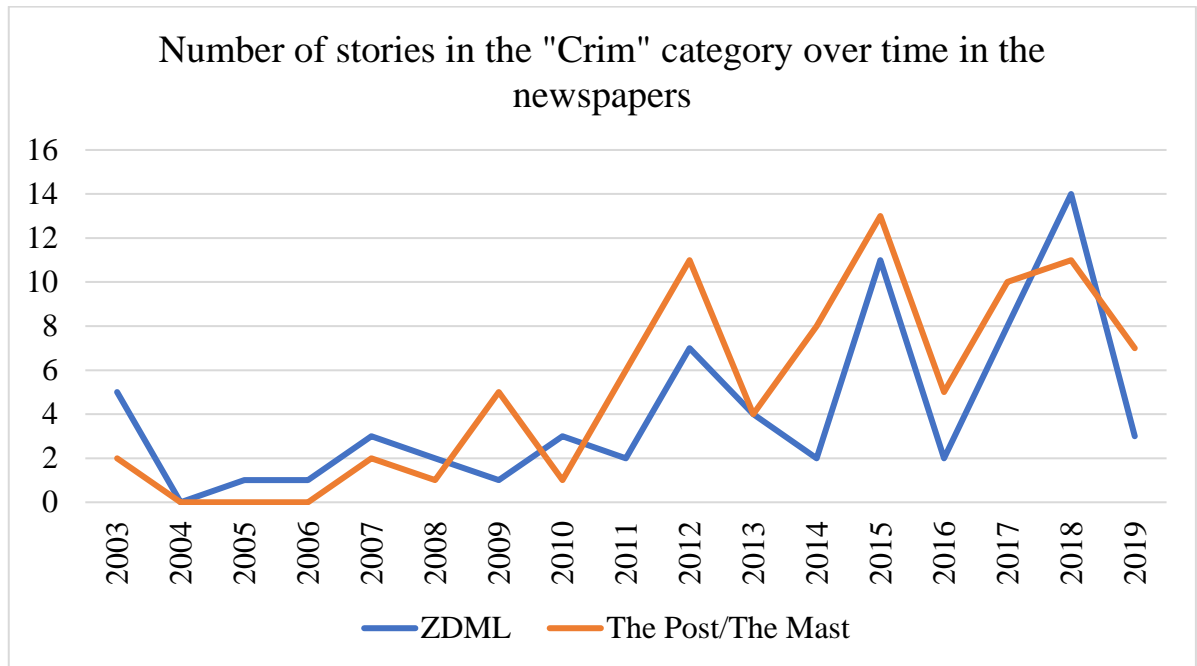
The presence of Chinese migrants in Zambia mainly emerged in three frame categories in the media. The Chinese nationals were portrayed as actors involved in *criminal* activities (Crim) also as business people typically arriving in Zambia and *competing* (Comp) with the local actors whom they push from the market, as well as those actors who are different from the Zambians in terms of *culture* (Cult). Thus, it can be said that the Chinese migrants in Zambia were portrayed mostly negatively, except for the cultural frame. Again, this applies mainly to the private media, where the negative coverage share is larger than in the ZDML.

3.1.5.3.1.1. *Chinese Nationals in Zambia as Criminals and Victims*

The presence of Chinese migrants portrayed in this category of the media frames shows the Chinese community as a *criminal actor* (Crim) breaching Zambian laws. These stories demonstrated involvement in illegal activities, including violating immigration laws, trafficking wildlife articles, illegal mining, thefts, assaults, and frequent corruption. As indicated in Figure 20, the number of observations in the category has been growing in private and state-owned newspapers.

⁹⁴ As Lee (2017) points out, the isolation and ascetic lifestyle of the Chinese migrants have also contributed to the spread of rumors about Chinese migrants in Zambia and beyond, accusing China of importing convicts as labor for projects undertaken in the country. A rumor that is widespread in Africa. (Brautigam, 2010; Yan & Sautman, 2012). The author herself encountered these rumors in day-to-day interactions during the research stay.

Figure 20: Number of stories in the “Crim” category over time in the ZDML and The Post/The Mast (2003 – 2019)



Source: Author

This category emerged as the second largest in The Post/The Mast (Figure 9) and was less prominent in the ZDML (Figure 8). As may be anticipated, it relies heavily on sources identified as “law enforcement” (LE), with a 52% share in the ZDML and a 62% share in The Post/The Mast (Tables 16 and 17). The sources included both statements by police or legal representatives about criminal cases. These stories factually informed about the nature of the crime, arrest, and subsequent prosecution of the culprits – “Police in Siavonga have arrested and charged a Chinese national for allegedly threatening violence, (...), Bao Yi, 24, an employee of ZTE, (...), was arrested on Friday and detained after he allegedly attempted to stab a Zambian casual worker engaged by the same Chinese company” (ZDML, 27. 11. 2006). In other cases, the newspapers reported about the corrupt conduct of the Chinese nationals – “It is alleged that Liang, (...), corruptly offered to give K50 million to Rebecca Mulyangwa, a public officer and actually gave K15 million cash gratification to Mulyengwa to destroy evidence against Top Motors in an investigation file a matter that concerned the ACC [Anti-Corruption Commission].” (The Post, 16. 11. 2011). In the ZDML, the potentially collusive nature of the activities of the Chinese in Zambia became, at times, defended in the stories as exaggerated, unjustified, and negatively affecting the Chinese businesses:

One thing that we can all not deny is that corruption is everywhere in the world, however, in the recent past, there has been a strong outcry that the Chinese are buying their way into almost all sectors of our economy using corruption. The perception is so strong that even some leaders who are seen eating or chatting with the Chinese in public places are perceived to be receiving bribes from them. One thing that is true is that there is no way the entire Chinese community in Zambia could be perceived to be corrupt, as that is just not possible. Of course, there could be a few bad elements, but to label an entire community corrupt because of isolated cases and rumours is just wrong. As vague as this tag of corruption on the Chinese community is, the perception is so strong in the communities and is affecting how our Chinese brothers conduct their businesses in the country (ZDML, 22. 11. 2018).

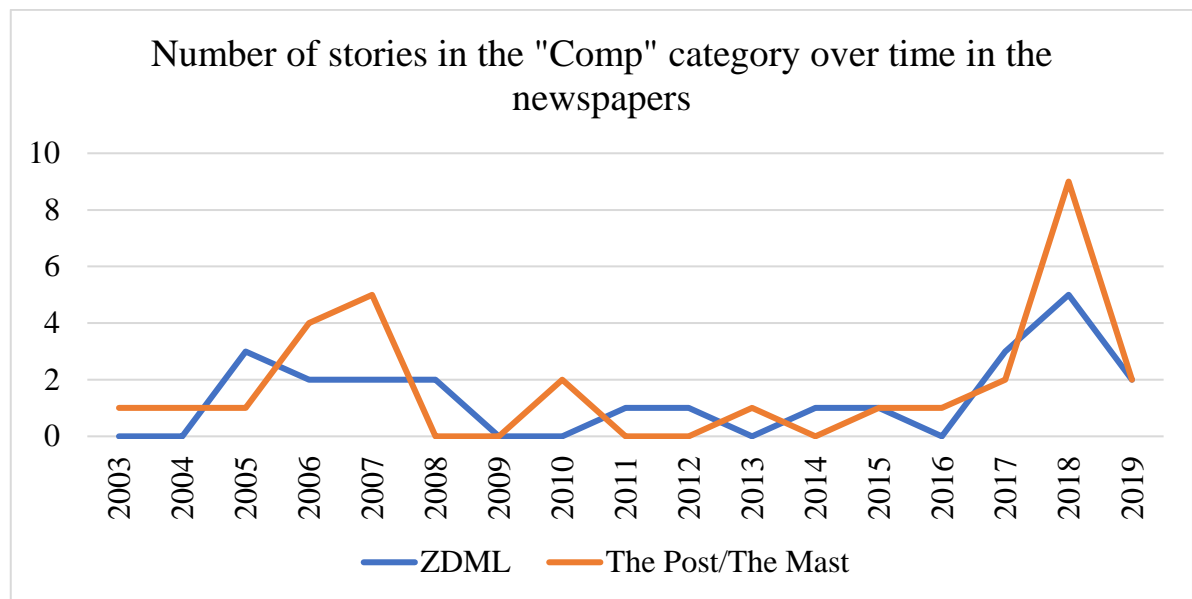
Tables 14 and 15 show that the stories in this category mainly came with a negative tone in both newspapers, portraying the Chinese as criminals. However, the category also included those with neutral or even positive tones. In such observations, the Chinese are described positively in relation to the aforementioned close cooperation between ZCA and the Zambian police, including the appointment of the Chinese reservists to increase security in Zambia. However, the private newspapers did not share the positive tone, portraying the decision as evidence of colonization. Also, stories with positive connotations concerned those where the Chinese nationals were presented as victims of rumors about their criminal activities. Likewise, this is related to those stories portraying them as victims of criminal activity. These instances were emphatically commented and condemned – “The killings [of a Chinese couple] have been roundly condemned with President Edgar Lungu urging law enforcement agencies to ensure that perpetrators of the heinous crimes are punished to preserve peace.” (ZDML, 2. 7. 2019). Likewise, Chinese nationals were occasionally presented as victims of illicit actions committed by other Chinese in Zambia. This was, for instance, the case from 2018, when it was reported that the Zambian police “detained four Chinese after they allegedly assaulted their colleague.” (The Mast, 14. 11. 2018). The remedy of this frame then includes law enforcement measures and prosecution of the culprits.

3.1.5.3.1.2. *Chinese Nationals in Zambia as Competitors*

The category of the media frames depicting the Chinese presence in Zambia as a *competitor* (Comp) is relatively marginal in both types of newspapers (Figures 8

and 9). It mainly emerges as a part of a broader debate on the negative impacts of China’s presence in Zambia and its unfair and exploitative relationship with the Zambians. This is also indicated in Figure 21, where the majority of observations are concentrated during Sata’s campaigns, and then it remerged in 2018 as a part of the negative impacts of China’s presence in the country and with the issue of the debt trap.

Figure 21: Number of stories in the “Comp” category over time in the ZDML and The Post/The Mast (2003 – 2019)



Source: Author

This category is also more frequent in The Post/The Mast compared to the ZDML, 22 compared to 13 stories in the dominant frame (see Tables 16 and 17). This is again given by the fact that the state-owned media were less prone to report on China negatively, as was the case of the “Crim” category (see Tables 14 and 15). Typically, the category included stories complaining about cheap Chinese imports and the influx of entrepreneurs squeezing out domestic traders by selling products at local markets at lower prices. It also involved the accusation of investors bringing the Chinese workforce at the expense of the Zambians. The issue usually emerged as a result of the weak law enforcement and permissive local authorities that “continued issuing work permits to Asians who only end up selling bread and eggs in Zambian markets” (The Mast, 20. 7. 2018) while the impacted marketers argued that it was “not fair for the government and the local authorities to allow foreigners to be selling goods like second hand clothes.” (The Mast, 23. 7. 2018). At times, the

very subsidies provided by China to its exports were blamed as the “Genuine investors cannot compete against these heavily subsidized products, which continue to flock [to] our country under a privileged umbrella.” (The Post, 1. 1. 2003). It is also noteworthy that portraying the Chinese as competitors was not limited to the written stories. It also included the cartoons printed in *The Mast*, where the Chinese businessmen were stereotypically depicted as selling substandard items like chickens, vegetables, and clothes in a Zambian market (Appendix 6).

Regarding sources (Tables 16 and 17), the category relied on the ruling political elites’ statements (ZGOV) as they usually reacted to the complaints about the Chinese out-competing the local businesses and were pushed to seek solutions. In the case of the private press, more space was reserved for the statements by the political opposition (ZPO) and the Zambian businesses (ZB) struggling with the Chinese competition.

Chinese business engagements in this category usually had a negative connotation. They were also described as going against the Zambian laws, reserving the market jobs to domestic entrepreneurs to alleviate poverty and unemployment. This was voiced by Miles Sampa (PF), the then Commerce, Trade and Industry deputy minister, in relation to the Chinese traders at the Soweto market in Lusaka in 2013:

“It is illegal for the Chinese to engage in trading chickens and vegetables; those we shall find wanting will be arrested. (...). The Chinese as investors are supposed to engage in mining, real estate and other businesses that Zambians cannot manage to undertake.” (...), Sampa said the government would not condone a situation where investors could engage in small businesses which were meant for local people (The Post, 26. 8. 2013)

At times, portraying China as an exploiter emerged in this category as a secondary frame connecting the Chinese business practices at markets to broader grievances related to China’s presence in the country. Also, the collusive connection to the Zambian government was mentioned in the stories, including the cartoons emphasizing the preferential stance towards the Chinese nationals in the country at the expense of the locals (Appendix 7). This was strongly voiced by an opposition party member, Charles Kabwita (NDC), in 2018, stating, “The Chinese have made Zambians slaves in their own country. They have literally taken over Zambia as they own huge track of land. We are disappointed that the Chinese government has

also continued exporting thousands of its unemployed nationals to be employed in Zambia under AVIC International, a PF surrogate company.” (The Mast, 20. 7. 2018). Similarly, a few months later, the anxiety over the Chinese petty traders pushing out the local businesses was also expressed by Abraham Phiri, a Copperbelt Young Leaders Initiative for Justice and Peace executive director:

Why should the Chinese be treated like first class citizens at the expense of us the indigenous people? Go to Chisokone Market in Kitwe, Chisokone Market in Ndola, a lot of very small jobs are being run by the Chinese. (...), Honestly, my heart bleeds for poor Zambians who are not in any formal employment. How will we survive as citizens? Everything is about Chinese. Yes, we know you [the PF government] love the Chinese, so go give them road jobs, construction, but let us the poor people do these small jobs of selling in markets. (...), Why should we the local people compete with Chinese? Why is this government so insensitive to the needs of the poor? Citizens are having a silent cry, which very soon will be heard. The PF is auctioning the country at the expense of its citizens (The Mast, 5. 9. 2018).

The ZDML printed stories marginalizing these grievances. In 2018, an article reported that the Lusaka City Council (LCC) banned Chinese from conducting retail business in poultry and vegetables at the New Soweto Market, whereas the “decision was made following complaints from local traders that the Chinese were selling the same commodities at a lower price than them.” (ZDML, 10. 11. 2019). A few days later, this decision was criticized in an opinion article arguing that it was going “against the spirit of global free trade” and had the “potential to ignite xenophobia” against the Chinese. The Chinese were defended as only using opportunities for poultry and vegetable trading, and the Zambians became blamed for “failing to meet the demand.” (ZDML, 17. 11. 2019).

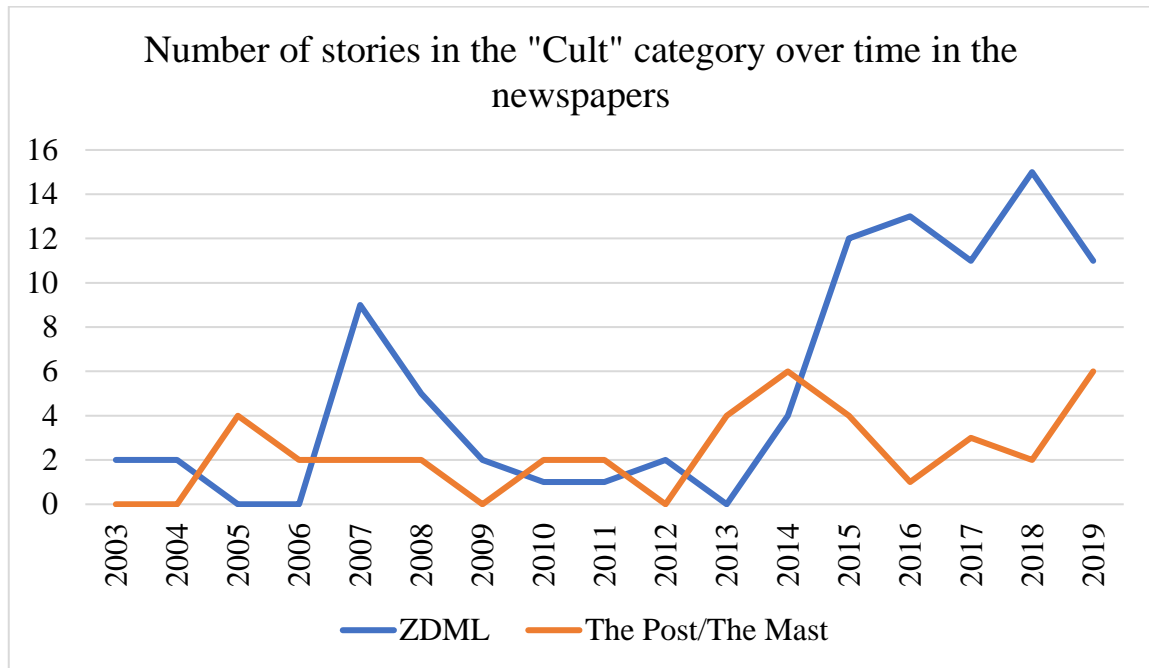
Solutions suggested in this category mainly included an intervention by the government and local authorities “to provide a conducive environment for Zambians to thrive in their businesses” (The Mast, 24. 10. 2017) and “enforcement of labour laws to address the problem of influx of Chinese laborers in the country.” (The Post, 27. 10. 2007). Likewise, it was suggested that the “councils should stop processing trading permits for Chinese traders as they are disadvantaging Zambians” and market associations should “join the crusade to eject Chinese traders from local markets” (The Mast, 20. 7. 2018).

3.1.5.3.1.3. *Encountering the Chinese as Culturally Different Actors*

Encountering Chinese nationals also emerges in the stories, showing China and its citizens as *culturally different* from Zambia and Zambians (Cult). It is the state-owned media where this frame is far more frequent than in The Post/The Mast, where it emerges as a relatively marginal category with a 4% share of observations compared to 6% in the ZDML (see Figures 8 and 9). The interaction between the Zambians and the Chinese nationals in the ZDML is also reflected in the number of Chinese sources, where the Chinese citizens (ChCit) are far more represented compared to the private press (compare 19% vs. 2% share in Tables 16 and 17). However, this featured interaction usually draws from encounters with the Chinese in China rather than the Chinese migrants in Zambia. These visits are far more frequent in the ZDML stories, including Zambian officers and students, but mostly the ZDML staff describing their experience in the country. The opportunity to visit China typically came as a part of a program of seminars and workshops organized and sponsored by the Chinese government. Since these sessions mainly included state-owned media professionals, they left the private ones with fewer opportunities to become exposed to such an experience.

In Figure 22, it is also evident that the observations in the category concern mainly the period from 2014. This can be attributed to Beijing's efforts to increase people-to-people exchanges to improve its image abroad, which goes hand in hand with broader initiatives like the BRI. The sudden increase in observations in 2007 and 2008 can be attributed to the Olympics in China and Beijing's endeavor to improve its image abroad by inviting foreign journalists to visit the country.

Figure 22: Number of stories in the “Cult” category over time in the ZDML and The Post/The Mast (2003 – 2019)



Source: Author

In these cases of visits to China, the stories reflect primarily the participants’ positive experiences from touring the country, sightseeing its cities and historical sites, and meeting the local population while emphasizing the differences from life in Zambia. Although mostly positive, these encounters were sometimes described with mixed feelings about cultural differences – “Communicating with the local people is rather frustrating. Nearly everyone speaks Chinese. But they are not unfriendly people, neither are they disinterested in learning how to speak in other international languages.” (ZDML, 18. 5. 2008), or for instance – “In fact, our tour guide, Gao Jie, had warned us about the curious looks and people wanting to take photos with us. (...), I met one little pristine-faced girl who stopped her mother just to look at me, and she seemed enamoured when I greeted her in Chinese. (...), She answered with a broad smile and hopped away, tugging at her mother. It was one little celebrity moment, although some of the gawking was actually offensive.” (ZDML, 9. 12. 2018). This frame also frequently emphasized the different work ethics between the Zambians and the Chinese. This often emerged as an impression from the visits to China – “But there is certainly one common thing which inspired me about the Chinese. The young, old and regardless of gender, are all hard working

people with great passion to develop their country. (...), To them, there is no night as is the case in many other countries, especially in Africa.” (ZDML, 18. 5. 2008).

Apart from the mentioned trips to China, this category includes stories of events celebrating Chinese culture in Zambia that represented opportunities to learn more about Chinese culture and interact with the Chinese community. These events, usually positively framed, involve political representation from both countries. Typically, the Spring Festival became such an occasion, as described by the Minister of Tourism and Arts Charles Banda, who said that the “Spring Festival has grown to become a key feature on the Zambian cultural calendar. ‘Such festivals give an opportunity to Zambian and Chinese people to interact and learn about each other’s culture,’ he said.” (ZDML, 15. 1. 2017).

Although the frame is mainly positive, a neutral or even negative tone emerged in some stories (see Tables 14 and 15). These often concerned the language barrier of Chinese nationals in Zambia. This also became stereotypically depicted in a cartoon story (Appendix 8), where the lack of understanding due to cultural and language differences was seen as contributing to misunderstandings at the workplace and exploitation of Zambian labor. Similarly, in these stories with a negative tone, the exploitation emerged as a secondary or dominant frame as they often debated the imposition of Chinese culture on Zambia and the Zambians or misrepresentations due to cultural barriers. As voiced in a story in 2008, “Most Chinese companies have very few or no Zambians at all in key positions (management) with real decision-making powers. Therefore, Zambians doing odd jobs in Chinese companies end up feeling misrepresented as their bosses do not seem to understand them from their cultural perspective. This leads to tensions between management and the workers in most of these Chinese firms.” (ZDML, 22. 11. 2018). Similarly, in this vein, a ZDML story welcomed the introduction of the Chinese language at all public secondary schools in Zambia as an optional subject, presenting it as prevention from exploitation due to cultural differences while “bridging up the cultural misunderstandings and also streamlining the barriers to strong partnerships” (ZDML, 11. 5. 2019).

The same issue was also debated in *The Mast* in a comment article written by Sishuwa Sishuwa, a leading Zambian historian, who strongly criticized the role of

the Confucius Institute in the country and the imposition of the Chinese language on the Zambian students. Unlike in ZDML, Sishuwa saw the introduction of the Chinese culture and language as yet another exploitative instrument:

Most importantly, the signing of the MOU [about teaching Chinese at secondary schools in Zambia] suggests that the Confucius Institute is a Trojan horse or ‘catfish’ that China deploys to lure unsuspecting victims into gradually ceding their sovereignty. (...). Thus, Zambia has effectively laid at the disposal of the Chinese its public education system to complement the Confucius institutes in producing large numbers of the would-be local labourers, administrators, interpreters and other accessories of this colonialism by stealth. (...). Given the lack of qualified Zambians and instruction materials to teach and examine Chinese language in public schools, it is likely that China may, in the interim, ‘donate’ more ‘gifts’ or subsidies in the form of Chinese educators (‘occupying forces’) and textbooks to help Zambia in its self-induced journey to being a colony of the Eastern powerhouse (The Mast, 14. 5. 2019).

The remedy suggested in this frame usually included learning about Chinese culture. This became particularly encouraged as a result of the trips to China, with participants calling to learn more about the country and its inhabitants while expressing a strong emotional bond to the visited country as a takeaway – “Despite the language barrier and time difference between China and Zambia, my stay in the Asian country was worthwhile. (...), The trip to China has left an indelible mark in my life which I will always live to cherish. I left China very knowledgeable about the importance of cultural values and norms, respect for others, especially the elderly. Given a chance to return to China, I would gladly accept because I feel there is more to learn from the Chinese people.” (ZDML, 21. 5. 2016). Apart from this, one may run into stories urging the Chinese community in Zambia to learn the local language and customs to better adapt to a different environment. In ZDML, for example, one of several articles written by Qui Guangmin, a Chinese lecturer at Confucius Institute, listed some basic phrases and the cultural differences the Chinese newcomers may encounter when living in Zambia:

Here are some tips to enhance adaption to the new culture for the Chinese living in Zambia. Learn one or two local languages. Language is always a key to your identity acceptance in Zambian tribes and society. Start from greetings. For instance, “Mulishani?”(nǐ)(hǎo) (ma). Response “Bwino mulishani” (hěn)(hǎo) (nǐ) (ne) in Bemba, (...), The following are the three racial tones; Firstly, tasting Zambian food in public positively.

Secondly, in a meeting room, avoid sitting with only fellow Chinese but mix freely with Zambians. Thirdly, not getting involved in any chores to do with Zambians which may seem inferior could be offensive. Pay attention to the local administrative systems. Know more and try to accept their differences with the Chinese systems. (...), My friends, try these tips then you will work successfully, peacefully and joyfully and you will love this amazing country the way I do (ZDML, 31. 1. 2019).

In conclusion, migration between China and Zambia has intensified in the last decade. This is due to a general increase in cooperation, where the boom in the construction industry has also led to an increase in labor migration from China. While this influence is considered passive, some research points to China's increasing politicization of the Chinese community in Zambia, raising questions about the possibility of seeing Chinese nationals as an uncoordinated force. Moreover, the influence of the Chinese community extended among Zambia's political elites and into political competition. The influx of Chinese workers to Zambia, where the less skilled Chinese laborers became seen as competition for poor Zambians, was reflected in Sata's campaigns. Sata eventually harnessed this frustration and translated it into electoral support, particularly among the urban population. The negative image of the Chinese population has also been reflected in its portrayal in the Zambian press, where it was presented mainly as a criminal force and a competitor that deprives Zambians of jobs. This negative image has been improved to some extent by the Chinese government's efforts to send selected Zambians to visit China to gain more positive perceptions of its culture and population and then report on these experiences. As the following parts of the thesis will show, such culturally enriching trips became an opportunity to introduce the Chinese governance system to Zambian audiences, thus potentially undermining the quality of democracy and its understanding in a foreign context.

3.1.5.4. Information Linkage

The information linkage was demonstrated in Zambia-China relations in the cooperation in the ICT sector and China's growing presence in the Zambian media. This increasingly close partnership shows the Zambian regime's openness to sharing sensitive information with Chinese actors, learning from China's media

management experience, and taking over its media content. As illustrated below, this mainly concerned cooperation with Zambian state-owned media.

3.1.5.4.1. Cooperation in the ICT Sector

The cooperation in the ICT sector in suppressing opposition voices has been demonstrated in detail in the chapter dealing with active influences, specifically democracy resistance. Although this cooperation was interpreted as a demonstration of Beijing's willingness to actively engage in the Zambian political landscape, it can simultaneously be understood as an ambition of the Zambian ruling elites to hold on to power through repression and the shrinking of democratic space in the country. Then, Beijing's willingness to provide material support and know-how enabled the PF regime to pursue its own authoritarian ambitions.

AidData (Custer et al., 2021) shows that from 2000 to 2017, China pledged to support 14 projects in the ICT sector in Zambia, with the overall price reaching nearly 800 million USD. Nine of these can be classified as ODA, and the remaining loans as other official flows (OOF). Cooperation in this sector has varied, ranging from material support to media and people-to-people exchanges to financially highly demanding large-scale projects improving the country's mobile and internet connectivity.

Regarding the latter, one may mention that in 2005, Chinese ZTE and Zambia Electricity Supply Corporation (ZESCO) signed an implementation contract for Phase I of the Fiber Optic Cable Project. This first phase cost 10.7 million USD. In 2010, ZTE and ZESCO signed a contract for Phase II of the project for 48.4 million USD. The project involved laying a 5300 km fiber optic cable network that covered 46 districts in Zambia and came with international connections to Namibia and Tanzania (ibid.). A few years later, in March 2015, during an official visit to Beijing, the Chinese and Zambian presidents signed a cooperation framework agreement for Phase 1 of the Smart Zambia National ICT Development Project for 65 million USD (Custer et al., 2021). The loan was used to finance a commercial contract with Huawei (Huawei, 2017). The project supported the creation of three data centers and an ICT talent training center. The initiative became controversial for increasing the capacity of the Zambian government to harass the opposition.

Following the project's implementation, Chinese and Zambian officials signed a concessional loan framework agreement for Phase II of the Smart Zambia National ICT Development Project for 280 million USD to improve mobile coverage in the country. The project was implemented again by Huawei and involved the construction of 808 communication towers, 1,009 wireless stations, and the installation of a matched transmission network and user access terminals (Custer et al., 2021; Lusakatimes.com, 2019; Xinhua, 2019; Xinhua, 2021).

3.1.5.4.2. China in Zambian Media Space

Although information linkage is examined as a passive influence from China's perspective, the case of Zambia shows that China's engagement can hardly be seen as passive, merely responding to the demands of African political elites seeking to maintain and expand their power. Such an active engagement became evident within the media sector where China, especially under Xi's rule, actively sought to increase its influence to improve its image.

According to AidData (Custer et al., 2021), from 2000 to 2017, China provided four projects that included material aid to Zambian media institutions. In 2002, Beijing granted RMB 1.7 million to the Zambian government to provide seven FM radio transmitters to improve broadcasting in seven Zambian provinces (Davies et al., 2008, p. 49). The same year, it provided a grant to fund the provision of two FM transmitters to the state-owned Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) for its radio channels. Similarly, in 2005, the Chinese government donated equipment to several media institutions, including TV stations and newspapers. A year later, the Chinese government donated vehicles and equipment to various Zambian media institutions (Custer et al., 2021). In 2011, China commenced the implementation of a parliamentary media reception center aiming to improve the coverage of the activities of the institution (Zambia Online, 2011)

The biggest and most controversial initiative in the media sector was completed under Lungu's rule in 2019 and related to a USD 273 million digital migration project. This particular project should be understood in the context of China's initiative to modernize African media by transitioning African media space from analog to digital technology. This was announced in 2015 FOCAC by Xi within the

“10,000 Villages” program that tackles the “digital divide” between rural and urban areas by providing digital TV access for 10,000 rural communities across 25 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. To do that, the Chinese government contracted StarTimes, the Beijing-based private pay-TV platform with close relations with the Chinese government (Schluntz, 2020). According to Madrid-Morales, StarTimes became an important tool for the Chinese government as “There’s a huge ideological element [to StarTimes’ African operations], (...), It’s a huge effort to get Africans to understand China. Even the selection of TV shows is very carefully done. It’s very specific shows that showcase an urban China, a growing China, a noncontroversial view of China.” (Kaiman, 2017).

In Zambia, as part of the migration transition from analog to digital technology, the country’s state broadcaster, ZNBC, partnered with StarTimes after securing a loan from China’s Exim Bank and created a new entity – TopStar. Under the deal, TopStar will collect advertising revenues and tower rentals for the following 25 years (The Mast, 1. 3. 2017). The deal became criticized for breaching Zambian law because TopStar obtained two licenses from the Zambian government – for signal distribution and content provision, violating competition law forbidding any media company from gaining such influence in the market (Jalloh 2019). Moreover, it was the StarTimes that was granted a majority stake 60% share, thus “effectively ceding control of the system to China and ensuring only positive coverage for Beijing and its influence in Zambia.” (Kurlantzick, 2023, pp. 220–221). In addition, the negotiated deal with the StarTimes was not discussed with ZNBC. As reported in The Mast, “the prepared documents were just served on ZNBC for signing just before the 2016 elections. (...), after studying the documents, the ZNBC board wrote to the Attorney General to register their displeasure in specific contents of the proposed joint venture but their protestation was ignored and ZNBC was later forced in the joint venture with TopStar.” (The Mast, 9. 2. 2017).

The partnership between ZNBC and StarTimes sparked a wave of anxiety about Chinese influence over the national broadcaster. For example, the Media Owners Association of Zambia (MOAZ) accused TopStar of using the freed-up bandwidth to carry Chinese-produced content instead of distributing licensed local channels.

Likewise, MOAZ claimed that TopStar's preference for foreign content discriminated against Zambians who do not understand Chinese promoted on these channels. According to MOAZ, TopStar had previously explained the lack of distribution of local programs with insufficient capacity. However, such an explanation did not hold when it had sufficient capacity for Chinese content (Jalloh, 2019). Already in 2017, a lawsuit came from MultiChoice, a Nigerian pay TV service provider, and StarTimes' competitor, complaining that "ever since ZNBC went into partnership with TopStar, it has started blocking some local channels from being received on the GOtv decoder." (The Mast, 9. 2. 2017). The severe critique also came from the political opposition presenting the deal as another example of selling Zambian strategic assets to China, as stated by Hichilema:

We have noted with worry the rate at which the Patriotic Front party and its leader, Mr Edgar Lungu, are selling our country's strategic assets and land due to their corruption and debts to foreigners. The most recent being ZNBC, which has been merged with the Chinese owned Star Times. (...), In simpler terms, being in a merger means that ZNBC is no longer our country's asset but belongs to the Chinese and will only be fully owned by our people when the loans acquired by Mr Edgar Lungu and his PF are paid back, if ever they pay back (The Mast, 21. 10. 2018).

The perception of China's enormous influence was also shown in March 2020, shortly after the pandemic's outbreak, outside this thesis's timeframe. During the pandemic, the PF government used the crisis to revoke the license of one of the country's privately owned televisions and a voice criticizing the government, Prime TV.⁹⁵ In reaction, the Zambia Institute of Independent Media Alliance (ZIIMA) demanded "that TopStar rescinds its decision to remove Prime Television from its platform," as it saw the decision as "an assault on media freedom and hindrance to consumers." ZIIMA then, unsuccessfully, petitioned the Chinese Ambassador as the Topstar was "acting on political directives" (MUVI TV, 2020). This demonstrated ZIIMA's understanding of China's overwhelming influence over the government's decisions and the media. As later explained by one of the organization's members, it was indeed anticipated that the Chinese embassy would

⁹⁵ The TV station refused to air the government's pandemic messages because it had its own initiatives on the issue, furthermore, from the experience of collaboration with the government in the past, it was afraid it would not get paid for it. Despite the television station's subsequent apology, the government persisted in its position (Freedom House, 2021a).

step in and reverse the decision (and thus also breach its non-interference principle), “[Because the Chinese embassy] it’s China, it’s Beijing, it’s the Chinese President, they can do it, they have the power!” (Respondent 4, 23. 7. 2020).

Some scholars dealing with China’s influence on Zambian media confirm that Beijing affects the state-owned broadcaster. Specifically, Gondwe (2022a) shows how the increased Chinese investment in Zambian media has shaped journalistic performance. He concludes that the ZNBC reporting increasingly glorifies China’s presence in the country. The challenges of working for the ZNBC and the absence of critique when reporting on China were also noted by interviewed ZNBC employees:

In the state media, you can’t run the stories against the Chinese. It’s too obvious to be stopped. The training happened between local journalists and [those] who flew to China for the training. (...), We don’t even begin [to report critically on China], you know your arrangement where you’re working, (...). It’s obvious you don’t do what the government won’t tell you [to do]. (...). It’s about the connotation, you know what I mean when I come here, even without setting rules, I just won’t start touching things [*pointing to the workplace of the author*]. So you see the President, the [Chinese] Ambassador, and you see the connotation between the government and the Chinese. Yet there are a lot of things that need to be put straight, like slave wages and bad working conditions in the companies being run by the Chinese. Of course, they [the government] will get one or two small Chinese [companies], but the giant ones they obviously won’t touch (Respondent 4, 30. 7. 2020).

The media owners control the media institutions the journalists work for. If I’m working for private media, what is the agenda of that media institution? I work for the state media, so you need to ask what the government’s stance on China is. And that would guide you [on] how to think about it. I mustn’t go against it (Respondent 5, 30. 7. 2020).

3.1.5.4.2.1. Cooperation between China and Zambian Newspapers

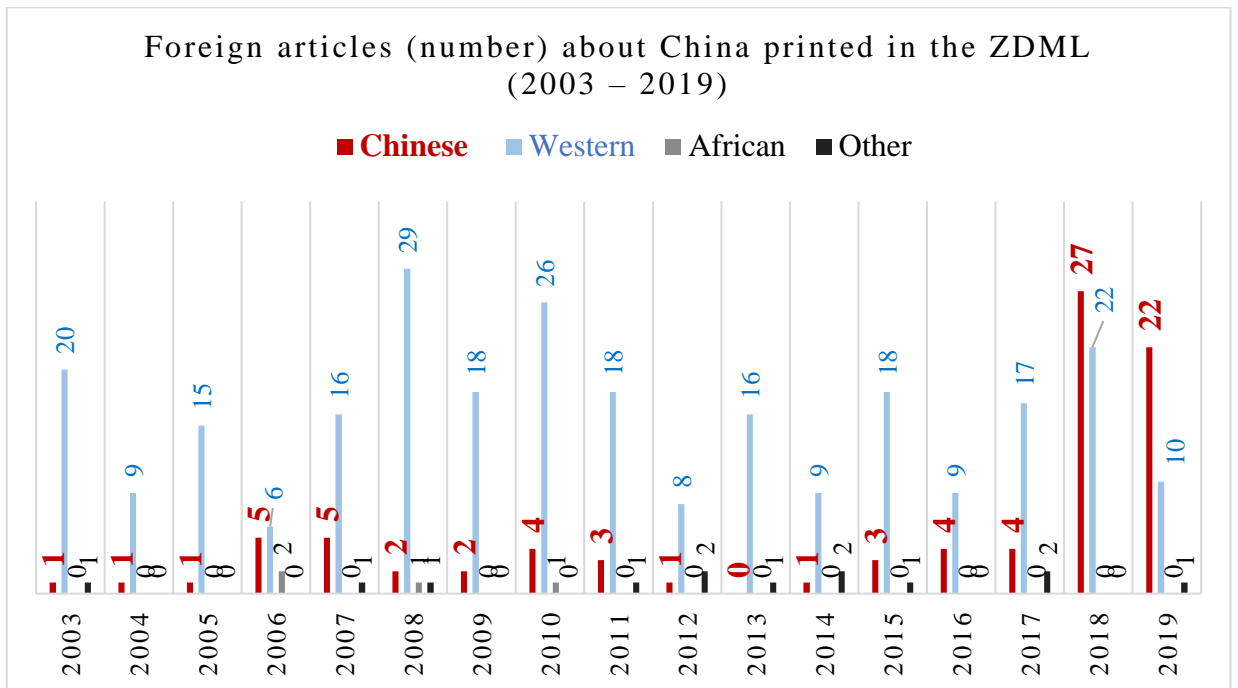
Similarly to Gondwe’s findings (2022a), the pattern of positive stories was also noticed in the state-owned ZDML, whose reporting on China proved to be overwhelmingly positive, with 76% of the observations compared to only 44% of observations in the private newspapers, as indicated in Tables 14 and 15. Moreover, the cooperation between the ZDML over time also intensified in content sharing.

AidData (2022) shows that three Zambian media signed agreements with Xinhua. Two of them publish solely online – *Lusaka Voice* and *Zambian Watchdog*. ZDML is then the only print media signing such a partnership. It is not clear when the content sharing commenced between these media.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, in 2012, when CCP’s director-general of the Research Office, Huang Huaguang, paid a visit to the ZDML, its managing director, Isaac Chipampe, demanded the delegation to help them equip the newspaper and start a partnership between the ZDML and the Xinhua “in the exchange of news so that international news published is balanced.” (ZDML, 29. 8. 2012). In the following years, ZDML started cooperating with Xinhua and also joined the Belt and Road News Network (BRNN) launched in 2017 (BRNN 2019; ZDML 6. 5. 2019) – a network established to garner international support for BRI, responding to Xi’s call on media outlets to shape favorable public opinion for BRI cooperation (Green, Nelson, & Washington, 2020, 12).

This cooperation with the Chinese Xinhua also became evident in the number of foreign media articles printed by the ZDML that covered topics about China, which in the last two years of the monitored timeframe outnumbered the number of articles taken over from before dominating Western outlets (Figure 23). As evident from Figure 24, this was not the case for the private press, where the Western media dominated the foreign articles printed in the newspapers (except for 2008).

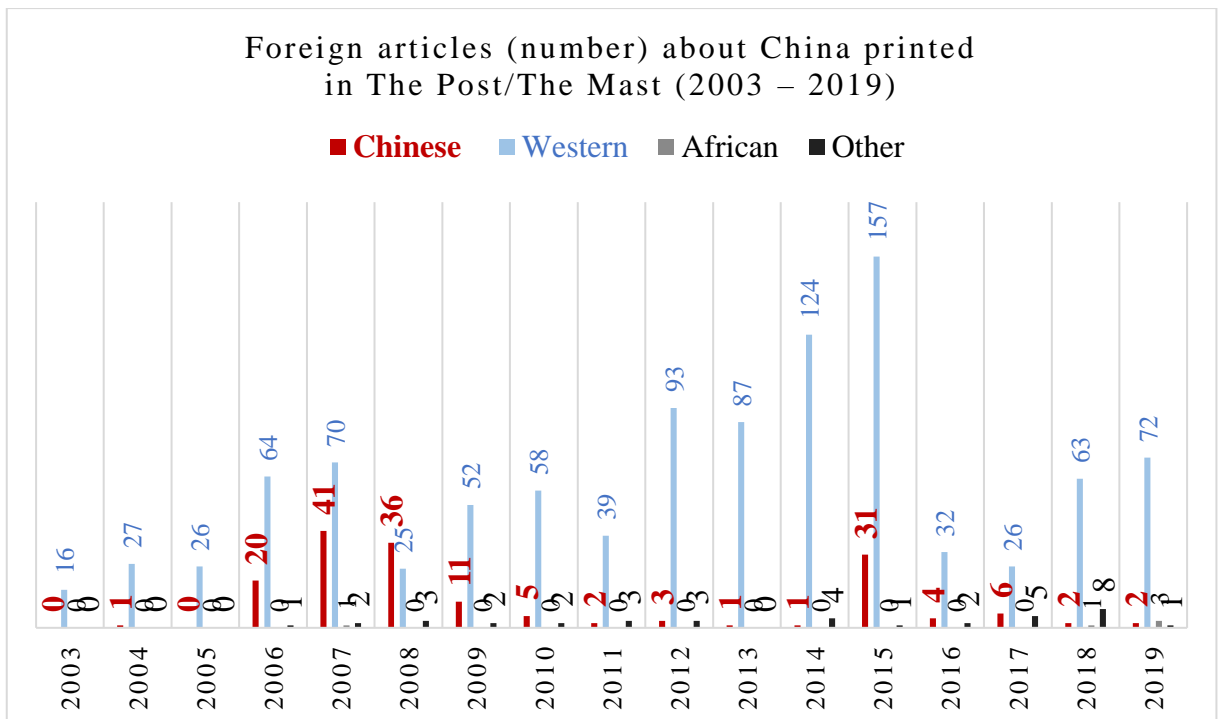
⁹⁶ In 2015 the ZDML also signed co-operation memorandum of understanding with the CCP’s People’s Daily for news and personnel exchanges (ZDML, 1. 10. 2015).

Figure 23: Foreign articles about China printed in the ZDML (number; 2003 – 2019)



Source: Author

Figure 24: Foreign articles about China printed in The Post/The Mast (number; 2003 – 2019)



Source: Author

The close cooperation between China and the ZDML also became evident from other forms of partnership. Over the monitored period, the ZDML regularly published special Chinese supplements, usually celebrating an anniversary or Chinese officials' visit to Zambia.⁹⁷ These issues usually included a foreword made by the Chinese Ambassador and a series of articles written by Zambian journalists as well as taken from media in China. Similarly, this type of "genre" included several advertisement pages promoting Chinese companies operating in Zambia also celebrating the anniversary or welcoming arriving officials from China (see Appendix 9).

Apart from these special supplements, the articles written by the Chinese Ambassadors and other embassy employees became increasingly published in the ZDML. As one may anticipate, these articles were entirely positive. Usually, they praise the long-standing cooperation in terms of economic and political ties as well as explain China's economic success and development path behind it (see Appendix 10). In this regard, 30 articles were identified as those written by the Chinese embassy staff, up to 15 of which were written only by Ambassador Yang Youming, who was in charge of the Chinese mission from 2014 to 2018 (China Daily, 2018). This increased cooperation followed Yang's visit to the ZDML in 2014, where he commended the newspaper's favorable coverage of China-Africa relations and expressed hopes for strengthening future ties via personnel training and exchanges in China (Embassy of the PRC in the Republic of Zambia, 2014). Moreover, during Yang's mission, the Chinese embassy also started awarding Zambian and Chinese journalists (ZDML reporters included) with the "China-Zambia Friendship Media Awards" (Embassy of the PRC in the Republic of Zambia, 2017) for their "positive and objective" coverage of Sino-Zambian relations. As explained by Yang in his comment written on the occasion of the first award ceremony in 2017:

The [Chinese] embassy initiated the awards as a way of commending individual journalists and media houses that play unique roles in promoting mutual understanding of the people and traditional friendship between China and Zambia through positive and objective reporting, and to display our deep appreciation. (...), The awardees were drawn from a cross section of media

⁹⁷ For example, "Chinese supplement on the PRC's 60th anniversary celebration" (ZDML, 1. 10. 2009) or "Zambia-China Relations supplement on the official visit to Zambia by Vice Premier of the People's Republic of China H. E. Hui Liangyu" (ZDML, 10. 1. 2011).

platforms, both print and electronic such as newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations, not only state-owned, but also private media. Such an all-inclusive list of winners clearly demonstrates that promoting China-Zambia friendship and cooperation is not merely the consensus of both of our two governments, but also the common objective of the media of both our countries (ZDML, 22. 12. 2017).

Yang's article/statement also shows the active endeavor of the embassy to improve China's image in the Zambian press while expressing hope for more positive stories on China-Zambia cooperation in the future that will "inject more positive energy into the traditional friendship," as stated below:

I am glad to see that an increasing number of reports on the progress of the pragmatic cooperation projects between China and Zambia appear on the local media. The various functions held by the Chinese Embassy in Zambia have become an important part of the media coverage as well. These reports have significantly promoted the understanding and knowledge about China among the local readers. (...), it is my hope that journalists will bring their own unique strengths to full play, to write more reports on China-Zambia relations which are positively objective in the content and diverse, vivid in style, so as to inject more positive energy into the traditional friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation between China and Zambia (ibid.).

Regarding the private media, there is also some evidence of cooperation in publishing China's special supplements. Still, it is to a lesser extent compared to the ZDML and concerns a few years in the 2010s (see Appendix 11). Otherwise, the author is unaware of any other partnership with Chinese media, as was the case of the ZDML. However, it should be mentioned that in 2014, The Post undertook its own initiative to respond to the increasing Chinese presence in Zambia and started to print some articles in the Chinese language for several months "to cater to the more than 30,000 Chinese nationals in Zambia." (The Post, 24. 10. 2014) (see Appendix 12).

Another difference in the extent of the cooperation between China and the different Zambian newspapers emerged in a less tangible dimension – **people-to-people exchanges**. As mentioned earlier in the autocratic sponsorship chapter of this work, this form of cooperation has gained more prominence over time. This also applies to the media sector and cooperation in Sino-Zambian relations, which became

overwhelmingly evident in the state-owned media.⁹⁸ In the ZDML, 27 articles⁹⁹ were printed as reports from training sessions or conferences organized to enhance China-Africa media cooperation, the majority of them (20 items) after 2015. These trips, sponsored by Beijing, usually included visits to the Chinese media and governmental institutions organizing the training, as described by a ZDML participant in 2008 – “The 24 journalists from 12 countries are in China on a professional programme for journalists at the China Foreign Affairs University. Their programme includes tours of media houses in the Capital of Beijing and Guizhou Province, which is perceived as the poorest region in China.” (ZDML, 15. 6. 2008). In 2014, ZNBC and ZDML staff together with the Minister of Information visited The All China Journalists Association (ACJA) that “expressed interest to partner with the Zambian media to further strengthen relations between the two countries.” (ZDML, 10. 7. 2014). The visit was presented as an inspiration for the Zambian journalism association that was struggling to operate and the partnership with the ACJA became thus seen as an “opportunity to learn from the Chinese media and how ACJA has managed to remain strong from its inception in 1937.” (ibid.). The ACJA was then urged by the visiting Zambians “to help Zambia come up with a similar association that will look into affairs of all journalists in the country.” (ibid.). Likewise, it was reported in 2015, when the journalists “spent the entire first week learning about the development of China in general and its new media advancements. The lectures were being conducted at one of China Central Television (CCTV) offices in Beijing.” (ZDML, 21. 5. 2015). And later that year, CCP’s People’s Daily invited African journalists “to learn about the media’s role in the China-Africa co-operation and the One Belt and One Road initiative.” (ZDML, 11. 10. 2015). More recently, for example, in 2018:

Given this background, China has over time advanced to a modern contemporary society complete with modern media trends among other dynamics but with Chinese characteristics from its history. This is one of the highlights at the ongoing 2018 Seminar on Media Think Tank for Zambia, which has drawn 22

⁹⁸ In the case of private media, a total of three articles can be found, which were dedicated to the description of a single event – “a seminar for information officers and journalists from 20 English-speaking African countries”, which was organized in China in 2011 (The Post, 28. 11. 2011).

⁹⁹ The vast majority of 23 of these could be classified as a “cultural” (Cult) category as a dominant frame, the rest of the articles (both in the dominant and secondary frames) could be categorized as *model of development* (MoD) where China is understood as an inspirational example worth of emulating. This is more elaborated in the following subchapter in this work.

media personnel from different institutions in Zambia. The seminar is under the auspices of the Research and Training Institute State administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT) of China. (...), Like other media academies around the world, the institute organises experienced professionals to exchange their experience with local radio, television and print media practitioners. These are at hand to give featured lectures or seminars on media management, financing, brand construction and promotion, digitilisation, among other media-related topics. (...), According to SAPPRFT, until 2017, there were more than 3,400 officials and managers from 146 countries of five continents who participated in different kinds of seminars in an effort to meet the challenges posed by new technology and economic development (ZDML, 3. 12. 2018).

In 2019, journalists from the ZDML and 60 other African colleagues from regional media attended a two-week workshop themed “New Era, New Idea, New Media and New Technology” in Beijing. It was organized under the BRNN initiative. The event aimed “to strengthen mutual understanding by enlightening the media so that they could equally educate society” and expose the participating African journalists “to Chinese social media production, challenges, opportunities and Chinese social participation by women, all meant to enhance and sensitize people on matters of trade.” (ZDML, 23. 9. 2019). As then explained by Jiang Jianguo, Chinese vice minister for the Public Department of the CCP, during the official opening – “The CPC recognised the important role media plays in any society, hence the need to engage you [journalists] from all over the world to help spread the vision of global development.” (ibid.). During these sessions, the Zambian journalists also learned about China’s motives behind its interests in the media sector in Africa from the Chinese representatives, as was the case during a visit to the StarTimes office in Beijing in 2017:

[StarTimes] wants to be recognised as a bridge of cultural exchange between Africa and Asia. (...), Ma Gao [StarTimes vice-president] stressed that there is nothing peculiar about StarTimes involvement in Africa as it is only trying to assist government attain affordable digital migration. (...). [As explained by Ma Gao:] “The CEO of this company often meets presidents of African countries not by any special private relationship but just co-operation. Not only does StarTimes needs [the] Africa[n] market but African governments’ need us too” (ZDML, 4. 11. 2017).

The participants then excitedly mentioned the inspiration by the Chinese media, which was repeatedly reported as a lesson to be learned by African countries. For example, in a 2019 article, it is stated, “China is one country that has done well in the convergence of the traditional and new media. Its massive investment in this capital-intensive transformative journey is something that developing countries like Zambia have a lot to learn from.” (ZDML, 14. 1. 2019). Similarly, in 2015 – “The integration of the media in the social aspects of community-level governance is something the African media can reflect on and learn from – acting as a bridge between people.” (ZDML, 11. 10. 2015). Apart from these lessons learned, during the visits, the participants were at times openly advised by Chinese hosts on the role the media should play in the relationship between China and African countries:

[The] deputy secretary general of the CHINANGO Network for International Exchanges, Shi Guohui, challenged the media to promote people-to-people exchanges, and serve as the bridge between the Chinese and their African brothers and sisters. He urged the media to boldly report on the negative aspects of the co-operation between China and its African partners so that solutions can be found to obstacles. (...), the co-operation must produce mutual benefits for China and its African partners, but that for this to be achieved, the media has to play a positive role (ZDML, 6. 10. 2015).

Beijing’s endeavor to create a positive image of China in the African media through organizing workshops and seminars for African journalists seemed to work. Indeed, in the articles, journalists were leaving these events overwhelmingly excited from the experience in China and deepening cooperation, or at least expressing hope for the next visits and the need for continued collaboration in the future:

Overall, the forum succeeded in galvanizing consensus among the media that China’s development master plan will be beneficial, especially to the weaker economies along the Silk Road. A total of 33 media houses, including the Zambia Daily Mail, which was represented by its managing director Nebat Mbewe, signed co-operation memorandum of understanding with the People’s Daily for news and personnel exchanges. Mr Mbewe said the agreement is important because it will improve the flow of information and improve understanding between the peoples of China and Zambia (ZDML, 1. 10. 2015).

Star Times overseas public relations director William Masy is optimistic the tour has enabled journalists have a better understanding of China. Ten minutes past midnight, October 24,

I was aboard an Ethiopian Airlines and thinking aloud: “This was a wonderful experience worth repeating.” (ZDML, 4. 11. 2017).

On the other hand, it is unknown to what extent this overwhelmingly positive, impressive, and inspirational depiction of experience in China is genuine. One may ask about the control China has over the immediate outputs of the training in China. The issue of control over the content depicting Sino-African relations in the African media has not been well addressed in the literature. The scholars have been rather focused on the presence of *Chinese media* content production and power relations with their African staff *in Africa* (mostly China Daily, CCTV/CGTN, Xinhua, CRI) (see, e.g., Gagliardone, 2013b; 2014; Madrid-Morales & Wasserman, 2018; Marsh, 2016; Umejei, 2018; Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2018). The less tangible and indirect dimension of China’s influence stemming from the professionalization training in China and its possible impact on reporting has been only rarely debated among scholars (Benabdallah, 2017; 2020; Diakon & Röschenhaler, 2017; Eisenman, 2023b; Nyirongo, 2020). However, most recently, Gregory Gondwe (2022b) demonstrated possible negative implications of the training sessions for the independence of journalism in Africa. Gondwe illustrated the tendency of Chinese governmental officials to maintain control over the content of the articles (both in China during training and in African countries after returning to their home country) and intervention in the stories about China. On a global scale, similar findings about such interference by Beijing in the foreign media spaces have also been demonstrated in the Freedom House report (Cook, 2022).

In this respect, the full extent of China’s interference in the Zambian media space is yet to be found. However, the findings of this work suggest that it became enormous over time, especially under Xi’s rule. This argument is further supported by the findings in the following section of this work examining emulation. Moreover, on the note of China’s control over the publications related to its image building abroad, one of the respondents interviewed recalled being prevented by the Chinese government from publishing a report summarizing his experience from a training session in China on the website of the Zambian governmental organization he worked for, as the report was not entirely positive (Respondent 16, 21. 8. 2020). The very influence of these training sessions was described by one of

the respondents working as the CEO of a Zambian NGO in the media sector as a way China manipulates local media:

We have seen a lot of ruling party members going to China, all these trainings and visits (...), They [the Chinese] are also trying to manipulate the local media, through all these exchanges and trainings in China. And we know how culturally Chinese media is, how dependent they are – so what kind of training do they get? The majority is from the national broadcaster, they have this crazy contract with TopStar, the Chinese company, and literally, everyone from the director general to office managers went to China for training on how to run the Chinese equipment (Respondent 10, 29. 7. 2020).

Also, concerning China's effort to control its image in the media abroad, another respondent recalled a higher education institution from China he was affiliated with expressed discontent over the respondent's interview with Western media on the topic of China's presence in Zambia (Respondent 8, 26. 7. 2020).

3.2. Emulating China Model

This subchapter examines another passive influence that fits into a broader body of research examining how countries learn from and emulate the strategies of other states. Emulation, learning, and lesson drawing are employed interchangeably in this work to deal with the blurred boundaries between various overlapping concepts. Drawing on Bennett's (1991) and Dolowitz and Marsh's (1996) studies, emulation is understood as a *voluntary process whereby elites in one country selectively and deliberately draw on the experiences of one or more countries that are perceived as models, which they then adapt to their own political system*. However, methodological limitations researchers face when examining authoritarian regimes and their effects on domestic politics in other states must be considered when using such a conceptualization. Non-democratic regimes exhibit far greater opacity, making it difficult for researchers to detect a causal process to the source of change, thus also conscious policy emulation (Ambrosio, 2017; Hall & Ambrosio, 2017). Such limitations do not prevent the researcher from examining how a foreign development model is perceived among elites and in the society of the potential emulator in the first place and what elements of it are seen (if any) as worthy of adoption and adaptation in the domestic settings. Therefore, while building on the studies by Ambrosio (2012), Fourie (2015), and Hodzi (2020), it is

examined whether such a debate has occurred at all, among whom, and what features of the external model it relates to.

Before analyzing how the China Model is portrayed in Zambia, it is first necessary to briefly introduce the debate on the concept and how this work fits into it. The literature dedicated to the China Model (CM) or Beijing Consensus (BC)¹⁰⁰ can be divided into several strands of thinking about these concepts. These have been evolving together with China's rise as a power in the international system and the Global South and also due to domestic economic and political developments in China. In this respect, Zhao (2016) distinguishes three waves of this debate. The *first* began with the working paper published by Joshua Cooper Ramo in 2004, triggering a discussion of whether there is a CM in the first place and, if so, what its elements are. Ramo used the term "Beijing Consensus" to describe the uniqueness of Chinese development, a model that differs from the Western "Washington Consensus" presented by John Williamson in 1989.¹⁰¹

Ramo assumed that China's increasing importance has changed the international order and created a new model upon which other states may develop. The model of the Chinese transformation is attractive to those states trying to figure out how to develop themselves, their place in the international system in the attempt to remain independent and maintain their way of life, and the ability to make their own political decisions. Ramo believes that the BC will replace the Washington Consensus as an already discredited "Washington-knows-best approach to telling other nations how to run themselves." Symbolically, he labels it as "a hallmark of end-of-history arrogance." (Ramo, 2004, p. 4). In Ramo's conceptualization, the BC is based on boldness to innovate and experiment while bringing benefits to the

¹⁰⁰ In this work, the concepts are used interchangeably (see e.g., DeHart, 2012). Although some authors (Dirlik, 2007, p. 21) draw distinction between BC and CM as the BC points to an alternative global organization whereas the CM rather answers to the particular needs of Chinese society and Chinese path of socialist development.

¹⁰¹ Williamson created a list of rules of neoliberal policy for economic reform in Latin America, which, as he expected, Washington-based institutions and policymakers would agree on. Individual policies emphasized the role of the market and the limited role of the state. This model was later presented as universally applicable to developing countries facing an economic crisis. In Africa, loans were provided by the IMF and the WB when a country acceded to the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). The impact of SAPs on African countries was vast and ubiquitous as by 1993, virtually all sub-Saharan African states had been obliged to implement adjustment programs. Their adoption led to poverty expansion, spread of illiteracy and worsening quality of life in general (Simutanyi, 1996; Easterly, 2003).

whole society and tackling the issues of equality and sustainability to secure stability, and, at the same time, maintaining sovereignty and control over own development policies that are not imposed by the West and better match local conditions (*ibid.*, pp. 15–42). Ramo argues that the BC is flexible enough that it can hardly be classified as a doctrine as “it does not believe in uniform solutions for every situation.” (*ibid.*, p. 4). In other words, China’s development and its path to power cannot be repeated by another nation. However, despite this proclaimed exceptionalism of China’s experience, he argues that some elements of China’s rise relate to the developing world. Therefore, the BC already represents and gives rise to new ideas very different from those of the West.

The introduction of the BC led to broad criticism from a number of scholars. Some authors (see, e.g., Dirlik, 2007; Kennedy, 2010; Naughton, 2010; Rebol, 2010) questioned China’s development experience as described by Ramo and the very term of the “Beijing Consensus” as no one agrees on anything in Beijing and the very term has never been used by any official Chinese source (Rebol, 2010, p. 12). Ramo’s concept became described among scholars as a “myth” and “misguided and inaccurate summary of China’s actual reform experience” (Kennedy, 2010, p. 461), “naively ideological, and full of contradictions” (Dirlik, 2007, p. 17), or an appealing “oxymoron” suggesting both that the Western model orthodoxy is being shattered while proposing a new set of pragmatic guidelines (Naughton, 2010, p. 437). Those scholars then rushed with the new set of own policies, better capturing the development path of China, making the conceptualization of the CM even more contested and ambiguous.

The first wave also offered an idea about the rising “China threat,” assuming that the CM was exportable abroad. The emergence of the CM concept as an alternative to development principles promoted by the West became seen among some scholars as a menace to the established international order as it was “in direct contrast to democratic liberalism, the economic and political model emphasizing individual rights and civil liberties” (Kurlantzick, 2010, p. 57). The main proponent of this thinking, Stefan Halper, argues that China became “the protagonist in a clash of values, governance, and two versions of modernity in the twenty-first century” and “learned how to extract the best from both market capitalism and one-party government, thus shattering the illusion that capitalism begets democracy.” (Halper,

2010, p. 2). Such a combination of market economics with autocratic politics “signals an intellectual rejection of the Western economic model” while offering an alternative model wherein “people accept a very non-Western kind of civic bargain: political oppression in the public square in return for relative economic freedom and rising quality of life.” (ibid., p. 3). Dangerously then, according to Halper, China became a source of finance and governance ideas for smaller countries, offering them a “less Western, less liberal format,” thus setting China to have “potentially a greater impact on the world in the next two decades than any other country.” (ibid.). It is because of the “China threat” discourse that the very notion of the BC/CM became rejected by Chinese scholars and officials (DeHart, 2012; Hodzi, 2020), yet, as shown by Zhao (2016), this proved to be rather short-lived.

The *second* wave of the debate commenced in the context of China’s national mobilization during the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the financial crisis weakening the Western political and economic system, undermining the legitimacy of their development policies. During this time, the debate blossomed among Chinese scholars who confidently embraced the notion of the CM and underscored its features that made China successful in its development and resilient in times of crisis.¹⁰² In the context of the financial crisis, some Western scholars and commentators began to underscore the weaknesses of the liberal development model and, conversely, to highlight the resilience of China, seemingly emerging from the crisis as a far more robust system (e.g., Breslin 2011¹⁰³; Friedman 2009¹⁰⁴; Fukuyama, 2011¹⁰⁵).

¹⁰² Such changes in the acceptance of the term “Chinese Model” were demonstrated by an increase in the number of headlines in online newspapers in China that contained the very term. As David Bandurski (2010) shows, although a gradual increase can be seen over the years since 2003, between 2008 and 2009 alone the number jumped from just under 1,000 to 3,000 appearances.

¹⁰³ Breslin (2011) argues that although the contemporary Chinese model can be seen as unique and country-specific, it provides “an important example of an alternative to the neo-liberal project that had come to dominate developmental discourses in the first part of the millennium.” (Breslin, 2011, p. 1324).

¹⁰⁴ In his opinion article in *The New York Times*, Friedman (2009) stated that although the one-party autocracy has its “drawbacks,” when it is led by “a reasonably enlightened group of people, as China is today, it can also have great advantages.” He claims that this form of governance can impose “critically important policies needed to move a society forward in the 21st century” while stating that the US “one-party democracy” led by the Democrats and Obama with no proper Republican opposition is worse (ibid.).

¹⁰⁵ Fukuyama emphasized the flaws and failures of the polarized and rigid “American model” to tackle the financial crisis while praising China as “on a roll” as “many Chinese see their weathering

The *third* wave, which began with the ascension to power by the current President Xi, is marked by the embrace of the CM idea by political leadership openly expressing willingness to share the Chinese development path. As explained by Zhao (2016, p. 5), for Xi, the CM is not only a product of economic growth recorded in China in recent decades but a result of a continued search for power and prosperity under the leadership of the CCP since 1949. The CM, as understood by Xi, promotes Chinese exceptionalism that stands against Western values that do not apply to China and the idea of the “China Dream” of great national rejuvenation. Although Xi proclaims that the CM is exceptional to China and cannot be replicated elsewhere, at the same time, he openly speaks about socialism with Chinese characteristics as a successful model of development that becomes an “option” or “trial” for other countries to follow and making it appealing to other countries to follow. According to Hodzi (2020, p. 894), Beijing now implies that it has a development model that other countries, particularly those in the Global South, can adopt and adapt to their specific conditions. This greater confidence of the current Chinese leadership about its model and its replicability became seen in a particular part of Xi’s speech, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” that was delivered at the 19th National Congress of the CCP in October 2017 and states that:

The Chinese nation, which since modern times began had endured so much for so long, has achieved a tremendous transformation: it has stood up, grown rich, and is becoming strong; it has come to embrace the brilliant prospects of rejuvenation. It means that scientific socialism is full of vitality in 21st century China, and that the banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics is now flying high and proud for all to see. It means that the *path, the theory, the system, and the culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics have kept developing, blazing a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization. It offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence; and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind.* This new era will be an era of building on past successes to further advance our

of the financial crisis as a vindication of their own system, and the beginning of an era in which US-style liberal ideas will no longer be dominant.” (Fukuyama, 2011). Fukuyama then described the advantages of the CM that, unlike the American one, “adapts quickly, making difficult decisions and implementing them effectively.” (ibid.)

cause, and of continuing in a new historical context to strive for the success of socialism with Chinese characteristics (Xi, 2017, p. 9; italics added).

This can be seen as a substantial departure from previous political leadership who encouraged African countries to look for their own development model. This was the case with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao at FOCAC in 2009, where he stated, “The Chinese government and people respect the right of African countries to independently choose their social systems and support the African people in exploring development paths that suit their national conditions. We firmly believe that Africa is fully capable of solving its own problems in an African way.” (china.org.cn, 2009).

Although there is an extensive body of research focused on the debate of what is and is not a model of China’s development and whether and to what extent it applies to the Global South, at the same time, there is a lack of understanding about how the very CM “lands” in the context of developing states. This part of the thesis builds on a handful of studies that have explored the puzzle of whether the Chinese model is being discussed and adopted in developing parts of the world (Ambrosio, 2012; Babones, 2020; DeHart, 2012; Fourie, 2015; Hodzi, 2020; Hodzi & Åberg, 2020; McCauley, Pearson, & Wang, 2022; Ratigan, 2021) and, if so, what elements of China’s development experience are suggested for emulation. Thus, this subchapter does not explore how realistic the replicability of the CM in African contexts is but whether some elements of this model are seen as inspiring, worthy of emulation, and learning.

In this regard, this work mainly follows the research by Ambrosio (2012), Fourie (2015), and Hodzi (2020), who, to a different extent and with different methods, investigate the perception and reception of the CM on the continent. Thomas Ambrosio (2012) attempts to determine whether the CM applies internationally while using content analysis of US and non-US media sources. While Ambrosio’s study focuses mainly on the frequency of references to and evaluation of the China model, he also examines whether the theme of emulation of the model appears in media discourse. He then concludes that there are concerns about possible emulation of the model in the African context stemming from the US and non-US media sources, yet he states that these should not be exaggerated. Ambrosio reasons

that *democracy is just incompatible with the CM* adoption. Likewise, severe *socio-economic differences* between China and African countries prevent adoption. Lastly, Ambrosio argues that African leaders *are far more attracted to China as an economic and diplomatic partner* rather than a model of economic and political development – “Thus, rather than the Chinese political-economic model, it is the Chinese investment and trade models which have made the most headway into Africa.” (Ambrosio, 2012, p. 394). Yet these conclusions are drawn mainly from South Africa’s sources, and it is not clear how this allegedly “exaggerated” attraction to the CM is presented in other, less democratic settings, like, for example, Zambia.

Two recent studies illustrate African agency in relation to emulating foreign development models, both working with adopting the CM. Elsje Fourie (2015) uses a *reflexive approach*, which considers ideational structures as important components of social reality and seeks to gauge receptivity to the China model directly among those actors tasked with influencing and formulating policy in developing countries. Drawing on dozens of interviews, Fourie demonstrates how the China model inspired the EPRDF government to deal more effectively with the demands and challenges of globalization and liberalization while maintaining power. Obert Hodzi (2020) then emphasizes African agency by understanding the CM as not a predetermined concept but as a “rhetorical commonplace” that may entail different understandings and interpretations of China’s political regime, governance model, and development experience by different African political actors (Hodzi & Åberg, 2020, p. 809). Hodzi (2020) shows how political elites in Africa are strategically shaping the CM and its norms to balance their domestic interests and relations with Beijing while endeavoring to derive maximum benefits from this relationship. Hodzi concludes that African elites adopt China’s “preferred norms” not based on the model’s attractiveness but to justify their regime and its survival (*ibid.*, p. 898). This adoption is driven somewhat out of frustration with the West and observance of its imposed norms, leading the African elites to search for new partners and sources of finance and legitimacy. He argues that what ends up being labeled as the CM, thus, depends on the domestic and international interests of the recipient governments. China, therefore, has no monopoly over the norms, values, and principles of its development paradigm and lacks the capacity to

promote and enforce the CM in Africa (ibid., 902). At the same time, Hodzi points out that since Xi acceded to power, there have been noticeable endeavors to socialize government officials and social elites from developing countries in its norms and values and learn from China's development path via organizing training in China. While Hodzi's study is an essential contribution to thinking about the perception of the CM in Africa, he does not offer much empirical evidence on how (and what) elements of the model are received in African states, as he relies only on a few statements by political leaders.

Given China's long-standing presence in Zambia and the close relationship between political leaders, it is surprising that the question of whether and how China is perceived as a model or example of development has not yet been explored in this case. While it is possible to encounter studies examining whether the characteristics of China's development are projected in the development finance flows and projects implemented in the country (Sojková, 2018) and those analyzing the success of specific projects reflecting the Chinese development path, such as the SEZs (Brautigam & Tang, 2011; 2014), regarding the very perception of the CM, we only know what the Afrobarometer surveys show (Lekorwe et al., 2016; Sanny & Selormey, 2021). Their results reveal that the CM remains popular in Zambia, but its appeal has declined sharply over the years (which is consistent with broader trends on the continent).¹⁰⁶ However, they cannot demonstrate how the CM is presented, understood, and if any elements are perceived worthy of emulation and by whom. This part of the thesis aims to cover this gap in the research.

Here, it is assumed that China is a passive actor that does not impose its model on African states. It is expected that such a demand for an alternative development path, both political and economic, is voiced by African actors. Based on a content analysis of the media frames identified in the Zambian press, it is demonstrated that Beijing is increasingly active in presenting its model and shaping its perception in

¹⁰⁶ While in the 2014/2015 Afrobarometer surveys showed that "China as the best model for development" was the most popular in Zambia with 32% of respondents, by 2019/2021 it was down to 22% and was replaced by the US, which in turn saw support rise from 23% to 31% for the same survey years. These changes are consistent with more general trends in the region, which on average has seen a slight decline in the popularity of the China model from 25% to 23% and an increase in the popularity of the US model from 31% to 32%. (Lekorwe et al., 2016; Sanny & Selormey, 2021).

Zambia by organizing training sessions in China for various stakeholders and creating media content.

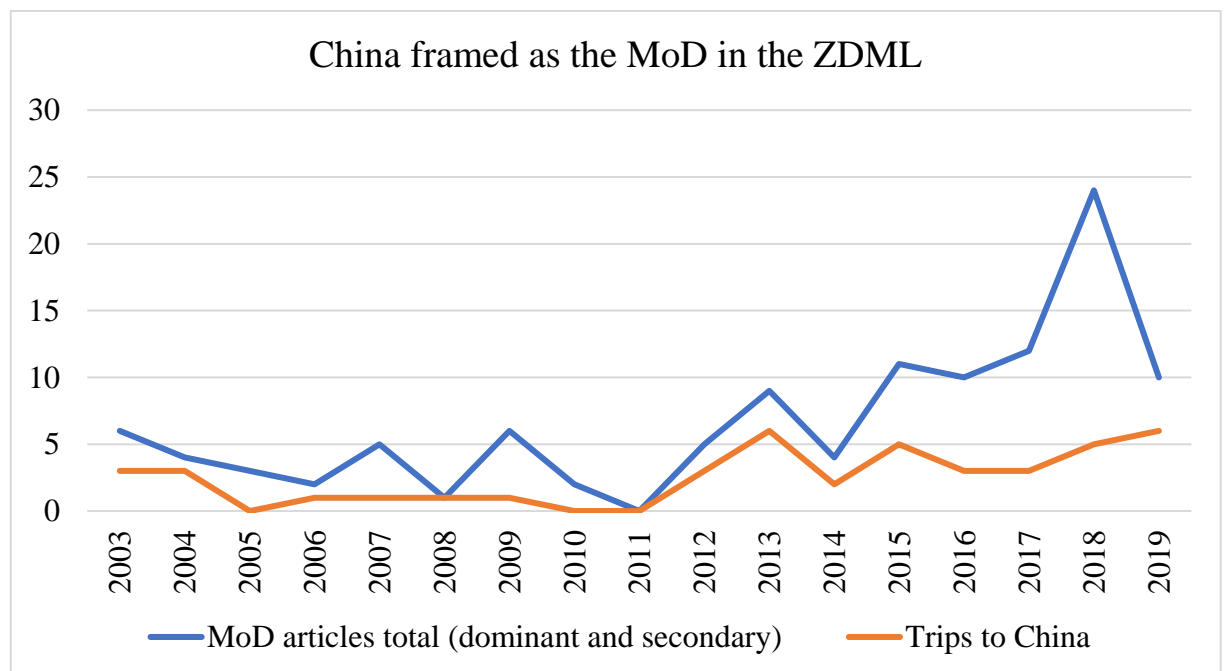
3.2.1. *China as a Model of Development in the Zambian Press*

China as a model of development (MoD) emerges as one of the major categories of media frames identified in the Zambian newspapers. In most of the articles in this category, the economic dimension of the model is underscored. However, given that the political sphere determines the economic one in China, the political and economic development path is mostly intertwined. The admired economic transformation China has undergone is often based on the specifics of the Chinese political system, with the CCP playing a leading role in the impressive transformation of the country. Regarding China's political model, it is mainly effective governance that became emphasized in the media. The debate about China as an authoritarian regime and its superiority to liberal democracy is then rare. When it comes to learning from the nature of this different regime, a cautious approach is voiced in the media. It should also be noted that the terms "China Model" or "Beijing Consensus" are rarely used in the Zambian press. Although the stories in this category of frames clearly describe China's specific path of development in economic and political terms and call for learning from and emulating it, it is instead referred to China as a particular experience of development or path.

The "MoD" category, as indicated in Tables 14 and 15, is overwhelmingly positive regardless of the type of newspapers. The category mainly relies on the statements of the political elites (Tables 16 and 17), which are observable in all newspapers. Interestingly, this kind of source is nearly the same in the state-owned ZDML for both countries (ZGOV and ChGOV), while in The Post/The Mast, the number of ChGOV sources is higher. However, in addition to those official statements, the ZDML also builds its stories on statements by Chinese scholars and analysts (ChSA). This can be attributed to a specific genre of the articles frequent in the ZDML (and less common in The Post/The Mast) – those describing professionalism training sessions in China (see Appendix 13). Reports from these visits to China account for nearly 40% of items in the ZDML, while in The Post/The Mast, it makes up only 17% of the items.

Unlike the ZDML, The Post/The Mast relies more on foreign scholars and analysts (FSA) as a source of information in this category. This can be explained by the few opportunities to participate in various training programs in China. Unlike in the ZDML, in The Post/The Mast, most of the items in the MoD category were printed in the form of deep contemplation about China’s development path in the comment sections. These stories then often rely on foreign sources in their analysis. Interestingly, this category also well reflects the standpoint of The Post/The Mast newspapers, as nearly half of these items in the comment section are editorials.¹⁰⁷ (Appendix 14). In the ZDML, most articles in the MoD category were published from 2012 after the PF in Zambia and Xi in China came to power (74% of the MoD category). The same goes for the specific genre of articles that emerged due to the visits to China (77% of articles in the genre), as seen in Figure 25. This can be attributed to the greater cooperation between the countries as well as greater support of people-to-people exchanges by Beijing.

Figure 25: China framed as MoD in the ZDML (total n. of articles and trips to China articles) (2003 – 2019)



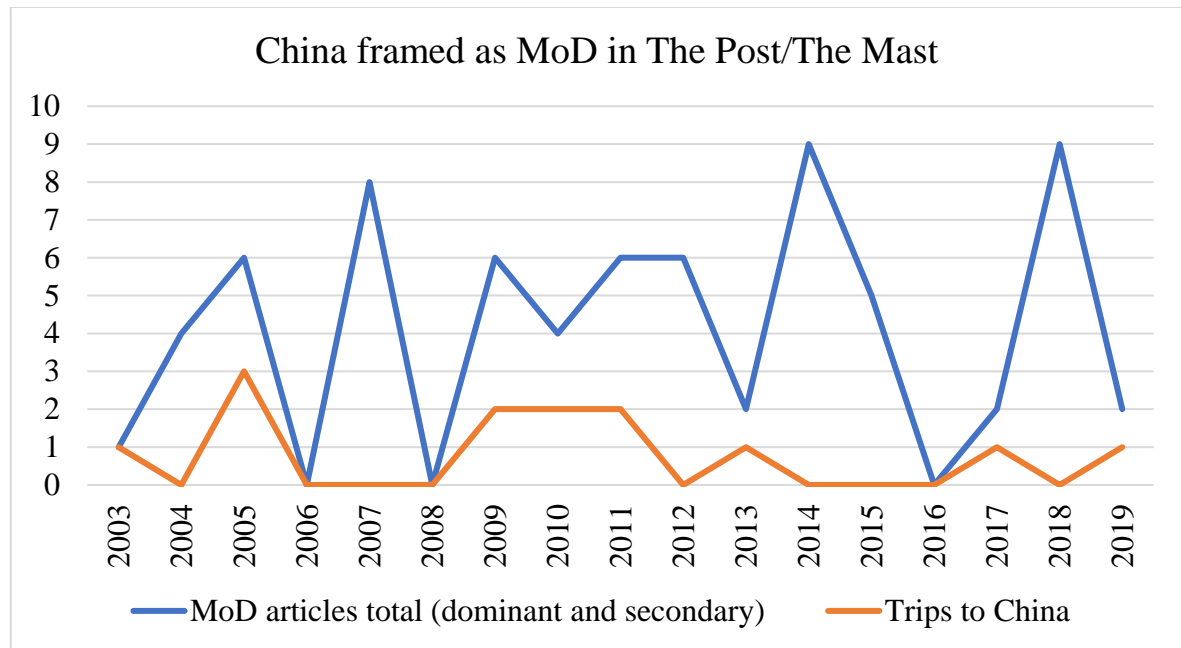
Source: Author

In The Post/The Mast, the frequency of items appearing in this category differs from the ZDML. As indicated in Figure 26, the increase under the PF is far from being

¹⁰⁷ Just for illustration, the 16 editorials in the MoD category account for almost half of all (34) editorials printed in The Post/The Mast collected by the author.

that dramatic (only 50% of the category). Regarding the articles resulting from the trips to China, there has been a decline since 2012 (only 25% of articles in the genre). Apart from the fewer opportunities to train staff in China for the private newspapers, this can also be attributed to The Post's closure in 2016 and a temporary suspension of publishing until The Mast was launched.

Figure 26: China framed as MoD in The Post/The Mast (total n. of articles and trips to China articles) (2003 – 2019)



Source: Author

In addition to the reports from the various visits to China, other stories point to China's active promotion of the CM. These include statements of the Chinese Ambassadors to Zambia, for which the newspapers became a platform to present the CM to the Zambian audiences, whether through the statements or writing articles in both newspapers. In The Post, however, these were printed solely as a part of special supplement issues. In the ZDML, such comments were printed even outside of the special supplements. The commentaries in the special supplements were also often accompanied by visual elements portraying China's transformation (Appendix 15). Similarly, when it comes to learning or emulating China's development path, although Chinese actors insist on the exceptionalism of such experience, at the same time, one may come across statements by Chinese officials advising the Zambian counterparts about the strategies of development that should be adopted based on the Chinese experience. This is not as frequent as those

suggestions by Zambian sources, but it shows a willingness to actively refer to China's developmental experience as a model to learn from.

This chapter and its structure take these findings into account. Thus, attention is *first paid to articles presenting China as an MoD written by Zambian authors*, not as an immediate output of visits to China. The next part is devoted to *articles incorporating comments by Chinese officials* framing China as an MoD in the Zambian media. The last section then works with the *stories describing the training sessions in China*.

3.2.1.1. *Zambian Portrayal of China Model*

In general, stories in this category typically present the PRC as a country with specific development experience that, in many ways, differs from the one prescribed by the West and its institutions. The different development path is then seen as standing behind its current status of economic and political power. In this regard, one may come across stories seeking inspiration in China's economic development as a response to the underperforming Zambian economy vis a vis Western pressure on adopting liberal reforms. It is then the very disappointing experiences that should drive Zambians "to ask ourselves, what have we benefited from being the darlings, the blue eyed politicians of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the other donors?" (The Post, 26. 9. 2005). In such a context, China is presented as an inspirational country that did not follow the neo-liberal dogmas pushing for uncontrolled liberalization of its economy, yet it became successful in its development, lifting hundreds of millions of people from poverty while maintaining political control over these policies by ruling party/government. With such an experience, it was repeatedly described as an alternative development model for developing countries by various commentators in the Zambian press:

China is another example of a nation that is thriving yet it has not taken the neo-liberal path. It is ranked as the fastest-growing economy in the world (...), China is indeed a great example that privatisation is not necessarily *sine qua non* – an essential requirement or without which not – for successful economic performance (The Post, 5. 11. 2004; italics in original).

China did not develop by following the rules of the Washington consensus. But critical concern by the west, and to some extent in Africa, has been focused on China's avoidance of good governance and human rights conditionality now commonly

insisted upon by the western countries. This undoubtedly has been what lies beneath the success of the Chinese model. (...). China's experience has does indeed have much to offer, which is of greater relevance precisely because China too is a developing country. Conversely, China's avoidance of conditionality means that she can move faster in producing results on the ground (The Post, 11. 3. 2007).

(...), we can see that clear and distinct policies have contributed to shaping China into an international powerhouse that we have come to know within such a short space of time. The miracle transformation of China in just 30 years from an inward-looking agricultural country to a global manufacturing powerhouse, as well as becoming the first country to achieve the millennium development goal by lifting 800 million people out of poverty have placed China as an ideal model for other countries and Africa to learn from (ZDML, 1. 9. 2018).

But it was his [Deng's] famous theories that would shape China's development for the next decades since December 1978. (...), The result of this thinking is a new kind of socialism, which is now being peddled as "socialism with Chinese characters." In reality, this idealism appears as a mixture of capitalism and socialism. It has produced dollar billionaires, while lifting over 50 million people out of poverty. (...), It is an economic transformation that has best been described as a "miracle". Yet, four decades ago, millions of China's citizens had to depend on meal coupons, while millions died of disease (ZDML, 23. 12. 2018).

China's impressive and inspirational growth and success were also often commented on and promoted by Zambian politicians. In 2009, President Banda advised people to "look at China and listen to them carefully; they are the people who really know economics. If you consider 30 years ago, 40 years ago China was a poor country and because of foresight, their discipline, their hard work, they are where they are today and the whole world depends on them." (The Post, 20. 10. 2009). In 2012, the PF Secretary General, Wynter Kabimba, described China as a "beacon of hope outside the traditional development models that have so far been prescribed for Africa", whereas "China has set a clear example for the world that social and economic development is within the reach of every country including the continent of Africa." (The Post, 19. 6. 2012). In Lungu's statement, China was also presented as a successful example of achievable development for Zambia: "We need to realise that we can be where China is today because we know where it is coming from as a once poor country. Over the years, it has transformed its economy

and everyone is now looking to China. That is the potential that Africa has to develop.” (ZDML, 5. 12. 2015).

The remedy suggested in the MoD category is **learning and emulating**¹⁰⁸ China’s path of socio-economic development that led to its transformation. In this regard, Zambian commentators and sources only rarely referred to the CM as exceptional, excluding its emulation elsewhere. They also often formulated lessons to draw from China in a *vague manner without referring to specific policies*. Right after the 2015 FOCAC, Lungu suggested China’s development path as a model to learn from because “There is a lot we can learn from China as a country and as an African continent because it is an economic giant. It is time African countries took advantage of the numerous opportunities that China has presented to the continent to develop itself,” (ZDML, 7. 12. 2015). The author of this story then described China’s experience as an unspecific menu of “offerings” socio-economic development African countries can choose from based on their needs – “Indeed, China has offered Africa its template for development. (...), This is the time for the country’s think tanks to step forward and help Government in identifying what to choose from China’s offerings for Zambia’s socio-economic development.” (ibid.). Similarly, in 2018, Lungu vaguely expressed the need to emulate China because “When China was doing TAZARA, they were very, very poor. Now they have worked hard, they are where they are and we also want to emulate them and where they are.” (The Post, 17. 9. 2018).

In general, when it comes to more *particular elements suggested* in the Zambian press, one may mention the prominent role of the state and privatization, the role of China’s SEZs and its SOEs in industrialization, the reforms undertaken in the agricultural sector, as well as the role of education, work culture, which became also seen as features accompanying China’s socio-economic transformation. In the realm of China’s political development, China’s achievements in terms of effective governance were emphasized in the stories, such as the uncompromising stance on corruption, the role of meritocracy, decentralization, and the political party governance mentioned earlier in this thesis. The very authoritarian nature of the

¹⁰⁸ Some of the results of the analysis are highlighted in bold for the readers’ better orientation in the section.

Chinese regime was mentioned only rarely in this regard, and if anything, with caution.

These lessons from the Chinese socio-economic transformation often emerged when debating various ills of Zambian development. For instance, China's path became used to voice The Post's stance against **privatization**:

Why don't we learn something from the successful nations like China and Vietnam, and be rational in our efforts to reform our economy. We have to adopt policies and structures that best secure the interests of our people. (...). We cannot continue to be cheated by agents of neoliberalism. We sold everything they wanted us to sell and we are still experiencing deepening poverty and job losses. It is time for us to wake up and think out things for ourselves, make decisions for ourselves (The Post, 5. 11. 2004).

Similarly, it also became argued that Zambia should learn from the role of the **Chinese SOEs** operating in the construction sector in Zambia:

Although the Chinese government is essentially a communist government, it has allowed a very liberal capitalist type policy towards Chinese commercial enterprise spawned by the government itself. This is an important lesson which Zambia as a growing economy cannot afford to ignore. (...), it is essential that our own government sets up a fully independent self sustaining construction unit on the same lines as our colleagues from the other side of the world not only for profit but to use it as a home grown base to retain strategic human resource in the sector and provide parity in a slanted market (The Post, 3. 1. 2010).

Some experts also encouraged Chinese investors to actively replicate some features of their domestic economic model in Zambia. In 2011, Zambian economist Kelvin Kamayoyo called for "carefully examining" the Zambian MFEZ against the backdrop of the earlier success of the **Chinese SEZs** "to improve Zambia's export capabilities and thereby contribute to poverty reduction." (The Post, 24. 1. 2011). He further encouraged China "to replicate in Zambia some of its good and workable domestic economic reforms such as development of township and village enterprise in rural enclaves." (ibid.). In general, the issue of SEZs, as an acknowledged feature in China's economic transformation, became widely discussed in Zambia, where two such zones were implemented for the first time in Africa. In April 2013, Sata even sent a delegation led by Finance Minister Alexander Chikwanda "to get an understanding of how a small fishing village of Shenzhen transformed into a high-tech hub. Shenzhen is China's first and into of the most successful special economic

zones.” (ZDML, 15. 5. 2013), with the outlook to “spread [the concept of SEZs] to all the 10 provinces in the country before they are established in district level through industrial clusters.” (ibid.). During his visit to Shenzhen, Chikwanda also said that “Zambia would emulate the Chinese culture of high achievement and commitment to the country” and that “Shenzhen’s transformation from a fishing village with a population of slightly over 400,000 to being China’s foremost high-tech hub is inspiring to Zambia.” (ibid.). During this visit, Chikwanda also implied that the Chinese way of development is superior to that of the West, but there are obstacles to its adoption in Zambia stemming from the rooted Western culture – “The problem is that the people in African countries have been adopting the Western culture, everything is done in the Western way and this is why Africans are not patriotic, they are not innovative.” (ibid.).

Among the other specific elements mentioned as suitable for emulation, the **discipline and hardworking** nature of the Chinese emerged as a feature contributing to Chinese development, as argued in an opinion article:

If we don’t learn from China today, I don’t know which country we shall learn from if our economy has to improve. (...), The economic development that China is enjoying today was a sacrifice by the previous generation of Chairman Mao. What we need today is to work hard for our future generation. It is not for us to enjoy the benefits and they will not be seen soon after all (The Post, 4. 2. 2007).

The hard work feature was also recurring in the statements of the Zambian officials. Patrick Nkhanza, permanent secretary of the Minister of Education, said that Zambians who study at Chinese universities have a responsibility to change Zambia’s economic status by using China’s working culture as the “Good working ethics have contributed to China becoming the second largest economy in the world.” (ZDML, 16. 5. 2014). In a similar vein, John Phiri, the Zambian Minister of Education, “implored Zambians to emulate the Chinese in the spirit of hard work, diligence and commitment to deliver if Zambia is to develop,” as national development “will only be achieved if people change their mindset from bickering and embrace hard work like the Chinese people. (...), once the mindset is changed, the country will be headed for massive development.” (ZDML, 11. 7. 2014). The **education** sector and the role of science and technology were also mentioned as

critical elements of China's successful development. In 2017, a Zambian analyst gave China as an example to follow for its reforms in the education sector:

The [Science, Technology, Talent and Education Reform and Development] Plan established education, skills training and talent nurturing systems through a rule stipulating that 50 percent of secondary school-goers would pursue technical and vocational training. (...), This was the extent of the Chinese resolve to reshape the attitudes of its worker through education, skills and talent discovery. Zambia could learn plenty from China, (...), we should be thoughtful, deliberate and calculated like China has been over the years (ZDML, 13. 9. 2017)

Moreover, in 2014, when the construction of the Confucius Institute was launched at the UNZA, Zambian Home Affairs Minister Ngosa Simbyakula presented it as the materialization of China's development experience driven by science and technology:

As a country, we need to start pursuing reforms to move on the same trajectory like that of China. We believe that investment in education training and our people is critical in this step. (...), The Confucius initiative is an answer to our many economic challenges. China has used such science and technology to build her economy and so we need to follow suit using this initiative (The Post, 22. 6. 2014).

China's **model of political governance** and some of its features also became suggested for emulation in the Zambian context. These instances have already been discussed earlier in the chapter on autocratic sponsorship in the context of the CCP's cooperation with the ruling Chinese parties and learning about the **party organization** (ZDML, 1. 11. 2017), as well as loyalty and discipline (The Post, 20. 6. 2014). Apart from that, the effectiveness of the Chinese system of political governance has been highlighted in the context of fighting **corruption**. In 2005, for instance, the Zambian Solicitor-General voiced the need to emulate China's fight against corruption as "it was interesting to learn how a vast country like China was keeping its public in check. (...). China has made strides in many areas not by accident... so we want to learn what make China tick." (ZDML, 27. 9. 2005). The stance on corruption in China was highlighted by outgoing Chinese President Hu in 2012. This became echoed by Goodwell Lungu, executive director of Transparency International Zambia, who pointed to the Chinese leadership's approach as a lesson worth learning:

There's so much we need to learn from the acceptance of the existence of corruption in the Chinese establishment. It is the first

step to forming critical anti corruption measures. (...), the Chinese model gives us that particular scenario where leaders going out of power were able to establish corruption was a major problem within their rant and file as well as their country (The Post, 26. 11. 2012).

China's hardline stance on corruption was also lauded in a commentary printed in The Post, encouraging Zambia to draw lessons from both its successes and failures:

Since taking office in late 2012, the current leadership of the Chinese Communist Party has taken anti corruption as a "life-or-death matter" for the party and the country. (...), In fighting corruption the way they are doing, the Chinese people and their leaders are fighting for all of us because we will learn from their experience. We will learn from their success, and we will learn even from the errors that they may be making because they are doing everything in an honest and transparent manner (The Post, 14. 6. 2015).

In addition, the Chinese **meritocracy** system was also cited as an element behind China's transformation, which was direly lacking in Zambia. The Chinese example was then employed as a criticism of the then PF government by the former special assistant to President Mwanawasa, Jack Kalala:

China had developed not by miracle, by chance or something, no. So it's the type of leadership we have. (...), Now, if you look at the composition, the leadership composition of PF, (...), They are not there for governing this country, no. It's an opportunity for them to enrich themselves. (...), There's no merit in these people, in my view, starting from the President. I don't think the President, if he was in China where they follow meritocracy, he would even hold the position of DC [district commissioner] (The Mast, 14. 10. 2019).

Kalala then called for the implementation of an "aggressive civic education programme for voting" (ibid.) that would lead to a better selection of national leadership based on their merits, like in China.

In the Zambian media, the very nature of **Chinese authoritarianism** is only scarcely commented on, and if so, mostly critically by Zambian sources. In The Post, the issue emerged in a commentary by Guy Scott (then in the PF) in response to the announced cooperation between the MMD and the CCP in 2009. As mentioned earlier in the chapter on autocratic sponsorship, Scott emphasized the different nature of the political regimes in China and Zambia and, thereby, the limits of cooperation between the political parties (The Post, 29. 12. 2009). Besides that, the debate was mainly a part of editorials, serving as a space for contemplation

about the Chinese political regime. The Post's editorials underlined the unwelcome nature of its undemocratic character in Zambia. The possibilities of emulating Chinese authoritarianism were thus dismissed, and if there was such a debate, it was concerned with being cautious about drawing lessons from China. At times, emulating China was even discouraged. In 2004, this was mentioned in relation to the importance of media freedom and its role in informing the government and the public. In the story, China's own authoritarian experience emerges as a cautionary example that should be avoided and as an argument for why the media need to remain uncensored:

Consider, for example the Chinese famine of 1958 – 61, in which between 23 to 30 million people died. Despite the fact that the Chinese government was quite committed to eliminating hunger in the country, it did not substantially revise its disastrous policies during the three famine years. Because of the absence of an uncensored press and other modes of public communication, the local officials across China were under the impression that while they themselves had failed, the other regions had done well. (...), The totality of the reported number vastly inflated the Chinese government's own estimate of the total amount of food grains that the country had. The information that is lost because of censorship of the press by an authoritarian government can devastatingly mislead that government itself. Censorship of the press cannot only keep the citizens in the dark it can also starve the government itself of vitally important information (The Post, 8. 5. 2004).

In 2007, an editorial also introduced the Chinese understanding of democracy. Here, one may come across the expression of the exceptionalism of China's political development path, where its inspiration rests in searching own design for the development in Zambia:

In a world in which peace truly reigns, democracy can take more forms of expression. The Chinese people have found their own form of expression of democracy, and we believe that it suits their conditions ideally. Its effectiveness has been shown over the last couple of decades and in its economic achievements. (...), The Communist Party of China is building socialism in China, it is not a capitalist party as some would like to believe. But it is socialism of the 21st Century and not of the previous centuries, that they are building in China. And they are doing it on the threshold of capitalism. Whatever the Chinese people are doing in their country is for their own benefit and out of their own choices. Let's engage them, let's cooperate with them to build for ourselves a Zambia that we desire and on our own designed. (...), we shouldn't forget that China has its own problems and challenges,

which shouldn't be transferred to us as a result of this friendship and cooperation (The Post, 3. 2. 2007).

In 2012, another editorial dismissed advocacy of a one-party system as “a recipe for tyranny,” which Zambia had experienced. The Chinese political one-party regime is seen as an unwelcome form of government, yet, at the same time, effective and suitable for the Chinese conditions and its large population:

Truly, the Chinese may have found their form of expression of democracy, and they believe that it suits their conditions ideally. To some extent, they are right because its effectiveness has been shown for more than 63 years, (...), But for us, the single-party state, except at rare moments in history, is a recipe for tyranny. What we have learnt from the Soviet experience and from the African experience is that the concept of the party as a vanguard which has the right to rule by virtue of calling itself something and which is entrenched in the constitution as a permanent God-father of this society, is a disaster. (...), Although we are generally opposed to a one-party state, except at rare moments in history, we feel China has characteristics that can today qualify it for that exception. The country has over 1.4 billion human beings, living in a Third World nation and with all the problems and challenges one can imagine (...), And the current political order in China, albeit with many contradictions, seems to be holding well in its responsibilities to such a gigantic population (The Post, 27. 11. 2012).

In ZDML, there was no such deep contemplation compared to The Post. However, as will be demonstrated further below, the *debate about the nature of the Chinese regime does not end here* with the standpoints of the Zambian newspapers. This debate *also arose due to Beijing's endeavors to present its understanding of concepts such as democracy and one-party rule*, whether through statements by Chinese officials or socializing Zambian political and social elites through educational sessions in China.

3.2.1.2. *Chinese Influence on the Presentation of the China Model*

As suggested above, how emulation is conceptualized – a passive influence from China's perspective, is open to contestation. As this section will demonstrate, China is an active actor in presenting its development model and the opportunities that this experience potentially offers for emulation. Examples of Beijing actively seeking to promote and share elements from its governance and economic experience via reaching out to ruling African parties have already been demonstrated in the autocracy promotion subchapter. However, this is not the full

extent of such efforts. An analysis of the *Zambian press* reveals that China as MoD has been portrayed and even actively encouraged to be emulated by various Chinese actors, including government officials. This was done through statements, even commentaries written by Chinese officials in Africa and through the increasing number of training seminars, workshops, and trips to China, where various elements of China's model became debated. As for emulation, one may come upon the aforementioned Chinese exceptionalism ruling it out in a context other than China. This mainly concerned statements of the Chinese officials earlier in the period followed here. Later, the Chinese officials started suggesting more openly the possibilities of learning from the Chinese development path elsewhere.

In those cases where the Chinese officials mention China as a specific model, the possibility for emulation of development experience is presented as limited. Here, the idea of China's exceptionalism arises, emphasizing the specifics of the Chinese path suited to the local conditions that can hardly be transferred to a foreign context. In 2004, Wu Bangguo, the Chairman of the National People's Congress, explained that China refused privatization prescribed by the West due to specific development conditions and the SOEs' role in it, explaining that "the core of the Chinese economic reforms are restricted to a socialist economy because they suit the Republic's reality." (*The Post*, 6. 11. 2004). A year later, Zhou Yabin, Chinese vice director general of Southern Asian and African Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, openly called for the international community to respect the "national conditions with each country having the right to choose its own social system and road to development," because it is "impossible to have only one model for all." (*The Post*, 7. 9. 2005). In a similar vein, this was also underlined by the Chinese Ambassador in Zambia, Li, who stated that "the Chinese people have succeeded in embarking on a path of development suited to China's national conditions and made great economic and social achievements" (*The Post*, 1. 10. 2007).

Later, simultaneously with the statements about the CM's uniqueness, some contradicting comments encouraging emulation arose. These emerged both as vaguely formulated as well as suggestions about specific policies adopted in China. In this respect, a ZDML article referred to the statement of Tan Jian, the Chinese Ambassador to Ethiopia, saying that "China is very confident about its own development model, but we are not trying to sell it abroad. (...), However, if our

foreign friends are interested, we are willing to share our experience.” (ZDML, 15. 5. 2018). Tan further added, “By delving into China’s case, African countries may find China’s promotion of investment, industrialisation and infrastructure construction inspiring to their own development.” Tan, however, emphasized that China’s experience is not a universal development model, hoping “that every country can find the development path that suits its own conditions. China’s economic miracles are not achieved by just following others’ advice.” (ibid.). China’s dismissive stance on the possibility of emulating foreign models was also mentioned in a story written by the Chinese Ambassador to Zambia, Zhou, commenting on the political changes in China and the ascendancy of Xi to power. Zhou assured Zambians about policy continuity under the new leadership, stressing that the regime would continue to learn whatever is useful for China but “will not copy any system from any country.” (The Post, 28. 11. 2012). Zhou’s statement also served as a way to refute the Western allegations about China colonizing Africa and assuring about its motives for cooperation bringing not only tangible but also less tangible benefits, including China’s “development experiences,” representing a “golden opportunity, not a doomsday for Africa.” (ibid.).

In some cases, the idea of the proclaimed uniqueness of China’s development path became undermined by open suggestions of specific policies for adoption in Zambia. These frequently included **education** and the role of **science and technology** in development. In this context, the Chinese Ambassador to Zambia, Li, said that China “has reached its level of development because of the importance it attaches to education,” urging Zambians “to work hard and develop Zambia through their education.” (ZDML, 28. 8. 2009). In 2011, Ambassador Zhou also repeated the importance of investment in education in Chinese development success, stating, “If you fail to invest in education, then you have difficulties moving ahead. China has developed because of education. If you fail to raise the standards of education in the 20th century, then the country will be lagging behind.” (The Post, 22. 11. 2011). Again, in 2013, Zhou stated that the Zambian government should use education so the country can produce finished products – “It is a waste of time to train professionals that are not creative or have no use for technology. People should be creative especially if natural resources are available.” He also said that China “is keen to improve every sector of society so that Zambia can one day

be like China, especially in science and technology.” (ZDML, 20. 12. 2013). In 2014, Zhou yet again openly challenged Zambia to “emulate the path that China took by developing the science and technology sector as a vehicle of growing the economy.” (The Post, 16. 5. 2014). He then underscored this feature in China’s development through the story of Shenzhen’s transformation that “developed using science and technology and today, it has more than 18 million people settled there and doing fine economically.” (ibid.).

The success of Chinese **SEZs**, like the one in Shenzhen, was also proposed for emulation by Zan Baosen, **Zambian-China Cooperation Zone (ZCCZ)** general manager, saying that “the ZCCZ is determined to replicate the success story of economic zones in China” while emphasizing that “The success story of the MFEZ in China is associated with support from central and local Government. The MFEZ in turn rewards such support with jobs, economic growth, empowering youths and technological transfer.” (ZDML, 23. 12. 2012a). Zan argued that in Zambia such replication was also attainable via “sustained political will and commitment to foster development,” while describing Zambia to be “better placed [compared to China] in making a success story out of the two MFEZ,” in Chambishi and Lusaka (ZDML, 23. 12. 2012b).

In his 2017 commentary, Chinese Ambassador Yang stressed the importance of China’s **infrastructure development**. Yang argued that it was a prerequisite for any further progress and economic success and “the only law for national development of a country, for China, for Zambia, and for any other country in the world. (...), China has a saying, ‘If you want to be rich, build roads first.’” (ZDML, 6. 11. 2017). Yang then listed principles that infrastructure development should abide by and that are drawn on the Chinese experience:

Firstly, the principle of sustainable development. An infrastructure project should be sufficiently profitable and can sustain its own redevelopment. (...), Tolling therefore is a necessary way for a developing economy, especially in its initial development stage. Secondly, the principle of diversification of financing and management. Financing an infrastructure project is never easy. New models of financing must be explored and applied in an open-minded way, and projects fully funded by the government should be reduced. At the same time, different management models should be applied so that all the stakeholders can share responsibilities as well as interests. Thirdly, the principle of aligning infrastructure projects with economic

development zones. An infrastructure project should aim to drive the development of relevant regions (ibid.).

Regarding the **authoritarian nature** of the Chinese regime, the Zambian newspapers became a welcomed space to introduce China's understanding of one-party rule as a possibility of governance superior to multiparty democracy. This was demonstrated in the statement by Ambassador Zhou in response to allegedly unfair Western criticism of the nature of China's regime, which is, however, more efficient than multi-party democracies. Moreover, according to Zhou, multi-party democracies may result in electing bad leadership like in the US. Zhou's defense of Chinese authoritarianism was written in the context of Xi's rise to power in 2012:

Why should the world's political system be based on multiparty democracy or elections? Malaysia, Singapore are regarded as authoritarian. India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka are regarded as democratic countries, but if you look at the results, all those that were regarded as authoritarian have developed faster than those other countries. We think our system has been working very well. Producing quick development, it benefits the people. It is the reason we keep the tradition of selecting our leaders. (...), Personally, I do not think the democratic way of electing leaders is bad but we also want people to respect our way of doing things. If your system is better, soon or later we will follow (...), Like what you do here running elections, like the Mufumbwe, how much money and effort did you waste? Look at the election in the US, how much money did they spend... and you still end up with Obama! (The Post, 16. 11. 2012).

In this statement, Zhou emphasized that China would maintain its "grassroot democracy restricted in its party structure" while he "was not against African countries adopting the Western style of democracy." (ibid.). At the same time, he gave some advice on what Zambia should adopt as reforms to create a governance system that favors the poor, using China's very experience as a point of reference:

Way back, we were poor and almost everyone was equal but we opened the eastern part of China first which is around the coast. The original idea was, people of the eastern part become rich and then they help on the west and it is our objective that the richer ones will help the poor ones (...), The gap has become larger than we expected and we are trying to correct that. It could be difficult but there is no choice and I am confident that Zambia, like China, will take very concrete measures to address this issue (ibid).

In 2017, Ambassador Yang wrote a commentary celebrating China's "outstanding achievements" under the Chinese government's leadership in economic terms but also "democracy and the rule of law." While saying that "China firmly supports

African countries to independently explore its own development paths in line with their own national conditions.” However, Yang simultaneously added that “China, with its development, has provided an extended development path for the modernisation drive of the developing countries, and contributed to the world development with Chinese wisdom and solutions.” (ZDML, 1. 10. 2017).

3.2.1.2.1. Touring and Learning from China

Within the MoD category, it is important to highlight the role of visits to China in portraying it as a model. In ZDML, nearly 40% of the articles in the category were printed as a result of these Beijing-sponsored journeys to attend various educational workshops or seminars or to study at Chinese universities. These stories also show the state-owned ZDML’s more prominent status compared to The Post/The Mast, where they account for only 17% of all items in the category. These visits included various actors from Zambia. Apart from the newspapers’ staff attending seminars for information officers and journalists, already described in the information linkage section, it was also possible to come across visits organized for the Zambian government, parliament, and the ruling party members, as well as experts, NGOs officers, scholars, students, and businesspersons. For example:

The Communication University of China (CUC) invited me, along with academics from other parts of the world, to be part of a gathering aimed at establishing some international league for higher education in media and communication (The Post, 23. 9. 2009).

In the quest to share experiences and expertise with other developing countries, China once again sponsored and organised a seminar on state-owned enterprises (SOEs) for developing countries, (...), In attendance were representatives from English-speaking African and Asian countries. Zambia was represented by officials from Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), Ministry of Finance and the Zambia-China Old Students Association (ZACOSA) (ZDML, 23. 10. 2017).

Last year, I was one of the participants at a seminar on Food and Drug Inspection and Quarantine for Zambia (...), The training was organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry (MCTI) and Jinagsu Inspection and Quarantine Institute of Quality (JSIQ) under the Ministry of Commerce of China. (ZDML, 16. 4. 2019).

Apart from the educational program, these trips typically involved cultural programs, including sightseeing and visiting diverse provinces in China.

Participants then conveyed their impressions to readers while describing China's extraordinary transformation. These articles described China as a poor developing country, which was typically demonstrated through visits to its poorer parts. Its modernization was then illustrated by describing impressions from visiting cities:

The journalists were impressed with the aggressive strategies China is employing against rural poverty. Using local human capacities and state-funded empowerment initiatives, the country has managed to pull 400 million rural people out of extreme poverty in just one year. (...), In all the four provinces what awed the journalists most was the breathtaking levels of infrastructure development – endless stretches of skyscrapers, sophisticated surface and underground road and railway networks, big modern airports, massive industrial parks and tailored anti-poverty initiatives. (...), The tour provided an insight into China's two extreme socio-economic faces – the large, affluent and congested cities with their highly developed commercial, industrial and domestic infrastructure and the dog-eat-dog poverty of the mountainous rural districts (ZDML, 1. 10. 2016).

According to Lina Benabdallah (2020), exposure to such contrasts creates a sense of relatability among the participants, where it is the poor rural areas that are meant to remind visitors that both their home countries and China alike are still developing. Modern Chinese cities then demonstrate that change and modernization are possible and achievable even in the context of other developing states. As Benabdallah points out, such tours are designed to evoke the perception of China as a development model and a potential demand for adopting China's experiences. At times, the very understanding of China as a still developing country despite all that economic progress made was reminded to participants by the Chinese organizers – “Despite China's glittering economic development over the last two decades or so, Mr Li [Quiangmin] said there was still a long way to go before the country reaches a high level of development.” (ZDML, 2. 4. 2006).

China's **transformation was typically explained** by Chinese officials and experts. Participants were informed on the drivers behind China's rapid development and features of its governance system, with the leading role of the CCP underscored:

One pertinent question which invariably arises is: what makes China such an attractive investments proposition? Indeed, one might go further and wonder just why Africa still remains largely a pariah continent when it comes to foreign investment. Ma Xijie, deputy director in the press and information office of the Shanghai Pu Dong area was quick to point out that good governance, political stability and social order were among the

pre-requisites which attracted investors. (...), A legal regime which protects foreign investment is equally indispensable if any country wants to woo potential investors (ZDML, 11. 9. 2003).

But Zhongjie [the Director of research of the CCP] explains that the achievement has not been accidental. “There is need to learn about what is happening in China to help the world to better understand the country. China is going through in-depth reforms with regard to politics, the economy, including science and education. (...), The party and the state emphasize the principle of scientific development, and we use this principle to guide the general economic and social development and we remain committed to building a socially harmonised society in the midst of this development.” (The Post, 20. 9. 2005).

According to Xu Liping, the International Poverty Reduction Centre social policy specialist, the development of rural areas was achieved through land reform and infrastructure development. Dr Xu, in a presentation stated that the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) set about land reform in the 1980s to encourage more citizens own land and provide food for the growing population (ZDML, 12. 8. 2015).

These seminars often served the Chinese organizers as a space to voice defense against Western criticism about the nature of China’s rapid development, its ambitions, and its non-democratic regime. The sessions became an opportunity to present Chinese understanding of concepts like **democracy, freedom of speech, and one-party rule:**

“People will say this is a one-party system country. It’s not really a one-party system because we have other ethnic minority parties as well. The only difference is the Communist party is the strongest and at the moment everybody likes to support the one-party system,” Prof Guanpeng said (The Post, 12. 1. 2011).

“There is a general perception out there that there is no freedom of expression in China; that there is no democracy because the government does not allow its people to express themselves freely as is the case in the western countries. But I can assure you that the people of China enjoy a lot of freedom to criticise the government without any reprisals, but this takes place in the private space. But as soon as this criticism finds its way in the media and becomes public it attracts government attention,” Prof Cao said (ZDML, 17. 9. 2015).

Prof Guan made an interesting statement on democracy in response to a question. “Is there democracy in China? No nation has the right to prescribe or define democracy for another sovereign nation. Here in China we have our own democracy, and it has worked for us,” he said. And the Africans could not agree more (ZDML, 1. 10. 2016).

Concerning the Chinese stakeholders quoted in the newspapers, emulating the CM was rarely openly suggested. This was an instance of an article that cited Wang Jun, the head of the Information Department of the China Centre for International Economic Exchanges, who stated that “The journey to a moderately prosperous society, an incessant process of exploring and solving such problems, could offer a China recipe for the least developing nations facing similar issues, (...), it may possibly serve as a fate changer for them.” (ZDML, 1. 10. 2017). **Chinese sources mostly did not explicitly encourage emulation** at all or underscored the uniqueness of China’s developmental experience. In such instances, there were also calls for Africa to seek its own development path suiting the specific conditions of African states. In 2012, this was stated by Lu Shaye, Director-General at the Africa Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

We believe in diversity and co-existence, not imposing our ideologies or beliefs on others. (...), We will not adopt other people’s ideologies... neither will we expect or force others to adopt ours. (...), What we have achieved in 30 years, others (the West) achieved in over 200 years. So, clearly, our model works for China. We argue Africa to develop its own model that will work for Africa (ZDML, 9. 11. 2012).

These visits, however, often resulted in African visitors suggesting learning from China’s development experience. These suggestions were formulated frequently very vaguely – “The ‘new’ China, as some people would like to put it, is an indeed a revelation and offers many valuable lessons to Africa” (ZDML, 11. 9. 2003), “Zambia has a lot to learn from China economically and socially.” (ZDML, 2. 10. 2004), or, “(...), indeed many countries of the world need to draw lessons from the China experience.” (The Post, 20. 9. 2005). More specific lessons suggested stemmed from personal experience in China. These did not include only the lessons drawn from attending educational events but also participants’ **observations made during daily life and interactions**. For instance, the Zambians admired the system of meritocracy, elections, law enforcement, cleanliness of cities, as well as environmental protection and developed urban infrastructure in Beijing or the commitment of the Chinese to their businesses while following the governmental regulations:

In Beijing, an attempt by a vendor to defraud this writer was short-lived as a secret police, (...), came to the rescue. (...), It was a pleasant surprise and I wished our police worked like that to

instill confidence in citizens and foreigners alike (ZDML, 3. 10. 2004).

Maybe I should invite the Beijing municipal government to come and conduct seminars, workshops and roadshow in Lusaka and the Copperbelt, to begin with, on how to keep streets, walkways, corridors, work places and residential areas clean and healthy. (...), And the size of the roads mwebantu! In some places they are 12 to 14 lane wide. “Can't the Chinese build us just one of these roads in Lusaka, even just ka eight-lane sure?” I mused one day (ZDML, 11. 10. 2015).

I paid particular attention to learning the best practices of doing business, part of course which I feel if embraced can help majority of people doing business. (...), businesses are conducted in a well-organised and orderly manner. Time that is wasted is never gained in business. In a nutshell, doing business calls for discipline and commitment (ZDML, 16. 4. 2019).

In China, meritocracy is practiced through the picking of brilliant and most talented people to join both, the civil service, parastatal and the Chinese Communist Party. I do remember very well that, as we approached graduation, most of my Chinese coursemates got very interested in joining the civil service or parastatals. (...), perhaps we could take a leaf from our friends in China (...), and consider introduction of entry exams for people in the civil service and participation in our politics (ZDML, 18. 12. 2019).

In other cases, learning from China's political system was suggested due to exposure to the major events in the regime. In 2012, a Zambian journalist was in China during “the historic and ground breaking ‘election’ of a new leader [Xi Jinping], (...), That huge step in the journey ahead starts this week and I am thankful to God I am around with other media managers from 24 African countries witnessing this watershed.” (ZDML, 7. 11. 2012). While observing the historical changes in China, the journalist was even drawing lessons from Xi's ascendancy to power by linking it to the elections in Zambia:

Several things are uncertain about China but one thing for sure is that the Communist Party of China will stay in power for many years. Using its own model, it also appears clear that there might be an increasing amount of democracy or democratic participation in China. (...), Of course, It may not be the same as in the United States or in Britain or in European countries etc., it will be very much Chinese characteristic, and that will set China apart from other developed countries for decades to come. As a visiting Zambian journalist, all I can do is watch and learn. We have our own election in Mufumbwe falling on the same day as the Chinese ‘election’ (ZDML, 7. 11. 2012).

A number of emulation ideas then **emerged from the training sessions** attended in China. The result was a call for emulating various development strategies to enhance Zambia's growth. In a 2015 article, for example, **self-employment** was underscored as an element to draw from the Chinese economic transformation:

Why use China as an economic model? Nobody foresaw that the “socialist modernization” that the post-Mao Chinese government launched would in 30 years turn into what scholars today have called China's great economic transformation. It does not need President Lungu to convince this nation about the lessons Zambia and other countries can draw from the rise of its economy. (...), This transformation is the story of our time. The struggle of China is an inspiration to many developing countries, including Zambia. (...), Self-employment is key to national development as the government may not create enough jobs for every Zambian. The government needs to come up with deliberate policies that would encourage self-employment which must be embraced by all Zambians. (ZDML, 8. 4. 2015).

The Zambian delegation members, including government officials, members of Parliament, and town clerks invited to Shenzhen's SEZ in 2009, suggested various lessons for emulation. The visit was designed for the delegation “to see for themselves what is being done to economically transform the country [China]. The trip was also aimed at being an eye-opener for the Zambians on the potential Zambia has in becoming an economic giant in its own reckoning” (ZDML, 12. 7. 2009). As a result of this “three-week fact-finding mission,” the Zambian participants expressed hope for Zambia to achieve the same level of development as China and described lessons to learn from the trip. The head of the delegation, Government Parliamentary Chief Whip Vernon Mwaanga, noted the remarkable **poverty alleviation** as inspirational for Zambia, as “the concentration of the government and the people of China has been about growing the economy and uplifting their people from poverty and building a prosperous country. (...), This is an important and over-riding lesson for us as Zambians.” (ibid.). Zambian MP from then oppositional PF, Faustina Sinyangwe, underscored the **disciplined** nature of the Chinese from which she “learnt that for any development to take place there must be high levels of discipline.” Also, Zambia should learn from the Chinese effective **governance system** and “emulate the Chinese by decentralising all the municipalities for them to make their own decisions” pointing out that it is the “municipalities [that] run all the industrial zones and that this was what Zambia should do.” Sinyangwe was also inspired by the **infrastructure development** in

the rural areas, as “(...), there should be proper infrastructure such as a good road network.” (ibid.). Another member of the delegation, Copperbelt Province Minister, Mwansa Mbulakulima, stated that he “learnt systematic planning from the Chinese and that they always have a way of attracting Foreign Direct Investment” and in this respect, “Zambia too should do something more to attract investors and retain them,” while, like before in China, **SEZs** became the “key to enhancing development in Zambia.” (ibid.). Lusaka Town Clerk, Timothy Hakuyu, then stated that “Zambia will get to the level where China is. We are also on the right track,” stressing that “the Chinese focused more on development than politics and that this element has to be emulated.” (ibid.).

In 2017, “In the quest to share experiences and expertise with other developing countries” (ZDML, 23. 10. 2017), China organized a seminar on the role of SOEs in development, which officials from Zambia also attended. A lesson from the seminar was the importance of the state’s interventions in the economy– “From the seminar, we learnt that it is the business of the government to be in business. (...), the Chinese experience is different [from the one prescribed by IMF and WB] and points to the fact that the government should be involved in business for a number of reasons.” (ibid.). The participants underscored the critical role of the SOEs in Zambian development planning and strategies, whereas China’s experience served as a reference case:

I still feel and believe that it’s only through strategic planning and hard work over a period of time that Zambia can flourish. (...), SOEs are critical in that, unlike private corporations, whose only goal is to maximise profits, they have and should have a social responsibility as an additional goal. (...), While country circumstances differ, Zambia can draw lessons from China’s SOEs reforms. (...), Among the many factors, one of the most important factors that enhanced Chinese SOE performance was great discipline and hard work. The determination to achieve set targets is critical. Zambia can draw lessons from that (ibid.).

When it comes to the various elements of China’s political system, the lessons drawn often included those in the **media governance**. This is given by the high number of stories written by Zambian media practitioners attending sessions related to the sector. This, at times, even led to drawing conclusions about the very quality of reporting in China that should be attributed to the democratic nature of the regime – “From the study tours and lessons drawn so far, it is evident that China’s media

landscape is robust and here is why. The Constitution of the People’s Republic of China guarantees citizens’ freedom of speech and information.” (ZDML, 3. 12. 2019). The issue of people-to-people exchanges in the media sector has been discussed in more detail in the subchapter on the information linkage section. Similarly, the lessons learned from the sessions organized by the CCP for African political parties related to **party governance** have been debated in the section on autocracy promotion. In addition, these visits also led some participants to formulate their views on the **superiority of China’s authoritarian regime** and the uselessness of democracy that would only hinder China’s impressive development:

Imagine, even for just one moment, that the Chinese government opted for a multi-party political system in China. How many political parties could possibly emerge? How much time would be spent on political bickering at the expense of development? Only one description could aptly describe the political scene in the unlikely event of such a development – veritable chaos would inevitably follow. (...), The achievements of the past two decades since the liberalisation of the economy took root cannot be traded for anything else, not even the so-called democracy which breeds nothing but chaos in so many countries. (...), With massive foreign investment flowing in, millions of jobs are being created and people seem at peace with themselves. They may not enjoy the unfettered freedom in the context of the Western world where multiparty politics breed acrimony every day, but they are certainly not missing much (ZDML, 13. 9. 2003).

The stories rarely mention the problematic nature of Chinese authoritarianism. In 2013, a ZDML article alluded to this issue concerning the non-transferability of the Chinese development experience and the possible resurgence of nondemocracies in Africa. However, it welcomed the alternative cooperation with China for reducing its dependence on Western donors:

Chinese aid practices and China’s own success in lifting millions of its population out of poverty without representative government and a free press could encourage a resurgence of non-democratic rule in Africa. (...), This experience is not necessarily transferable, nonetheless, an economic relationship with China does provide an alternative to dependence on Western countries. A distinction is sometimes made between the “Beijing Consensus” and the “Washington Consensus” as many Africans seek engagement with China along lines less restrictive than those imposed by European and American partners or international organisations (ZDML, 8. 1. 2013).

To conclude, the CM has become one of the major categories of how China was portrayed in Zambian newspapers. Among the elements of the Chinese development experience highlighted by Zambian stakeholders and suggested for emulation dominated the socioeconomic features. These included the role of SOEs and SEZs in development, education, and investment in science, as well as discipline and work culture. The features of the CM regarding political governance mentioned for emulation underscored the organization and management of political parties, the meritocracy system in the civil service, and effectiveness in tackling corruption. In this regard, the CM was not presented as exceptional to such an extent as to preclude emulation. However, on the question of the ethos of China's authoritarian model, Zambian voices were more cautious while pointing out its democracy-subverting features seen as unwelcomed in the context of a democratic Zambia. Such articles, however, were mainly printed in the private media, giving more space for deeper reflections on the regime's nature in China.

Other findings in this section revealed that conceptualizing emulation as China's passive influence is limited in the Zambian case. In Zambia, China appeared to intervene in presenting its development model. This occurred through statements made by Chinese officials in Zambia as well as the organizing training sessions in China, from which participants reported their impressions of touring the country and training sessions. These reports concerned mainly ZDML. This part of then showed that although Chinese officials insisted on the uniqueness of the CM, they simultaneously encouraged the Zambian counterpart to adopt its various elements. These included the SEZs, investment in education and science and technology, or the role of infrastructure development, where Chinese experience served as a reference point. At the same time, Zambian newspapers served as a platform for the Chinese officials to present their own understanding of concepts related to the nature of the Chinese regime (one-party rule or democracy), even highlighting the superiority of the Chinese political model over others. Although during the actual training sessions in China, the explicit encouragement to emulate the CM by the Chinese trainers and officials rarely arose, at the same time, these events became a platform for presenting Chinese understanding of development and its related elements. Likewise, these training sessions introduced Chinese comprehension of concepts such as democracy or one-party rule. Beyond these workshops,

participants gained insights and knowledge about the Chinese development experience through traveling around the country and day-to-day interactions and observations. The impressions that participants then wrote in their stories thus reflected how Beijing itself sought to be portrayed. Furthermore, this was done through the credible voice of Zambians, who essentially became a vessel of the Chinese propaganda.

The subsequent active intervention in the immediate outputs of such experiences in China has been demonstrated only sporadically in the literature (Gondwe 2022b), and the extent to which such interventions occur specifically in Zambia remains unclear. However, as noted earlier in the thesis, Zambian respondents reported Chinese efforts to censor such outputs by preventing their publication (Respondent 16, 21. 8. 2020). One of the interviewed scholars in Zambia then shared his worry about the influence on the “mindset” of those taken to China “just as tourists” by the Chinese government, which goes beyond the political elites reaching the very higher education institution he worked for:

The Chinese want to go beyond the political elites, even the institutions, they target certain people, taking them to China just as tourists, but in the meantime, they are buying them to be on their side. China has a deliberate policy of ensuring that people are won over to their side. You don't see that coming from the Western or the European Union or the United States of America. To send people to see how they are doing things, it is not happening like that. But for Chinese, it is a very common thing. Even at an institution of the size of the University of Zambia, they come like: “Can you nominate this many people to go on tour?” They are getting people, some of them are not experts or anything, just ordinary employees. They are going to be on the delegation going to China. Everything is facilitated. So when they come back, they do not say anything negative. They are always supporting, they are winning them over. (...), It is changing your mindset about how you relate to it [China] and the Chinese people (Respondent 7, 23. 7. 2020).

These findings not only put into question the conceptualization of emulation as a passive influence as understood in this work but also Hodzi's (2020) notion of the CM as a “rhetorical commonplace,” embracing different comprehension and interpretations of CM by different African elites. The extent to which China influences such understanding rather undermines the argument about African agency when picking “preferred norms” for emulation by African elites. When considering the increasing endeavors to socialize these elites into China's

understanding of its development paths and features, one may ask about the independence of voicing subsequent preferences to emulate this experience. The Zambian case shows that China has greater control over the presentation of its model in a foreign context than had been anticipated. Moreover, Beijing definitely can promote the notion of the CM and, although further research is needed, possibly even enforce it by interfering in the way CM is presented abroad.

However, despite the generally positive portrayal of China as a MoD in Zambian newspapers and Beijing's efforts to actively improve its image, the aforementioned Afrobarometer survey results (Lekorwe et al. 2016; Sanny and Selormey 2021) show a sharp decline in the popularity of the CM in Zambia over time. Of course, one may argue about how the CM would have been viewed without such attempts to influence its image (not only) in the Zambian press. On the other hand, at least, it can be argued that these interventions by Beijing did not prevent the decline of the CM's popularity.

Explaining why these efforts by Beijing to build a positive image in Zambia have not met with success can be seen as a spur for further research. However, in this regard, it can be argued that the deteriorating economic situation under the PF government and the concomitant unsustainable indebtedness to external creditors, including China, may have played a role. Generally, when one looks at the overall portrayal of China in the Zambian media, especially in the private press, China and its involvement in the country has often been portrayed negatively as an exploiter and a law-breaking criminal actor (Table 15 and Figure 9). This may also have negatively affected the perception of the CM. Then, as some interviews conducted in Zambia show, specifically in relation to how the CM is seen, the perceived contradiction between how China performs at home and abroad may have played a role. On the one hand, the uncompromising stance on corruption, for example, was highlighted. On the other hand, this was followed by expressions of incomprehension as to why Beijing and its companies do not apply this stance in Zambia. In China, "corruption is punishable by death (...), But here, it's been embraced like oranges or bananas" (Respondent 1, 22. 7. 2020) while catering to local corrupt elites:

China has used state capital to push economic development that is something that a lot of African countries could look at. Also, private sector in collaboration with the state capital and state

enterprises. But this requires a high-level discipline in terms of the political establishment, especially as it relates to corruption, because that where the problem is. On the one hand, in China itself, the government has very stringent measures when it comes to anti-corruption, but unfortunately, when it comes to corruption [in Africa], the Chinese state-owned enterprises and African governments, the Chinese have fallen well short. (Respondent 6, 31. 8. 2020).

3.3.Extraversion – Roads for Votes

The last concept examined in this work is “extraversion” (Bayart, 1993; Bayart & Ellis, 2000; Clapham, 1996). It emphasizes African elites’ role in mobilizing international support and resources to strengthen and consolidate their power position and promote specific interests in domestic power competition. This thesis studies extraversion in the context of China’s increasing engagement on the continent. In this regard, Clapham argues that China should theoretically “fit” into the patterns of rentier statehood and politics with which Africa’s rulers have become accustomed to retaining their power through contact with the external world for centuries (Clapham, 2007, p. 364).

In the literature, one may then come across studies describing how the African political elites strategically employ projects implemented by China to maintain power. For example, Phillip Roessler (2013) demonstrates this in the case of Sudan from 2000 to 2011. Here, the Chinese support of more than 5 billion USD was allocated disproportionately by the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) to the northern part of the county, tending to vote based on whether the party delivered services and employment opportunities. Moreover, considering the country’s partition in 2011, the investment allocation became critical to ensuring that the North would continue as a viable state even as South Sudan and possibly Darfur secede. Later on, Dreher et al. (2019) demonstrated in their cross-national research that African political leaders’ birth regions receive substantially larger financial flows from China in the years when they are in power. In addition, they found that these biases result from electoral competition during which Chinese aid benefits politically privileged regions in years when incumbents face upcoming elections and when electoral competitiveness is high.

This part of the dissertation then builds on the growing body of literature that explicitly relates the concept of extraversion to China's growing presence in Africa and the agency of African political elites (e.g., Alves & Chichava, 2018; Clapham, 2007; Corkin, 2013; 2019; Hartmann, 2019; Wang, 2022). Corkin (2013; 2019) has repeatedly demonstrated this link in the case of Angola, where political elites consolidated their legitimacy through the construction of infrastructure projects during the post-war reconstruction, which they repaid with oil supplies to China. Alves and Chichavy (2018) studied the cases of Angola and Mozambique. They explored China's influence on the dominant structural dynamics of Africa's relationship with the outside world through extraversion and neopatrimonialism. They argue that China's relations with the two countries largely conform to patterns of extraversion and collusion with neopatrimonial ruling elites. At the same time, they argue that it became increasingly challenging and costly for China to break away from this pattern, as it had been for other external powers before (Alves & Chichavy, 2018, p. 255). Recently, Wang (2022) examined infrastructure mega projects implemented by China in Angola and Kenya. Wang's study employs the idea of "presidential extraversion," focusing on the role of individual African political leaders (e.g., presidents, prime ministers, ministers, advisors, or governors) in implementing infrastructure projects. Wang concludes that African presidents indeed employed such a strategy through China-sponsored mega projects. Such highly visible and costly facilities, with material and ideological functions, coincided with the political survival strategies of rulers. Whether these projects were economically viable became less relevant. In the domestic arena, political elites instrumentalized projects funded by Beijing to demonstrate their management to the people while sustaining the clientelist networks on which elites' power depended.

With reference to these studies, it is assumed that China has an indirect influence on the domestic political competition in African hybrid regimes by enhancing the chances of the ruling elites to maintain their power by building large infrastructural projects that help them boost their performance legitimacy in the eyes of the electorate and sustain their clientelist networks. The transport and energy sectors represent 2/3 of loans from more than 165 billion USD provided by Chinese creditors to African countries between 2000 and 2019 (Boston University Global

Development Policy Center, 2022). The sectors then may not only include many of these visible mega-infrastructure projects with the potential of boosting the performance legitimacy of the incumbents during political campaigns (Wang, 2022) but given their prices (and in combination with the Chinese lending opacity), these also provide a great opportunity for receiving substantial kickbacks for the ruling elites enrichment and patronage distribution. This is not to say that other projects in different sectors would not bear such potential; it is assumed that this effect should be most evident in the cases of these two sectors dominating Chinese lending in Africa and involving the most prominent and expensive initiatives. The hypothesis is formulated in the following way:

H4: More financial support in economic infrastructure projects from China will decrease the chance of an alternation in power in elections.

To test the hypothesis, the author uses logistic regression with standard errors clustered by country. The dependent variable, *alternation in power*, is coded as binary and is operationalized as “0” when there is no change in power, while the value “1” indicates the alternation. The data are taken from NELDA data (Hyde & Marinow, 2021),¹⁰⁹ while only the general elections are included in the dataset (in presidential systems, the executive ones; in parliamentary, the legislative elections). Independent variable – *China’s financial support in economic infrastructure projects* is then operationalized as the accumulation of loan commitments to *transport and energy sectors* during the term in office, excluding the election year. The data are drawn from the Boston University Global Development Policy Center (2022) dataset. The author assumes that these sectors will include the most financially demanding and visible projects that the political leaders can instrumentalize to demonstrate their performance during their time in office.

¹⁰⁹ Specifically, answers to question number 24 are used – “Did the incumbent’s party lose?”

Table 22: Regression models of the influence of the PRC loans (in transportation and power sectors) on alternation in power

	Liberal democracy index (inverted)					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Explanatory variable	Gray zone regimes	EA regimes	ED regimes	Xi's rule; Gray zone regimes	Xi's rule; EA	Xi's rule; ED
Loans	-0.373 (0.269)	-0.836 (0.672)	0.172 (0.163)	-0.876 (0.593)	-2.186 (1.838)	0.099 (0.284)
Constant	-1.515 (0.232)	-2.181 (0.438)	-0.755 (0.315)	-1.289 (0.332)	-2.253 (0.861)	-0357 (0.471)
N of observations	162	105	53	58	36	17
N of groups: country	45	34	19	43	28	14
R2	0.009	0.020	0.006	0.037	0.087	0.002

Notes: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

As can be seen from the regression results (Table 22), the hypothesis cannot be confirmed as there is no statistically significant effect across the models. It, however, seems that Chinese loans in the two sectors decreased the likelihood of alternation in power in the “gray zone,” especially in electoral authoritarianism (EA). On the contrary, in electoral democracies (ED), the chances for alternation increased with the volume of Chinese loans. Yet, these effects remain statistically insignificant. These results demonstrate that despite incumbents’ efforts to finance large infrastructure projects, the ruling political elites generally cannot rely on this strategy to maintain their power.

The explanation for this may be found in the research that shows the possibility that the chances of the incumbents to maintain their power by boosting their legitimacy through implementing major infrastructural projects can be undermined by their negative impact on the populations of the states and communities where they are implemented. These negative associations may then translate into voters’ support. For example, Brazys, Elkink, and Gina Kelly (2017) associate the location of a larger number of Chinese projects (not classified as aid) with higher experiences with and, to some extent, perceptions of corruption in Tanzania. They also show that while the WB projects are associated with lower levels of corruption in the absence of Chinese projects, this relationship disappears with Chinese projects being implemented nearby. Isaksson and Kotsadam (2018a) confirm these findings by matching the location of Chinese-implemented aid projects in 29 African

countries with the responses from the Afrobarometer survey, showing that those individuals living near sites where Chinese projects are being implemented are rather experiencing corruption compared to those projects implemented by the WB. Yet again, Isaksson and Kotsadam (2018b) show that Chinese development projects discourage trade union involvement in the area of project implementation. Other scholars (Gehring et al., 2018) find that although aid projects implemented by China and the WB seem to reduce conflict, there is a higher likelihood of non-lethal repression by recipient governments in areas where China is active. In addition, some scholars (Briggs, 2019) have demonstrated reduced support for the incumbent in project construction sites, regardless of whether the donor is democratic or non-democratic, possibly undermining the legitimacy of leaders in power. Similarly, Blair and Roessler (2018) found that while the announcement of Chinese development projects improves public opinion about China, a negative perception is associated with the implementation phase.

As demonstrated in the case study of Zambia, the strategy of extraversion became broadly employed, especially under PF rule. During the by-elections in 2015 and regular elections in 2016, Lungu was able to harness the benefits of the newly built infrastructure that brought him voters' support. Within a short period, he won two elections by a slim margin after the death of Michael Sata in 2014. The opacity of these often overpriced projects enabled widespread corruption and patronage distribution. In 2021, although adopting the same strategy, Lungu decisively lost the election. As will be shown, the dependence on the Chinese infrastructure and overborrowing from external lenders resulted in serious financial distress, severely impacting ordinary Zambians. This, further worsened by the pandemic, eventually became one of the factors that influenced the results of the 2021 elections, where the political opposition recorded a landslide victory.

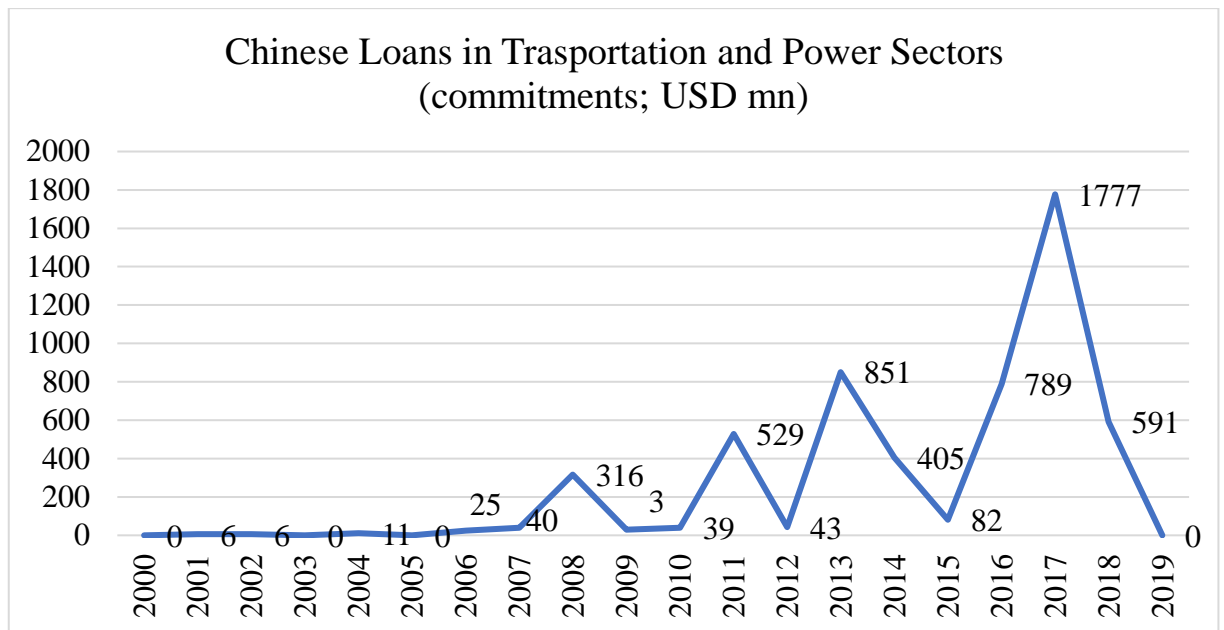
3.3.1. Instrumentalizing Chinese-Funded Projects in Zambia

The case of China's engagement in Zambia may serve as an example of how Chinese finance became instrumentalized by both ruling and opposition political elites to mobilize voters and strengthen legitimacy. Already during the presidential campaigns of Michael Sata, the Chinese increasing investment in the mining sector, stained with labor abuses as well as the growing Chinese diaspora competing with

the Zambian entrepreneurs and collusive relationship with the ruling MMD, became exploited to mobilize electoral support both in the urban areas and in the Copperbelt. By employing the “China card,” Sata gave a tangible face to diverse socio-economic frustration in Zambian society (Aidoo, 2019; Hess & Aidoo, 2015). In addition, to support his anti-Chinese campaign, Sata could also mobilize financial support from Taiwan to run his populist campaign (Lusakatimes.com, 2011).

Nevertheless, during the PF rule, the unprecedented cooperation between Zambia and China in building major infrastructure projects can be noted (Figure 27). This was especially true in the transport and energy sectors, presenting a 55% share of the value of all loans provided by Beijing (Figure 14). The construction boom served mainly for Sata’s successor, Edgar Lungu, to demonstrate the performance of his government through the plethora of new roads, airports, and dams in the country. However, the projects implemented were criticized for being opaque, overpriced, corrupt, and economically unviable by the political opposition as well as scholars (Brautigam, 2021; 2022; Lee, 2017; Resnick, 2022; Zajontz, 2020; 2022). The country’s long-term financial sustainability being compromised by the irresponsible construction of many such initiatives became a secondary concern for the PF and its members, prioritizing their short-term political and personal gains (Brautigam, 2021; 2022).

Figure 27: Chinese Loans to Zambia in Transportation and Power Sectors (commitments; USD mn; 2000 – 2019)



Source: Boston University Global Development Policy Center, 2022

The increasing cooperation in infrastructure building and its instrumentalization by the PF's government also became reflected in the media. Previously portrayed as an equal development partnership (DP category of media frames), cooperation became dominated by one side – the Zambian government and its agency. This then concerned mainly the state-owned ZDML, which increasingly became a platform for propaganda for the ruling PF (Beardsworth, Siachiwena, & Sishuwa, 2022). On the eve of the 2015 and 2016 elections, Lungu presented the performance of his party and himself in the office by underscoring the number of constructed development projects throughout the country. Although such instrumentalization of Chinese projects and funding has also been evident under the MMD rule (Hess & Aidoo, 2015), the strategy reached an unprecedented level under the PF. The state-owned ZDML then became one of the main platforms for self-promotion and demonstration of Lungu's and the PF's performance.

Lungu's excessive emphasis on infrastructure was compounded by the fact that he may have felt little legitimacy. This led to his greater need to score political points and rent-seeking behavior through project implementation to build the much-needed power base in the PF and the country (Simutanyi & Hinfelaar, 2018, p. 10). Lungu came to power as a relatively unknown politician as a former Minister of Defence and Justice when he ran for PF in the by-election in 2015 after Sata's death in October 2014 to complete his term. In the PF, his selection was a highly divisive

affair, and he was challenged by nine other candidates, including Sata's widow and son (ibid., 21). His position was weakened by factionalism in the PF as some of the party's prominent figures from Sata's camp did not support his candidacy. This included the PF Vice-President and interim Zambian President, Guy Scott, and his supporters, leading to serious tensions in the PF and, eventually, Scott's defection¹¹⁰ from the party (Simuchoba, 2014).

Lungu did win the 2015 election, but by a mere 1.66% of the vote over his main opponent, the UPND's candidate Hakainde Hichilema, with a low turnout of 32% of registered voters. Within a short time, he had to quickly mobilize resources for the campaign for the next (regular) elections in August 2016. During the 2015 and 2016 elections, Lungu was able to reap some of the fruits sown by Sata under the Link 8000 Project and Lusaka 400 initiatives. Simutanyi and Hinfelaar (2018, p. 10) explained that continuing these large-scale projects from Sata's era showed a visible achievement of government provision of services. Moreover, these contracts served as a source of "handsome rents to the political elites," while the selected contractors were "not only obliged to pay bribes to those who facilitate the contracts, but also to make cash donations to the ruling party." (ibid.).

The pursuit of wealth was only further underscored by uncertainty surrounding Lungu's mandate. Lungu intended to run for the elections in 2021; however, it was challenged as unconstitutional, as it would have been his third term in office (Daka 2021). Such a situation then led the party sponsors to seek payback in the shortest possible time while Lungu was in the office. The accumulation of vast wealth and its redistribution to sponsors and loyal supporters was made possible through the mismanagement of public resources, including the large loans for construction projects. As Simutanyi and Hinfelaar put it – "To ensure the distribution of patronage to the vast number of individuals who seek the President's or state

¹¹⁰Just days after Lungu was elected as the PF presidential candidate for the 2015 elections, in early December 2014, Lungu stripped Scott of all positions in the party for "gross indiscipline", making him a mere ordinary PF member. The move followed Scott's decision to write a letter to the Acting Chief Justice Lombe Chibesakunda urging her "not to entertain anyone that would show up as a PF candidate before the party's presidential nomination wrangles are resolved by the courts of law." (Lusakatimes.com, 2014). Scott openly supported the UPND in the 2016 elections (Butty, 2016), and became its member in 2021 (Sakala, 2021).

attention, rules have to be bent or/and circumvented and accountability mechanisms over-ridden by executive fiat.” (2018, p. 26).

In the 2016 campaign, Lungu’s strategy of “selling” his infrastructure performance to voters peaked. Both increasing repressions and, at the same time, unprecedented promotion of construction projects built by Chinese contractors served the PF well, and Lungu also won the 2016 election, yet still by a narrow margin of 2.7%. As put in the report of the election observation delegation by the European Union, “The PF unduly benefited from its position as the incumbent party,” whereby “The inauguration of a number of infrastructure projects during the campaign further blurred the distinction between state and ruling party, reinforcing PF’s campaign advantage.” (EU EOM, 2016, p. 16).

As noted by Beardsworth (2015), the development of infrastructure boosted the PF’s popularity in rural areas of the country. These initiatives implemented under the Link Zambia 8000 Project made the government visible to citizens who had had only little interaction with the state while facilitating the movements of goods and people.¹¹¹ In Lusaka, the Lusaka 400 initiative also relieved the traffic in the city, making the PF popular, especially among bus and taxi drivers – a substantial part of the PF’s vote base (ibid.).

Some studies then show that allocating visible infrastructural projects is strategic in Zambia to gain and reward loyal voters, and project selection may depend on political party support in the area. In this respect, Raballand et al. (2013, pp. 13–14) examined RDA contracts from 2008 and 2011 to show a relatively weak yet negative correlation between provincial-level support for the *then-major opposition*

¹¹¹ Indeed, as presented by some recent studies, the rural and remote areas played an important role in supporting the PF and appreciating the infrastructural development. As demonstrated in the research by Hangala Siachiwena, for the PF it was rather its rural strongholds that became crucial in gaining political support during the 2016 elections and that collapsed substantially already by 2020 (Siachiwena, 2022, p. 609). In this regard, Erin Hern (2022) revealed, that degree of remoteness to infrastructure in Zambia played an important role in understanding democracy among Zambians in 2016. Hern shows that those living closer to the major road-and-rail infrastructure were much more likely to describe their political participation in procedural terms. These results were starkly different from those living more remotely from the infrastructure who became much more likely to explain their political participation in instrumental terms – as a bid for personal aid or to try to draw public goods to their communities. Such an understanding of political participation in remoted areas could have been well exploited by the ruling party’s infrastructure initiatives bringing the major Chinese-built projects to rural areas and thus scoring political points.

party PF and the share of road contract allocations. However, an outlier case in this correlation became the Western province presenting a swing region with possibly influenceable voters by infrastructure construction.¹¹² The importance of “swing” provinces as a determinant in aid allocation in Zambia was also manifested by Takaaki Masaki (2018), who analyzed development aid allocation provided by WB, JICA, and AfDB from 1996 to 2010. Masaki revealed that the districts where opposition parties enjoyed greater popularity received more projects. On the contrary, districts with a higher concentration of incumbent supporters or dominant coethnic voters received fewer projects. Masaki then attributes this strategic aid distribution to the limited information available about the voting preferences of the citizens. This *uncertainty*, particularly present in competitive autocracies like Zambia, characterized by highly volatile voter preferences, drives the incumbents’ efforts to sway as many weak opposers as possible to consolidate their power (Masaki, 2018, pp. 71–72).

In addition, in Zambia, these governmental infrastructure initiatives tapped into, in general, the unrealistic expectations for the road sector by the Zambian public. Zambians have “got used to roads being ‘over-engineered’ since Independence, there is a widespread expectation that all Trunk, Main and District roads should ultimately be paved,” and yet “There is little understanding that most new upgrading projects are uneconomic.” (Raballand & Whitworth, 2012, p. 11). Similarly, as explained by one of the respondents in Zambia:

(...), ordinary Zambians want to see what have you done – build a road, then you worked. So they think “If I don’t do a road, they will not vote for me.” (...), So that’s why we are talking about these unsustainable debts, it’s because of the demands by the people, demand for these projects. So they come to have no option but to borrow (Respondent 5, 30. 7. 2020).

Apart from electoral gains from implementing visible infrastructure projects, the ruling PF also received financial support through opaque and overpriced contracts. As argued by some scholars (Brautigam, 2021; 2022; Lee, 2017; Ofstad &

¹¹² An example of such a strategy was the MMD’s (later also PF’s) decision to build the Mongu-Kalabo road in the Western province. Given the extensive cost of the project and its uncertain economic viability, one potential explanation for procuring the road was the incumbent government’s endeavor to secure the province’s loyalty. The MMD was concerned that the swing province may shift its political loyalty to the PF or the UPND, which eventually happened in the 2011 elections (Raballand et al., 2013, p. 13–14).

Tjønneland, 2019; Zajontz, 2022), agreements with Chinese contractors were awarded without public tendering and circumvented standard procedures by the designated oversight bodies. Which, according to Tim Zajontz, led to a “systematic bypassing of transparency norms and competition standards which are legally codified in Zambian public procurement law and has reinforced ‘not so public’ procurement processes, characterised by informal, highly personalised negotiations between Zambian political elites and Chinese enterprises about terms and conditions of road projects.” (2022, p. 6).

Some Zambian respondents also mentioned the issues of inflated project prices and corruption benefiting the ruling elites. Political opposition leaders strongly criticized these opaque and corrupted deals benefiting the political leadership:

They are overpriced to serve their purpose. (...), if they [the Chinese] are prepared to pay more, especially to the ones who have the authority to sign it, you enhance the possibility of that project, in other words, there is no competitive tender here. So they will get the job anyway because they are prepared to pay above, and the money goes to the one who signs, whether it is the president, minister, or whoever. (...), Because, you see, the corruption we can see, they are paying money, you see ministers now they bought so many things, so they know it is corruption (Respondent 15, 7. 9. 2020).

Also, a leader of another political opposition party recalled his discussion with the manager director of AVIC, who explained the role of the Zambian government in choosing the low-quality infrastructure, yet, at the same time, the most expensive in the region:

I was in China. I was in Beijing. I had a chance to see their roads. Their roads are strong, very strong. How come here, in Zambia, they construct poor roads? (...), So I had a chance to talk to the managing director of AVIC, he said, “It is your government that chose it. We [AVIC] have road A, B, C, D, E, they [the Zambian government] tell us to give us “E”. But if you choose “A” we give you the road that you want. So, don’t blame China. Blame the authorities here or the government.” That was the answer. [Interviewer: *Why did they choose it?*] It’s the corruption. We have corruption that is now frantic (Respondent 14, 3. 9. 2020).

Similarly, the issue was mentioned by one of the leading figures of civil society in Zambia. The respondent particularly referred to some of the tangible benefits stemming from the inflated deals and bribes for the President and his inner circle:

There is some money that goes to individual Ministers. From this, they give so many contracts to the Chinese government to Chinese contractors. There is a huge chunk of money that goes to the PF as a party and goes to the Ministers involved in this transaction. There are also houses that have been built by the Chinese contractors for the ministers, for the politicians that are involved, we know about some houses in Ibex [Hill]¹¹³ that were built by the Chinese contractors. So it is this special treatment that they get, they are giving to specific individuals. Ministers here are receiving big briefcases, bags of money from their offices in the evening. (...), And for these contractors to maintain these jobs, to maintain these contracts, they fund even campaigns (Respondent 9, 29. 7. 2020).

Lastly, a governmental officer elaborated in detail that the poorly negotiated and overpriced deals with China are since “The people that are required to negotiate do not have the right competence and don’t have the right information” and that there is also another problem of a “principal-agent,” the Zambian government, which “is not negotiating of behalf of people. (...), the agent is more interested in self-beneficiation than striking the right deals for the Zambian people.” (Respondent 16, 21. 8. 2020). The respondent also stated that some cases showed that a financed project “costs three to five times more than it should have,” and although “In the negotiations, there is considerable room to strike better deals (...), the agent was more interested in gaining political mileage or gaining from these transactions through corruption and rent-seeking, the deals are not as good as they could have been.” Zambian politics then seems to be “significantly running on China’s money” where “20 to 50 % of what would have been a loan contract is just going through different channels to the ruling party and mainly to the campaigns of the ruling party.” Unlike in other countries in the region (naming Botswana as an example), in Zambia, “The selection of these [road] projects is not based on feasibility studies,

¹¹³ The extent of corruption that spread among the PF officials arose soon under the Hichilema’s rule. Already in 2022, the PF leadership was accused of acquiring assets that they could have never earned from their salaries, including houses and flats in this luxury Lusaka district. Some of these major allegations included Lungu’s economic adviser, Hibeene Mwiinga, who built a 600 thousand USD house in the Chinese-constructed Kingsland City, a complex in Lusaka’s luxury Ibex Hill district. In addition, he bought several other properties, including an apartment in the neighborhood and a number of luxury vehicles (Lusakatimes.com, 2022). Later police also seized Lungu’s lodge in the same area (Zambian Observer, 2022). Earlier in April 2022, it was reported that, former PF’s Minister of Agriculture and PF’s acting President, Given Lubinda, was accused that he purchased a house from Kingsland City (Daily Nation, 2022). Moreover, this happened upon receiving money from several Chinese companies depositing together 280 thousand USD in his account disguised as a loan (Chisola, 2022).

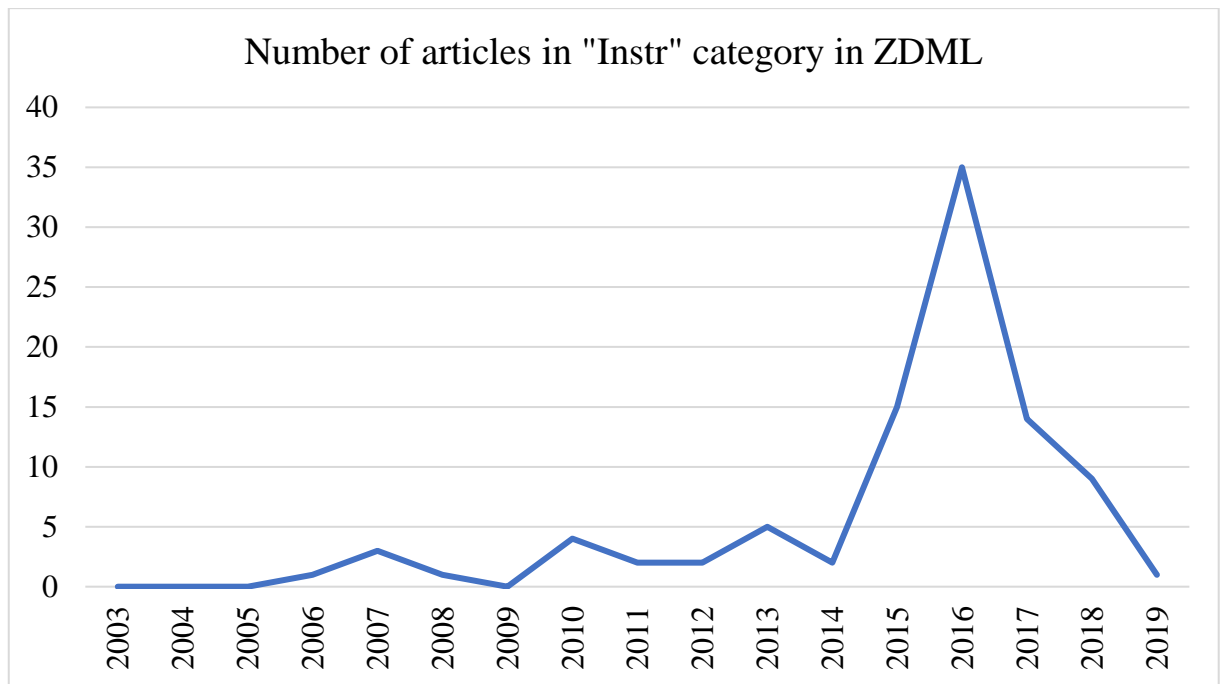
they are based on the highest price so the political machinery can benefit from it.” This emerges from “a lot of behind-closed-doors conversations [as] there are Chinese entities that go straight to State House to negotiate deals. Then it is difficult to challenge the deal, how was the project selected, how was the price of it done.” (ibid.).

Indeed, in 2023, the IMF published an extensive *Diagnostic Report on Governance and Corruption* in Zambia, only further confirming the vast mismanagement of resources under PF. The report shows that large public investment projects were frequently transformed into “vehicles for political patronage and rent seeking opportunities” (IMF. Legal Dept., 2023, p. 15). Corruption then “have inflated the costs of numerous high-profile tenders and construction projects,” while substantial financial resources invested in infrastructure projects “provided avenues for corruption, especially in the award of tenders, where political connections allowed members of the elite to bend the rules and access to lucrative contracts.” (ibid.). As will be demonstrated in the following section, the overpriced and corruption-ridden construction projects became integral to the PF’s political campaigns in the 2015 and 2016 elections. They became a part of Lungu’s strategy to manifest his and PF’s performance to the potential electorate and a welcomed platform to criticize the opposition. During the campaigns, these efforts to win Zambian voters dramatically changed how China and its companies were portrayed in the Zambian press – as a *mere instrument of PF’s development strategy*.

3.3.1.1. *The Instrumentalization of Chinese Infrastructural Projects in Zambian Media*

As an “instrument” to implement the ruling party’s development plans, China was framed mainly in the state-owned ZDML (Figure 8) as it became a welcomed platform to promote the major infrastructure projects the PF was building nationwide. In this regard, one can notice the high incidence of observations falling under this category during the 2015 and especially 2016 elections (Figure 28).

Figure 28: China framed as Instr in the ZDML (total n. of articles) (2003 – 2019)



Source: Author

Generally, stories in this category portrayed China as a mere contractor that, although it implements projects with Chinese loans, is presented as an unequal partner. The Zambian government, particularly the president himself, played a major role in this frame. This is then reflected in the type of sources (Table 16) underpinning this category. In this respect, they rely on statements by the Zambian political elites, with an overwhelming 67% share of all sources in the category in the ZDML. An important voice in these stories is the Zambian citizens' positive evaluation of the government's actions. In the ZDML, this is the category where Zambian citizens (ZCit) gained the most attention, with a share of 11% of sources. Similarly, representatives of the local governments and traditional authorities (ZLG&TA) became more frequently cited (6%). The presentation of these two types of sources can be attributed to the commissioning of the projects across the country, which usually included some local government representatives and ordinary Zambians living in the area. Their voices were used to underscore the importance of the projects for the local communities and to praise the work done by the Zambian government. China, or the Chinese contractors implementing the projects, were mostly not evaluated and only briefly commended for the well and timely implementation of the project. The main credit, however, always goes to the Zambian ruling party and Lungu. At times, the role of the Chinese companies is

criticized by emphasizing the necessary oversight by the Zambian government over the project implementation.

The ZDML stories generally presented the progress in infrastructure building resulting from the government/party's strategy. In the newspapers, this was accompanied by a strong visual element (see Appendix 16), where pages of photos demonstrated the infrastructure built throughout the country, showing how the "PF delivers yet another infrastructure masterpiece" (ZDML, 11. 6. 2016). Already before the 2011 elections, the road construction in Western Province became instrumentalized in presenting the performance of the MMD government:

The construction of the Sesheke-Senanga and the Mongu-Kalabo roads is the recent major project Government is undertaking in Western Province. The road sector, which over the years had been neglected, is now among the government's top priorities. (...), It is from the realisation that a well integrated and interconnected road network can foster national and economic development that Government has embarked on the construction of the Sesheke-Senanga road (ZDML, 9. 9. 2011).

Similarly, in 2015, the construction of a road was explained as an initiative of the Link Zambia 8000 project and the PF's commitment to bring more economic development through infrastructure-building:

It [the road] is part of the Link Zambia 8000 project and runs from Siavonga, Gwembe, Sinazongwe and ends at Chief Mukuni's area in Livingstone. The road will gobble K332.9 million. (...), However, the progress made on the construction of the road is mirrored on the Patriotic Front (PF) government's commitment to end the transport problems among the people of the valley. President Edgar Lungu believes that the project is important because it will spur growth in the area (ZDML, 29. 10. 2015).

When it comes specifically to the role of China in the implementation of these projects, Chinese companies were only mentioned as actors merely tasked by the government while mostly lacking any voice or representation in the stories as it was the government demonstrating the leading role in the construction:

Government has engaged China Henan Limited to undertake full rehabilitation of the Kafue River Hook Bridge in the Kafue National Park (ZDML, 18. 11. 2015).

Copperbelt Province Minister Mwenya Musenge is confident that the C-400 project will hit the ground as soon as the Ministry of Finance and the main contractor China Henan finalise "one or two" issues. (ZDML, 6. 5. 2016).

At times, the Chinese contractors were praised for their work and meeting deadlines, yet it was again the PF and the President whose work was mainly elevated:

Minister of Works and Supply Yamfwa Mukanga, (...), commended the contractor China Henan, RDA and the rest of the people that were involved for delivering a quality product. Copperbelt Minister Mwenya Musenge said the people of the Copperbelt would remain indebted to the PF administration for the unprecedented development taking place in the province that includes the upgrading of the Kiwe-Chingola road into a dual carriageway, the C-400 road project and the full rehabilitation of the Chingola- Solwezi road (ZDML, 11. 6. 2016).

Minister of Housing and Infrastructure Development Ronald Chitotela said the Government is walking the talk on the delivery of development to its people. (...), “I’m impressed with the works by Avic, we are walking the talk and everyone can gauge the works the Patriotic Front government is doing,” he said (ZDML, 27. 8. 2018).

The leading government’s role became also emphasized through the need to sustain control over the contractors’ work so that it meets the expected standards:

Deputy Minister of Transport, Works, Supply and Communications Mutaba Mwali assured President Lungu that the ministry will closely supervise the two contractors to ensure that a good job is done. “It is a relief for us to see the start of the long-awaited rehabilitation of this important road. The road has been carefully designed to accommodate heavy vehicles going to the mines,” he said (ZDML, 5. 6. 2016).

President Lungu cautioned China Harbour Engineering Company against substandard works on the road from which he anticipates maximum economic benefits. “We expect a maximum return on this investment, I don’t expect substandard roads and other infrastructure. I am directing the contractor, supervising engineers – Andosa Consulting – and the Road Development Agency to ensure that the road is constructed within prescribed standards,” he said. President Lungu said good roads are critical to the realisation of economic diversification agenda the government is vigorously pursuing (ZDML, 28. 7. 2017).

The affected local communities then commended these projects and the government’s engagement. As mentioned earlier, this category relies on the voices of ordinary Zambians expressing their gratitude to the government while underscoring the benefits of infrastructure in the area where they live.

Charles Mututwa, proprietor of Safari Lodge has applauded President Banda for having initiated the construction of the

Sesheke road and has called on the people of Western Province to give the head of state another mandate in the 2011 general elections. According to Mututwa, the only form of appreciation and recompense the people of Western Province should consider giving President Banda is to vote for him in the 2011 elections. (...), President Banda has done in the short period of time he has been in State House and there is need for him to be supported in the 2011 tripartite elections so that there can be a smooth completion of the economic developmental programmes he has initiated (ZDML, 9. 9. 2011).

A Mufulira resident, Naomi Simpemba, thanked Government for finally listening to the cries of the people by working on the Mufulira-Ndola road (ZDML, 9. 9. 2017).

Remedies in this category usually included promises of more infrastructure implemented by the government in the future; for instance – “In order to realise the full economic benefits of the bridge and envisaged future development, President Lungu says Government will soon upgrade the road from Mufuchani Bridge, which is on earth road, to bituminous standards.” (ZDML, 11. 6. 2016). Apart from that, this frame also included the *expression of the endorsement for the ruling party in the elections* as it brings about infrastructural development much welcomed across the country regardless of party affiliation. Such expressions of support often went along with *condemnation of the political opposition* and its negative attitude towards the work of the ruling party and the President:

She [Mafinga MP Catherine Namugala] said PF has built a district hospital, the road and several schools in Mafinga and it is important for the electorate to support the ruling party so that it can continue delivering development. “I want the PF to deliver and continue its work and despite my need to rest as MP, I will still campaign for Mr Lungu and the PF,” she said. She said Mafinga is now a PF stronghold and the people love Mr Lungu and will give him all the votes this year. “We are very happy and lucky to have the President in our area; we love him very much because he loves us, too.” (ZDML, 16. 3. 2016).

Minister of Works and Supply Yamfwa Maukanga said the people of Western Province have all the reasons to vote for President Lungu on August 11 this year because the development he is spearheading is visible. Katuba member of Parliament (MP) Jonas Shakafuswa (UPND) said the people of Western Province should not be swayed into believing that the opposition political party will deliver any development to the area because it is a losing party. (...), Mr Shakafuswa said Zambians are one regardless of which province they come from and that people should vote for Mr Lungu as he is a leader who has defined the

national motto ‘One Zambia One Nation.’ (...), and his Sinazongwe counterpart Richwell Siamunene (UPND), said the people of Southern Province are gradually shifting their loyalty to the PF because of pragmatic development projects the ruling party is implementing across the country. Sioma headman Situmbaito Mpolokelo, (...), said the people of Sioma should support President Lungu because of his practical style of leadership as demonstrated by the delivery of various development projects (ZDML, 29. 4. 2016).

At times, the voters were openly encouraged to support the PF and Lungu’s presidential bid by Lungu himself:

He [Lungu] urged the residents to be wary of some “power-hungry” politicians who are giving empty promises when PF is on the right track in delivering sustainable development. “I have delivered infrastructure projects countrywide and I am urging Zambians to vote for me again.” (ZDML, 17. 7. 2016).

The newspaper articles were only collected up to the end of 2019; therefore, it is impossible to continue monitoring how Lungu presented “his” infrastructure in the press after that year in the print press. Yet it can be argued that the demonstration of the “infrastructure-based performance” of his government continued to play a significant role in the 2021 elections. For example, reference can be made to Lungu’s Facebook account (Lungu, 2021)¹¹⁴ Here, he presented the projects built by inaugurating two airports on the eve of the 2021 elections, for example, as a demonstration of the achievements made under his government (see Appendix 17). Moreover, Lungu was able to capitalize on the pandemic in the 2021 campaign when he barred in-person campaign rallies, citing the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2021¹¹⁵ (Freedom House, 2021b). Yet, despite the restrictions, he was still holding rallies in the name of commissioning projects (Niabiage, 2021).

Despite all Lungu’s efforts to demonstrate the performance of his administration on the project’s construction while continuously increasing repressions in the course of his rule (Amnesty International, 2021) and, in general, a “deeply unfair electoral environment” (Beardsworth, Siachiwena, & Sishuwa, p. 522), he and the PF lost

¹¹⁴ Lungu's Facebook was deleted a few days after the 2021 loss. Later on the account was renewed but the earlier posts from 2021 remained unavailable.

¹¹⁵ Even with these restrictions, Hichilema was gaining extraordinary support across the country, including the eastern provinces, the traditional strongholds of the ruling PF, where thousands turned up for his national face mask distribution exercise – a loophole to get around restrictions on rallies. As put by Zambian historian Sishuwa (2021) in his commentary on the eve of the elections – “If this expression of support translates into votes, the incumbent is in trouble.”

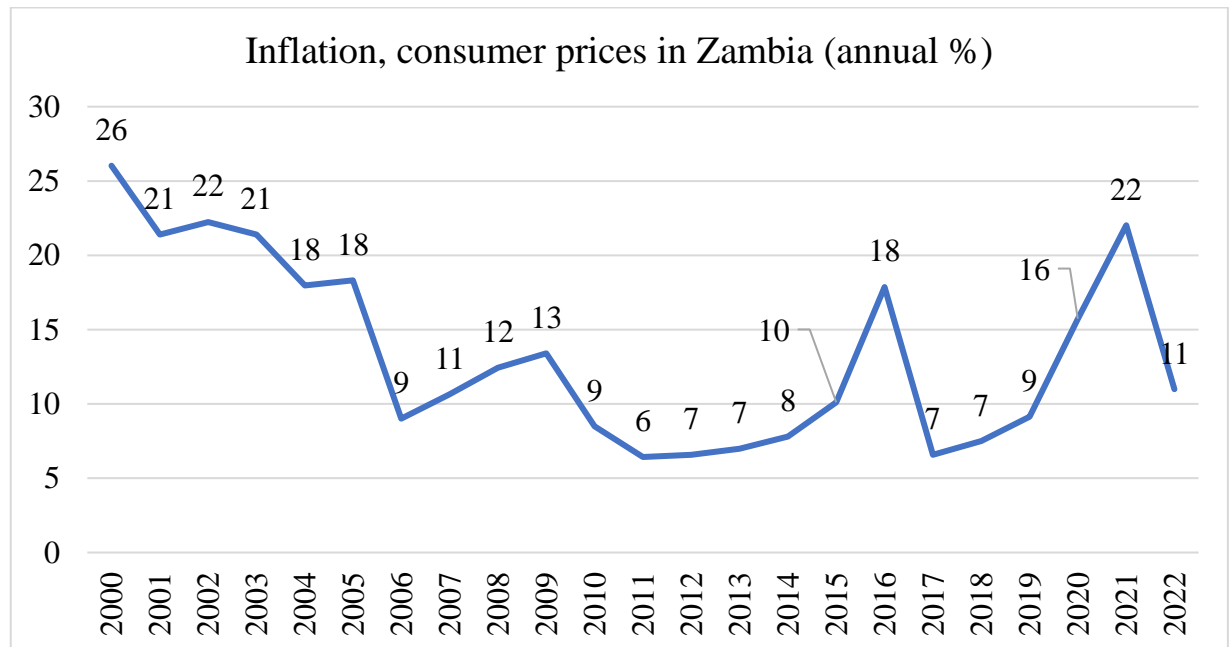
the 2021 elections to the UPND and Hichilema. Hichilema obtained 2.8 million votes (59% of the valid votes cast), 1 million votes more than Lungu, and won by an impressive margin of 21%, making it the largest electoral victory in 25 years (ibid.). Such a change in the government was against all expectations also because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which only exacerbated the advantages of the incumbent. Such a situation where the opposition emerged victorious in elections during the pandemic has happened in only two other African cases –Malawi and Seychelles (ibid., p. 517).

The unexpected loss of the PF can be attributed to several factors,¹¹⁶ whereas economic decline due to bad economic management, corruption, and overborrowing became a major one (Beardsworth, Siachiwena, & Sishuwa, 2022; Resnick, 2022; Sishuwa, 2021; Sishuwa & Cheeseman, 2021). When it comes to the very construction projects implemented during the PF tenure across the country, they were associated with corruption and increasing worrisome indebtedness resulting from reckless borrowing. Moreover, in Zambia, these loans were accompanied by widespread anxiety from a debt trap and China's seizure of Zambian assets. The worsening economic situation, due to declining copper prices and unprecedented borrowing for overpriced large infrastructure projects, both from China and private lenders, was reflected in rising commodity prices, widespread unemployment, and increasingly poor delivery of social services undercut by the lack of funding (Sishuwa & Cheeseman, 2021). All this inevitably

¹¹⁶ Apart from the worsening economic situation, other factors included the Hichilema's wealth and the creation of a coalition with other political subjects. This was a strategy, which elevated the UPND from a regional party, with support concentrated in the south-west parts of the country, to a national one digging deep into strongholds of the eastern parts of Zambia (see Resnick, 2022, p. 73). Also, the list of factors included the increasingly important role of civil society and its efforts to educate citizens on the importance of voting and vote protection. They also played an important role in deploying their observers across the country. Before the election, civil society organizations became instrumental in raising attention to the government's human rights abuses and undermining the rule of law by initiating several court cases against the government, helping to undermine the PF's rule legitimacy. (Sishuwa & Cheeseman, 2021). The use of social media also became an important factor. Given that nearly all independent media outlets were shut down during the PF's rule, both print and television, the social media during the 2021 elections facilitated the dissemination of information about the political and socio-economic context in a heavily controlled media ecosystem that disadvantaged opposition access to traditional media (Lynch & Gadjanovaa, 2022, p. 538).

affected a large section of the Zambian population,¹¹⁷ facing inflation levels reaching a 20-year high in the election year (see Figure 29).

Figure 29: Inflation, consumer prices in Zambia (annual %; 2000 – 2022)



Source: World Bank, 2023

3.4. Chapter Conclusion

Authoritarian diffusion has proven to be an international influence that negatively impacts the quality of democracy in Africa. At the same time, the case of Zambia demonstrates that this is an influence that is far more active on the part of Beijing than how it is conceptualized in this thesis. The *autocratic linkage* of African hybrid regimes to China turned out to be statistically significant in all four dimensions, and it can be argued that the increasing density of ties, be they economic, intergovernmental, technocratic and social, and informational, increased autocratization. Hypothesis H3 was thus confirmed. The impact of these linkages was statistically significant, especially when the entire “gray zone” between democracy and authoritarianism is considered, except for technocratic and social linkages that capture migration flows. Here, the effect has only been statistically significant in electoral democracies and in the gray zone under Xi’s rule, where its

¹¹⁷ It was reported that up to 40% of Zambians were forced to reduce the number of meals consumed during the day (Sishuwa 2021).

significance decreases. The autocratizing effects of ties to China were then more closely illustrated in the case of Zambia.

The case of Zambia has shown that in all the linkages dimensions examined, China created an opportunity for Zambian ruling elites to implement their authoritarian ambitions. On the one hand, *economic linkage* to China has enabled Zambian governments to pursue their development agenda, especially in the strategic mining sector. On the other hand, at the same time, the extensive cooperation in the construction sector also gave the ruling elites an outlet to pursue their short-term political and personal career ambitions, which they used both for personal enrichment and to stay in power. The unsustainable indebtedness (not only) to China then had a very destabilizing impact on the political and economic development of the country. This was particularly the case during the PF rule when the country was undergoing rapid autocratization.

As for *intergovernmental ties*, these had shown resilience and growth despite the turbulent period from 2006 to 2011, when anti-China populism was on the rise in Zambia, fueled by the then-opposition PF and its leader, Michael Sata. Presidential visits aside, these ties were also strengthened by inter-party cooperation between the CCP and the ruling Zambian parties. At the same time, the personality of Zambia's first president, Kenneth Kaunda, contributed to their maintenance and eventual restoration after the hectic period of populist campaigns. Over the years, the ruling leaders have manifested diplomatic support for each other on various issues. Beijing has also strengthened these ties with material assistance to Zambian governments and, as discussed in the chapter on autocratic sponsorship, to incumbent parties ahead of the general elections. Relations between the ruling parties then, especially under Lungu, reached a point of such support that the Zambian President manifested more accountability to the external actor than to Zambians, shielding Beijing from the criticism in the context of non-transparent and unsustainable debt and corruption scandals.

Migration linkages between (or *technocratic and social linkages*) have also intensified over time. This was mainly related to increasing cooperation in the construction sector, which also brought many Chinese workers into the country. At the same time, growing connectedness between states meant that more Chinese

entrepreneurs entered the country, competing with domestic traders in the marketplaces and threatening their livelihoods. This influx of migrants into the cities and poor working conditions in Chinese mines contributed significantly to the rise of the populist PF and eventually carried it to power in 2011. The role of Chinese business people in Zambia proved problematic due to their corrupt interference in the political campaigns of the incumbents, both under the MMD and the PF. The increasing criminal activities targeting Chinese nationals have then given way to their greater politicization through various associations tied to Beijing. This then may challenge the idea of the migrants as an uncoordinated force unreflective of China's political interests in Zambia. China's active influence may then also be noted by Beijing's increasing efforts to present China in a good light to Zambians through the funding of training sessions in China involving grassroots interaction with the Chinese population and culture. The result is the participants' positive perception of China and its subsequent presentation to the broader audiences in Zambia.

The *information linkage* between Zambia and China has increased profoundly over time, particularly under Xi. This reflects Beijing's efforts to wield greater influence over how China is presented abroad and the expansion of initiatives such as the BRI. In this regard, it is possible to talk about implementing projects in the ICT sector that have allowed the Zambian government to improve the surveillance of the opposition. Beyond these initiatives, one may then note the extraordinary impact on the media sector. China's StarTimes, in partnership with Zambia's national broadcaster ZNBC, formed a joint venture – TopStar – to implement the country's migration from analog to digital broadcasting, with the Chinese side acquiring a majority stake, giving it control over the digital content. In the print media, this influence became particularly evident in the ZDML through content sharing and the circulation of commentaries by Chinese ambassadors in Zambia. Moreover, the Chinese ambassador started awarding Zambian journalists for their “positive and objective” reporting on China. Such deepening cooperation helped to present China and its engagement in Zambia in an uncritical manner. Furthermore, collaboration in this sector was fostered by an increase in opportunities for media professionals (mainly from the state-owned media) to attend training sessions in China, where they were exposed to the Chinese model of media governance. The outputs of these

training sessions were overwhelmingly positive reports describing the experience of traveling in China and socialization into the Chinese worldview, governance system, and media management. Such a manifestation of information linkage then challenges understanding these ties as passive.

Like the autocratic linkage to China, *emulation* as a form of passive influence has proven to be more active. Through content analysis of the Zambian press, this influence was manifested in the media frame depicting China as a model of development. This became a prominent category, especially in state-owned newspapers. Here, Zambian writers presented China positively as an example of a country that had not followed the dogmatic neoliberal policies of the West but its own development path that led it to its economic and political success. The suggested areas for emulation then mainly concerned the socio-economic features behind China's progress. Conversely, the authoritarian character of the regime was described with caution with respect to the possibilities of learning from Chinese development. To the extent that there was an emphasis on elements of the Chinese governance system that were perceived as worthy of emulation, these concerned its effectiveness, e.g., stance on corruption or system of meritocracy. The main actors calling for emulation in these cases were the articles' authors and the Zambian political elites.

However, this category was not limited to stories absencing Chinese stakeholders' interference. These were observed in the newspapers as statements by various Chinese officials who spoke openly about the Chinese model and sometimes even called for the emulation of some of its elements in Zambia. Beyond this, reference can be made to comments written by Chinese ambassadors describing China as a development model. The most prominent active dimension of emulation was noted in the reports from visits to China. These were no longer limited to the stories written by media staff but reflected Beijing's efforts to train a wide range of stakeholders, whether officials, development experts, students, academics, or politicians alone. The participants were then not only trained in the Chinese experience in economic development or party and media management but also in understanding democracy and one-party rule. The long-term impacts of these trainings on the participants and their work are yet to be found in the case of

Zambia, and hence the extent to which these lessons learned are emulated in practice.

The final passive influence analyzed was *extraversion*. This was examined both quantitatively and qualitatively in the case of Zambia. Hypothesis 4, which assumed a relationship between the volume of Chinese lending in the transport and power sectors and the election of an incumbent, was not confirmed. This may also be due to the negative impact of Chinese projects on the population in African states living in their proximity when implemented. The case of Zambia then shows that this strategy was used especially during Edgar Lungu's rule, during the 2015, 2016, and 2021 elections. This was demonstrated in the examined articles published in the state-owned ZDML, which reduced Chinese projects to a government initiative and turned them into a PF instrument to showcase its performance to mobilize voters. This strategy may have given Lungu some coveted advantage over opposition candidate Hakainde Hichilema in 2015 and 2016. In 2021, it proved insufficient, and Lungu lost. His loss can also be attributed to the fact that, as a result of the implementation of the featured infrastructure projects, Zambia became unsustainably indebted, and the projects were associated with non-transparency, corruption scandals, and fear of loss of Zambian sovereignty vis-à-vis China. At the same time, PF's severe economic mismanagement has negatively impacted the Zambian population through rising prices of goods or deteriorating social services delivery.

Conclusion

The international dimension of autocratization is a largely unexplored area in contemporary literature devoted to explaining the “third wave of autocratization” in the world. Much of the research has long focused on the intra-state factors influencing the quality of democracy, or scholars were preoccupied with the role of external democratic actors in democratization. The literature examining the international influence of authoritarian states on autocratization emerged rather recently and mostly focused on countries such as Russia, China, and Venezuela and their activities in their immediate neighborhood. The question of whether and how these states undermine democratic progress in more distant regions has received little scholarly attention. This has been largely due to the long-standing absence of good-quality data that would allow scholars to explore the issue using quantitative methods and, simultaneously, the challenges of conducting qualitative research on such a sensitive topic in the context of states undergoing autocratization. Thus, this thesis aimed to cover this knowledge gap regarding China’s influence in African hybrid regimes, a category encompassing most African states and regimes where, in theory, its projection should be most pronounced. Using mixed methods research, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, the author sought to determine *whether the People’s Republic of China influences the autocratization of African hybrid regimes.*

To avoid the conceptual and theoretical ambiguities that the current debate in the literature on international influences on autocracy offers, the author divided the research into *active* and *passive* influences (from the external power standpoint) based on Tansey’s conceptualization (Tansey, 2016a; 2016b). Active influences or *autocratic sponsorship* assume that the external actor actively engages in the domestic politics of a foreign country. These were further divided based on whether they were driven a) ideologically (*autocracy promotion*) or b) as a reaction to various democracy-promoting and regime-menacing incentives (*democracy resistance*) arising externally or domestically. Passive influences or *authoritarian diffusion* assume that the external actor unintentionally influences a regime abroad. The unintended motives are considered only with respect to the external power but not the recipient, thus taking into account the research underscoring domestic actors’ role in actively shaping cooperation with an autocratic actor according to

their agency and goals. This led to further division of the authoritarian diffusion into a) *autocratic linkage*, explaining autocratization through the density of ties to China; b) *emulation* that examined whether China was seen as a model of governance worthy of emulation; and c) *extraversion* examined as a strategy through which African elites use the presence of an external actor and their own dependence on its support to consolidate power and position over their domestic competitors. The author posed four research questions in light of the state of the research and the theoretical background:

1. *How does cooperation with the PRC affect the autocratization of hybrid regimes in Africa?*
2. *What mechanisms does the PRC utilize to project its influence on hybrid regimes in Africa?*
3. *How do African political elites employ the PRC engagement to consolidate their power?*
4. *In Zambia, is the Chinese political model of development perceived and presented as worth emulating? Who refers to China as a model? What elements of the model are seen as (un)worthy of emulation?*

Findings in this work showed that cooperation with China influences the autocratization of African hybrid regimes. However, this differs across the influence and mechanisms employed by Chinese and African actors. Ideologically motivated *autocracy promotion* operationalized as a number of CCP cadres and delegations' visits in Africa was **not confirmed** in the regression analysis as an influence explaining the autocratization of African hybrid regimes (H1). These findings lend credence to authors seeing this type of influence as a matter of the past (Tansey, 2016a; Weyland, 2017) or exerted by regimes other than China (Vanderhill, 2013). However, in this respect, as some scholars have shown (Benabdallah, 2020; Cabestan, 2022; Eisenman, 2023a; Herman, 2020), and as demonstrated in the Zambian case, the projection of such ideologically motivated influence by Beijing cannot be entirely rejected. The CCP has invested a lot of effort in building cross-party relations and associated knowledge sharing on a wide range of governance issues, which has been increasing under Xi's rule. In addition, inter-party cooperation and knowledge transfer may take longer to be reflected in the quality of democracy. Moreover, Beijing has only recently launched some major initiatives

in cross-party cooperation beyond the timeframe examined in the thesis. In addition, the increasing ideological dimension of China's influence was demonstrated through examining emulation in Zambia, where it emerged in the number of media reports from Beijing-organized training sessions in China for a broad spectrum of participants. These findings only further showed that the researchers should not disregard Beijing's ideological cooperation.

When it comes to *democracy resistance*, the findings showed that China indeed *responded to both external and domestic incentives, potentially menacing the survival of the African hybrid regimes*. However, these reactions differ substantially based on the incentives evoking them and the mechanisms employed as a response. Thus, with respect to hypothesis H2a, assuming that *China responds to Western democratic aid by increasing its development assistance*, the results demonstrated that Beijing reacted mainly to the democratic aid only when operationalized as a disbursement, not a commitment, thus considering its effectiveness rather than pledges. However, these results emerged somewhat puzzling as they demonstrate that when democratic ODA disbursed by the West increases, the aid provided by China decreases in response. The hypothesis was thus **rejected**. Nevertheless, these findings could be interpreted as Beijing acting as an alternative donor and stepping in when traditional donors deprive foreign regimes of their financial flows (as in the cases of Malawi and Ethiopia) and vice versa. In general, however, these results cannot be taken authoritatively due to the overall *weakness of the coefficient estimates* across the models and their very *low explanation power*.

As a trigger for China's aid provision, sanctions were statistically significant in electoral democracies only, while this significance increased during Xi's rule. Thus, hypothesis H2b, assuming that *China responds to Western sanctions by increasing its development aid*, was **confirmed only in a limited way**. Also, the positive reaction to the sanctions was rather expected in electoral authoritarianism, whose survival should be more menaced by coercive measures. Also, empirical evidence shows electoral authoritarianism getting development aid from Beijing when sanctioned (e.g., Rwanda in 2012 or Zimbabwe since the early 2000s). However, this does not mean that one cannot encounter cases of China increasing its aid to electoral democracies while facing Western sanctions, as it did in Ivory Coast.

Hypothesis H2c, assuming that *China responds to the pro-democracy mobilization by increasing its development aid*, was **confirmed**. Mobilization for democracy proved to be a significant determinant of China's development assistance in the regimes in the gray zone. As anticipated during Xi's rule, the effect maintained significance and also emerged as significant in electoral authoritarianism. This confirmed the anticipations regarding the fragility of electoral authoritarianism being menaced by the protests supporting democracy. However, the models' *explanation power and the coefficient estimates strength were weak*. Nevertheless, empirical evidence from African hybrid regimes (Ethiopia and Zambia) showed that Beijing was willing to provide development finance in reaction to the mobilization endangering the regime. Notably, Beijing's funding in the ICT sector demonstrated the potential to enhance the capacities for digital repression of aspiring African autocrats.

Chinese military support proved to be a powerful response to democratic aid disbursement. Thus, hypothesis H2d, assuming that *China responds to Western democratic aid by increasing its military support*, was **confirmed**. The results apply to both operationalizations of military support: military trade and the number of military projects. For trade, the results indicated a particularly strong reaction to the disbursement of development aid in the gray zone, particularly in electoral authoritarianism. China's response became even more significant during Xi's rule. In the case of military projects delivered, the results were similar. Yet, the coefficients were smaller, and the models' explanation power decreased. These results were again only applicable when it comes to the disbursement of aid, not the pledges, further showing that Beijing considers the effectiveness of democratic aid.

The sanctions imposed by the West on the African hybrid regimes were an insignificant trigger for China's military support. This applies both to military trade and military projects provided by Beijing. Thus, hypothesis H2e, assuming that *China responds to Western sanctions by increasing its military support*, was **rejected**. However, there is some empirical evidence that Beijing assists sanctioned regimes with its military support, as in the case of Sudan. These results may just indicate a lack of trend regarding Beijing's reaction to the sanction or employment of other modes of endorsement, like rhetorical backing and voting in the UN.

The last hypothesis (H2f) testing the democracy resistance by China assumed that *China responds to the pro-democracy mobilization by increasing its military support*. The hypothesis was **confirmed** only when the support was operationalized as military projects, not trade. The results show that mobilization for democracy became a determinant of China's military response in the gray zone regimes and electoral authoritarianism. However, contrary to expectations, mobilization for democracy was not statistically significant during Xi's rule. The Zimbabwean case supported the findings, where long-term military support from Beijing enhanced the regime's military capacities and survival. Zimbabwe may also serve as a case for military trade, further manifesting Beijing's will to sell its weapons to a foreign country facing domestic challenges. Similarly, the case of Zambia may again serve as an example wherein China provided anti-riot equipment and weapons in anticipation of the highly contested and PF regime challenging 2021 elections.

When it comes to passive international influence, *authoritarian diffusion* results demonstrated that cooperation with China led to an increase in autocratization in African hybrid regimes. The case of Zambia then indicated that this influence was far more active on the part of Beijing than anticipated in this work. The *autocratic linkages* to China were statistically significant in all four dimensions examined. Thus, it can be argued that the increasing density of ties to China, be they economic, intergovernmental, technocratic and social, or informational, increased autocratization. Hypothesis H3 was thus **confirmed**. The impact of these linkages was statistically significant, especially when considering the entire gray zone, except for technocratic and social linkages, operationalized as the Chinese workers' migration flows. Here, the effect remained statistically significant only in electoral democracies and the gray zone under Xi's rule.

The Zambian case demonstrated that China created an opportunity for Zambian ruling elites to implement their authoritarian ambitions in all the linkages dimensions examined. On the one hand, *economic linkage* to China has enabled Zambian governments to pursue their development agenda, especially in the strategic mining sector. On the other hand, at the same time, the extensive cooperation in the construction sector also gave the ruling elites an outlet to pursue their short-term career ambitions, which they used both for personal enrichment and to stay in power. The unsustainable indebtedness (not only) to China then

destabilized the country's political and economic development. This was particularly true during the PF rule when Zambia was rapidly autocratizing.

As for *intergovernmental ties*, these have shown resilience and growth despite the turbulent period from 2006 to 2011, when anti-China populism was on the rise, fueled by the then-opposition PF and Michael Sata. Presidential visits aside, these ties were also strengthened by inter-party cooperation between the CCP and the ruling Zambian parties. At the same time, the personality of Kenneth Kaunda contributed to their maintenance and eventual restoration after the period of populist campaigns. Over the years, the ruling leaders manifested diplomatic support for each other on various issues. Beijing has also strengthened these ties with material assistance to Zambian governments and incumbent parties ahead of the general elections. Relations between the ruling elites then, especially under Lungu, reached a point of such support that the Zambian leader demonstrated more accountability to the external actor than to Zambians, shielding Beijing from the criticism in the context of non-transparent and unsustainable debt and corruption scandals.

Migration linkages (or *technocratic and social linkages*) have also intensified over time. This was mainly related to increasing cooperation in the construction sector, bringing many Chinese workers to Zambia. Simultaneously, growing connectedness between states meant that more Chinese entrepreneurs entered the country, competing with local traders and threatening their livelihoods. This influx of migrants into the cities and poor working conditions in Chinese mines then contributed to the rise of the populist PF and carried it to power in 2011. In addition, the role of Chinese business people proved problematic due to their corrupt interference in political campaigns. The increasing criminal activities targeting Chinese nationals have then given way to their mobilization and politicization through various associations tied to Beijing. Consequently, this challenged the idea of the migrants as an uncoordinated force unreflective of China's political interests in Zambia. The active influence was also noted in Beijing's increasing efforts to present China in a good light through funding trips to the PRC involving grassroots engagement with the Chinese population and culture.

The *information linkage* between Zambia and China has increased over time, particularly under Xi. These close ties not only revealed a willingness to share

sensitive information on the part of the Zambian government but also reflected Beijing's efforts to wield greater influence over how it is presented abroad. In general, one needs to underscore the implemented projects in the ICT sector, allowing the Zambian government to improve the surveillance of dissenting voices in society. Beyond these initiatives, Beijing became extraordinarily influential in the media sector. *First*, China's StarTimes, in partnership with Zambia's national broadcaster ZNBC, formed a joint venture – TopStar – to implement the country's migration from analog to digital broadcasting, with the Chinese side acquiring a majority stake. This deal also gave StarTimes control over the digital content. *Second*, in the print media, this influence became particularly evident in the state-owned ZDML through content sharing and the circulation of commentaries written by Chinese ambassadors. Moreover, the Chinese ambassador even started awarding Zambian journalists for their positive reporting on China. Such deepening cooperation helped to present China and its engagement in Zambia in an uncritical manner. Furthermore, collaboration in this sector was fostered by an increase in opportunities for media professionals (mainly from the state-owned ZDML) to attend training sessions in China, where they were, among other things, exposed to the Chinese model of media governance. The outputs of these training sessions were overwhelmingly positive reports describing the experience of traveling in China and socialization into the Chinese worldview, governance system, and media management. Such a manifestation of information linkage further challenged the understanding these ties as passive only.

Like the autocratic linkage to China, *emulation* as a form of passive influence has also manifested to be more active. Through content analysis of the articles printed in the Zambian press, this influence emerged in the media frame, depicting China as a model of development. In this regard, however, it became necessary to distinguish between who speaks and writes about China as a model and the context of the publication of the stories. Thus, one needs to consider whether Zambian authors or the Chinese ones wrote the stories or reflected the statements the Zambian or Chinese actors made about the Chinese model. Or whether the articles emerged due to visits and training sessions in China, thus socializing with Chinese ideas about economic development and governance systems.

First, Zambian authors presented China positively as a country that had not followed Western dogmatic neoliberal policies but had its own development path, resulting in its economic success and international power status. The suggested areas for emulation then mainly concerned the socio-economic features and reforms behind China's progress. Conversely, the authoritarian nature of its regime was described with caution regarding the possibilities of emulation. Those elements of the Chinese governance system perceived as worthy of emulation concerned its effectiveness, e.g., stance on corruption or meritocracy system. The main actors calling for emulation in these cases were the articles' authors and the Zambian political elites.

Second, other stories presenting China as a model observed more interference by various Chinese actors. This included statements by Chinese officials who spoke openly about the Chinese model and sometimes even called for the emulation of some of its elements in Zambia. These often contradicted the statements implying that the model is not transferable elsewhere and that a country needs to search for its own development path, as China does not impose its development experience. Similarly, these included comments written and printed in the ZDML by Chinese ambassadors describing China as a development model. The elements suggested for emulation in the Zambian context included the role of education, science and technology, SEZs, and infrastructure in the development. When it comes to the authoritarian nature of the Chinese regime, emulation was not suggested, yet the ZDML became a welcomed space for the Chinese actors to underscore the superiority of the Chinese form of governance over liberal democracy.

Third, the most prominent active dimension of emulation was noted in the reports printed as a result of visits to China. These were not limited to the stories written by media staff but reflected Beijing's efforts to train and educate a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including officials, development experts, students, academics, and state officials. In this regard, the participants were trained in the Chinese experience in economic development or party and media governance and introduced to the Chinese understanding of democracy and one-party rule. The immediate outputs of this interaction were stories printed in the newspapers referring to the positive inspiration from this experience and suggestions for emulation. These emulation-worthy elements again included the socio-economic dimension of China's rapid

economic transformation. However, this experience led some participants to see China's authoritarian regime as superior to democracy. The long-term impacts of these training sessions on the participants and their work are yet to be found in Zambia, and hence, the extent to which these lessons learned are emulated in practice. Nevertheless, considering China's active involvement, these findings call for further examination of ideologically driven emulation and its reconsideration as a passive form of external influence.

The final passive influence examined was the strategy of *extraversion*. Hypothesis H4, which assumed a *relationship between the volume of Chinese lending in the transport and power sectors and the election of an incumbent*, was **not confirmed**. Although the relationship was negative and Chinese finance indeed decreased the chances of alternation in power in African hybrid regimes, the effect was not statistically significant. This may be due to the negative impact of Chinese projects on the population in African states living in their proximity, as demonstrated by some scholars. Nevertheless, despite the lack of significant effect, literature shows that there is a great effort on the part of African elites to instrumentalize Chinese financial flows strategically to retain their power. In Zambia, it was demonstrated that the ruling elites largely employed this strategy. Therefore, examining the extraversion in the context of China's engagement in Africa should not be dismissed. Chinese loans financing overpriced infrastructure projects became not only an opportunity for getting kickbacks going to the pockets of the ruling elites and rewarding the network of their supporters. They also served the ruling party as a visible demonstration of its performance in the eyes of the voters. The increasing dependency on China and other creditors and the unsustainable debt burden were not of such a big concern for the ruling elites interested in short-term personal gains. This strategy was especially employed under Lungu's rule during the 2015, 2016, and 2021 elections. In this thesis, it became demonstrated in the examined articles published in the state-owned ZDML, reducing the Chinese projects to a government initiative and turning them into a PF instrument to showcase its performance to mobilize voters. In 2015 and 2016, this strategy may have given Lungu some coveted advantage over the opposition. However, in 2021, it proved insufficient, and Lungu lost. His loss can also be attributed to the fact that, as a result of the implementation of the featured infrastructure projects, Zambia became

unsustainably indebted, and the projects associated with non-transparency, corruption scandals, and fear of loss of Zambian sovereignty vis-à-vis China. At the same time, PF's severe economic mismanagement negatively impacted the Zambian population through rising prices of goods or deteriorating social services delivery. All of it, of course, became worsened by the pandemic hitting Zambia's already struggling economy very hard.

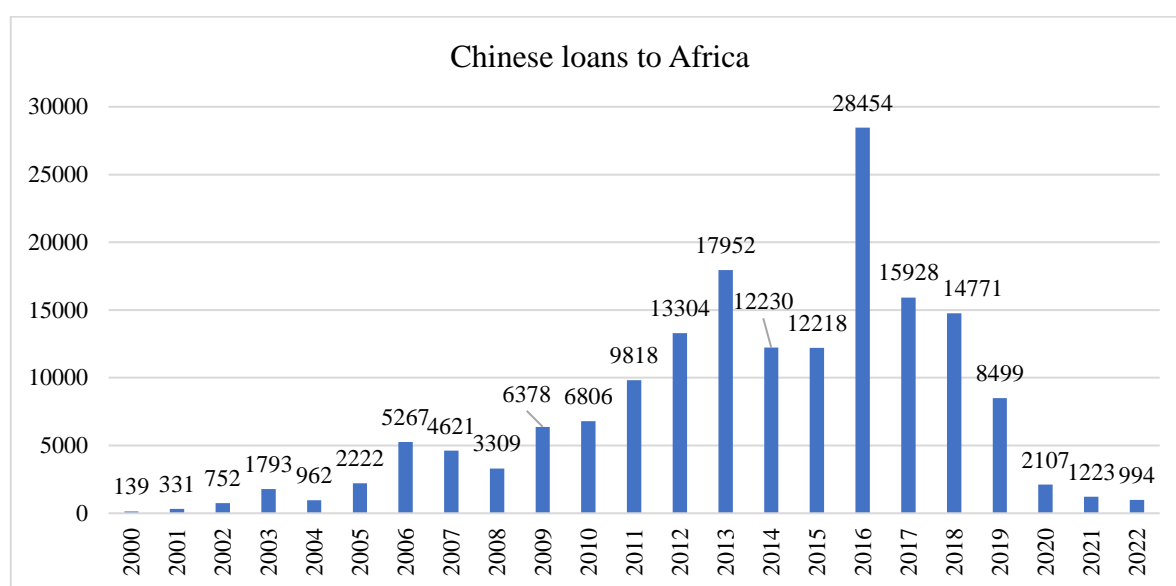
This case calls into question to what extent the extraversion strategy is useful in an environment that, despite autocratizing, is still competitive, and the incumbent must put a great effort to "sell" its performance through the projects and satisfy a bigger coalition needed for winning the elections. The extraversion strategy is under-researched in Sino-African relations. In particular, there is a lack of understanding of how it operates in more competitive settings like Zambia. So far, the research has mainly focused on the cases of less competitive hybrid regimes, particularly Angola (Corkin, 2013; 2019), with the absence of experience with alternation in power through elections. This incentive for further research should also be supported by the regression results, showing that it was mainly in electoral authoritarianism, where Chinese finance reduced the chances of alternation in power. Conversely, in electoral democracies, these chances increased, further emphasizing the need to understand how this strategy plays out in more competitive contexts.

Overall, the international authoritarian influence examined in this thesis can be described as an *autocratic synergy* between African states and China. Thus, on one side is the authoritarian power, China, which actively seeks to influence African elites (both political and social) ideologically and responds to incentives that have the potential to threaten the regime abroad; on the other side, African ruling elites welcoming Chinese alternative finance free from political conditionalities while offering opacity and, thus, opportunities for their own enrichment, distribution of patronage, as well as control and financial advantages over the opposition.

However, in this regard, the question remains about where cooperation between African states and China will go from here. The growing debt burden stemming from overborrowing and non-performing loans of many Chinese projects, with the pandemic and the war in Ukraine bringing further severe fiscal distress to many low-income economies, revealed this cooperation's limits. Also, China's economic

decline may have further undermined its will to finance economic infrastructure projects worldwide. Some African states, including Zambia, have hit the limits on borrowing further from China, experiencing protracted debt restructuring negotiations. Recent studies and data clearly demonstrate a significant drop in Chinese lending in Africa (Moses et al., 2023) and a reorientation from financing infrastructure to bailing out countries from their debts to China (Parks et al., 2023). Although this trend was evident before the pandemic, COVID-19 accelerated it substantially in the last three years, showing that a reversal of this pattern is not yet in sight (Figure 30).

Figure 30: Chinese lending to Africa (commitments; USD mn.; 2000 – 2022)



Source: Boston University Global Development Policy Center, 2023

According to some scholars (Ray, 2023), this indicates a shift in the focus of this finance towards “small and beautiful” initiatives away from large infrastructure projects, which China became reluctant to finance through its loans. Also, recently, more profit-driven financing through PPP started to emerge and gave rise to a debate about the possible implications of these deals for political and economic relations (van Wieringen & Zajontz, 2023; Zhang, 2023). If they persist into the future, these changes may also mean that China is less willing to support financially risky and economically unviable projects and those serving to empower the ruling elites regardless of their economic returns. How, if at all, these recent developments will reflect in the autocratic synergy between African governments and Beijing, and

how will they manifest in China's role as an autocratic promoter and democracy resister, or its perception as a model in Africa is a question for future research.

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Printed Zambian Newspapers

Zambia Daily Mail Ltd.

The Post

The Mast

Appendix

List of Appendixes

Appendix 1: Presidents of Zambia – an overview

Appendix 2: List of respondents (sector, code, date, mode)

Appendix 3: Codebook for the content analysis of media frames in the Zambian newspapers

Appendix 4: Section dedicated to TAZARA construction in the National Museum in Lusaka (2019)

Appendix 5: Mongu–Kalabo Road (July 2020)

Appendix 6: Examples of cartoons printed in The Mast depicting the Chinese “investors” in 2018 and 2019

Appendix 7: Example of a cartoon printed in The Mast depicting the preferential treatment of the Chinese “investors” in Zambia in 2018

Appendix 8: Example of a cartoon printed in The Mast depicting the Chinese language barrier of the “investors” in Zambia in 2018

Appendix 9: Examples of the special supplement issues in the ZDML in 2009

Appendix 10: Examples of comments by the Chinese Ambassador in the ZDML in 2016

Appendix 11: Examples of the special supplement issues in The Post in 2007

Appendix 12: Examples of articles printed in Chinese in The Post in 2014

Appendix 13: Examples of reports printed in the Zambian newspapers from the visits to China (ZDML: 2004, 2015; The Post: 2005)

Appendix 14: Examples of editorials printed in The Post presenting China as an MoD (2004 and 2015)

Appendix 15: Example of a visual element in the Chinese special supplements printed in the Zambian press (ZDML 2013)

Appendix 16: Examples of articles and photo supplements in the ZDML framing China as an “instrument” (2015 and 2016)

Appendix 17: Screenshots from Edgar Lungu’s Facebook account during the 2021 campaign

Appendix 1: Presidents of Zambia – an overview

Name	Party	Years in office
<i>Kenneth Kaunda</i>	UNIP	1964 – 1991
<i>Frederick Chiluba</i>	MMD	1991 – 2002
<i>Levy Mwanawasa</i>	MMD	2002 – 2008
<i>Rupiah Banda</i>	MMD	2008 – 2011
<i>Michael Sata</i>	PF	2011 – 2014
<i>Guy Scott</i>	PF	2014 – 2015 (interim)
<i>Edgar Lungu</i>	PF	2015 – 2021
<i>Hakainde Hichilema</i>	UPND	2021 –????

Source: Author

Appendix 2: List of respondents (sector, code, date, mode)

Sector (total n)	Respondent's code	Date of interview	Mode
Journalists (independent media) (3)	1	22.07.2020	<i>Phone call</i>
	2	30.07.2020	<i>Phone call</i>
	3	23.07.2020	In-person
Journalists (state media) (2)	4	30.07.2020	In-person
	5	30.07.2020	In-person
Scholars/ Analysts (3)	6	31.07.2020	<i>Phone call</i>
	7	23.07.2020	In-person
	8	26.07.2020	In-person
Civil society organizations and activists (4)	9	29.07.2020	In-person
	10	29.07.2020	In-person
	11	28.07.2020	<i>Phone call</i>
	12	27.08.2020	<i>Phone call</i>
Political opposition representatives (3)	13	01.08.2020	In-person
	14	03.09.2020	In-person
	15	07.09.2020	In-person
State officers (3)	16	21.08.2020	<i>Phone call</i>
	17	28.09.2020	<i>Phone call</i>
	18	22.10.2020	<i>Phone call</i>
Ruling party member (1)	19	12.08.2020	In-person
Business person (1)	20	04.08.2020	In-person
Foreign donor (1)	21	21.10.2020	In-person

Source: Author

Appendix 3: Codebook for the content analysis of media frames in the Zambian newspapers

Elements coded	Codes/operationalization
Type of the newspapers	ZDML; The Post; The Mast
Year	2003... 2019
Date (detail)	e.g., 12.03.2008
The author of the article	e.g., Ernest Chanda, Hone Siame, CNN, Xinhua..
Genre	e.g., editorials, comments, features, general news, special supplement
Foreign media	1 = yes; 0 = no
Frontpage	1 = yes; 0 = no
Dominant frame (identified)	DP (Development partner), PP (Political partner)....
Secondary frame (identified)	DP (Development partner), PP (Political partner)....
Frame elements (Entman 1993):	
Problem definition	What is caused by a causal agent, i.e. what is the core problem of the story; what are the costs and benefits resulting from the actions of the causal agent?
Diagnosis of causes	Identification of the forces that stand behind a particular issue; who bears the responsibility for the fallouts; explanation of why the causal agent acts the way he/she does
Moral judgment: dominant frame	Positive/neutral/negative
Moral judgment: secondary frame (if identified)	Positive/neutral/negative
Moral judgment: commented	Description of causal agents and adjectives used in relation to them and their actions; are the actions judged positively, neutrally, or negatively?
Suggested remedies	What options are listed as possible solutions to the problem; how are the offered solutions justified; what effect is expected from the listed solutions?
Type of sources (identified):	
The Zambian government and governmental agencies	ZGOV
The Chinese government and governmental agencies	ChGOV
Foreign government and governmental agencies	FGOV
Chinese businesses and entrepreneurs (state and private)	ChB

Zambian businesses and entrepreneurs (state and private)	ZB
Foreign businesses and entrepreneurs (state and private)	FB
Zambian unions, business associations and workers	U&A&W
Zambian political opposition	ZPO
Zambian local government and traditional authorities	ZLG&TA
Chinese local government	ChLG
Law enforcement (police, law courts)	LE
Zambian scholars and analysts	ZSA
Foreign scholars and analysts	FSA
Chinese scholars and analysts	ChSA
Chinese media	ChM
Zambian media	ZM
Foreign media	FM
Foreign NGOs	FNGO
Zambian NGOs	ZNGO
Chinese NGOs	ChNGO
International organizations and international financial institutions	IOs and IFIs
Zambian citizens	ZCit
Chinese citizens	ChCit

Source: Author; Entman 1993

Appendix 4: Section dedicated to TAZARA construction in the National Museum in Lusaka (2019)





Photos: Author

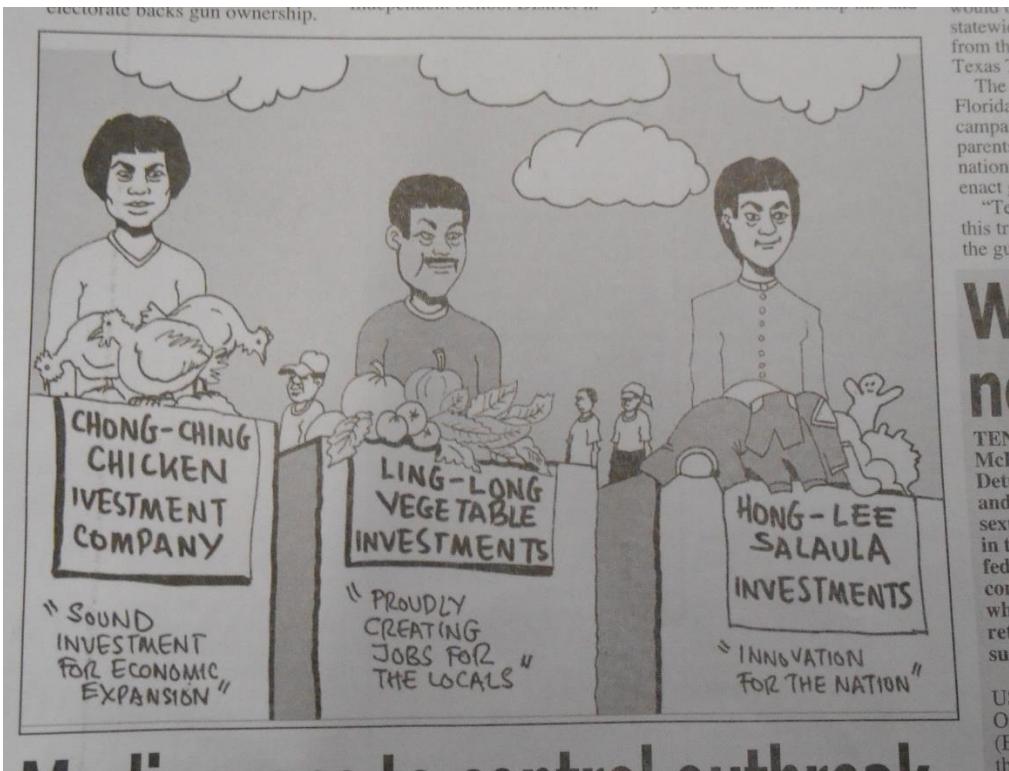
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Photo: Author

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Photos: Author

Appendix 10: Examples of comments by the Chinese Ambassador in the ZDML in 2016

ZAMBIA DAILY MAIL, Friday, March 4, 2016

Chinese economy's impact on China-Zambia economic relations

China's share of global GDP has now reached 15 percent

By YANG YOUNG
Lusaka

The world economy is now at the crucial stage of profound adjustment and a shift in force that drives the growth. And the world is yet to fully grasp the impact of the global financial crisis.

Against this background, the Chinese economy has entered into the new normal shifting from fast quantitative expansion to a stage of pursuing higher quality and efficiency.

According to the data released recently by the Chinese government, the Chinese economy grew 6.9 percent in 2015, which still remained within the reasonable range of development speed.

Finally China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) registered a median-high growth rate with a GDP increase of over US\$500 billion, and continues to be one of the fastest of the world's major economies.

China's share of global GDP has now reached 15 percent. As the world economy is sluggish, its growth rate is more than satisfactory. Employment increased steadily, income kept a constant rise, and prices also remained stable.

Secondly, the economic structure is continuously optimized. This is mainly reflected in the following: the structure of demand continued to improve, industrial restructuring kept advancing. Consumption's contribution to growth increased by 15.4 percentage points, 30.3 percentage points higher than that of investment.

The share of the service sector in GDP rose by 2.4 percentage points, 16.7 percentage points higher than the industrial sector. Per unit GDP energy consumption was lowered by 5.6 percent.

The industrial value of high-tech industries was up 14.2 percent year-on-year, growing much faster than traditional industries. The regional structure is more coordinated and balanced. The urban-rural structure is continuously optimized. These changes are beneficial for the sustainable development of the Chinese economy.

Thirdly, China remains a major driving force for global economic growth. In 2015, China contributed one quarter to the world economic growth. China's imports totaled US\$1.68 trillion, still the second largest in the world.

The outbound direct investment reached US\$127.6 billion, up by 10 percent year-on-year. Chinese nationals made 120 million overseas visits, up by 12 percent, and spent more than RMB 1 trillion overseas, registering an increase of 20 percent. The volume and global share of China's imports of major commodities from international market continued to grow.

Looking into 2016, China has the confidence and capability to maintain medium-to-high level growth. The Chinese economy enjoys great potential, resilience and ample space for policy adjustment. The first reason is that there is a more solid material foundation after over 10 years of economic growth.

China now has a more complete industrial system and a more efficient infrastructure network, with its more than 230 types of industrial products and operational mileage of high-speed rail ranking the first in the world.

The second is based on the high-end orientation of production

factors. New members of the workforce have about 13-year schooling on average, with over seven million college graduates who enter into the labour market annually.

The amount of research and development expense of the society is more than 14 trillion RMB, which ranks the second in the world. China's annual investment in innovation projects has become the first in the world.

The third is because of the vast market space. Consumption has become the strongest driving force of Chinese economic growth. China has the largest number of mobile internet users and 4G network users worldwide, which stand at 680 million and over 100 million respectively.

At the same time, China's urbanisation rate has now reached 56 percent, with 20 million of rural population moving into urban areas annually, pushing up demands in investment and consumption.

China has become an important engine of the world economy and will continue to make positive contribution to the world economic growth. In the coming five years, it is estimated that China will import more than US\$10 trillion of goods, and its demand for commodities will keep a stable growth.

Chinese investment abroad is expected to exceed US\$500 billion. Chinese imports of Zambian products and investment in Zambia will accordingly continue to expand.

At the same time, China plans to increase overseas cooperation in production capacity and equipment manufacturing, which is beneficial for Zambia to speed up its industrialisation and urbanisation causes. At the Johannesburg Summit of Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) successfully held last December, the Chinese side announced that China would offer US\$60 billion of funding support to African countries including Zambia. Currently, the Chinese and Zambian sides are actively engaged in identifying co-operation projects.

It can be anticipated that the co-operation potential between the two countries in the fields of infrastructure construction, energy tourism, agricultural processing will be further released within the framework of FOCAC, creating more opportunities for socio-economic development of Zambia. China is willing to work with Zambia to take advantage of the new opportunities for bilateral pragmatic co-operation, provide new driving forces for economic growth of the two countries and jointly open up a new prospect of development.

The author is Chinese Ambassador to Zambia.



SPECIAL CHINA-ZAMBIA Supplement

ZAMBIA DAILY MAIL

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2016

FORUM

聯合合作 論壇 非洲 新 發展 論壇

The Johannesburg Summit on Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

Sommet de Johannesburg du Forum sur la Coopération sino-africaine

4-5 December 2015 3-4 Desember 2015 4-5 Desember 2015

CHINA'S President Xi Jinping and African heads of state had a group photo during the FOCAC Johannesburg Summit.

Foreword

By He Mr Yang Young, Chinese Ambassador to Zambia

OCCASIONALLY, the world economy is now at the crucial stage of profound adjustment and a shift in force that drives the growth. And the world is yet to fully grasp the impact of the global financial crisis.

Against this background, the Chinese economy has entered into the new normal shifting from fast quantitative expansion to a stage of pursuing higher quality and efficiency.

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Photos: Author

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Photos: Author

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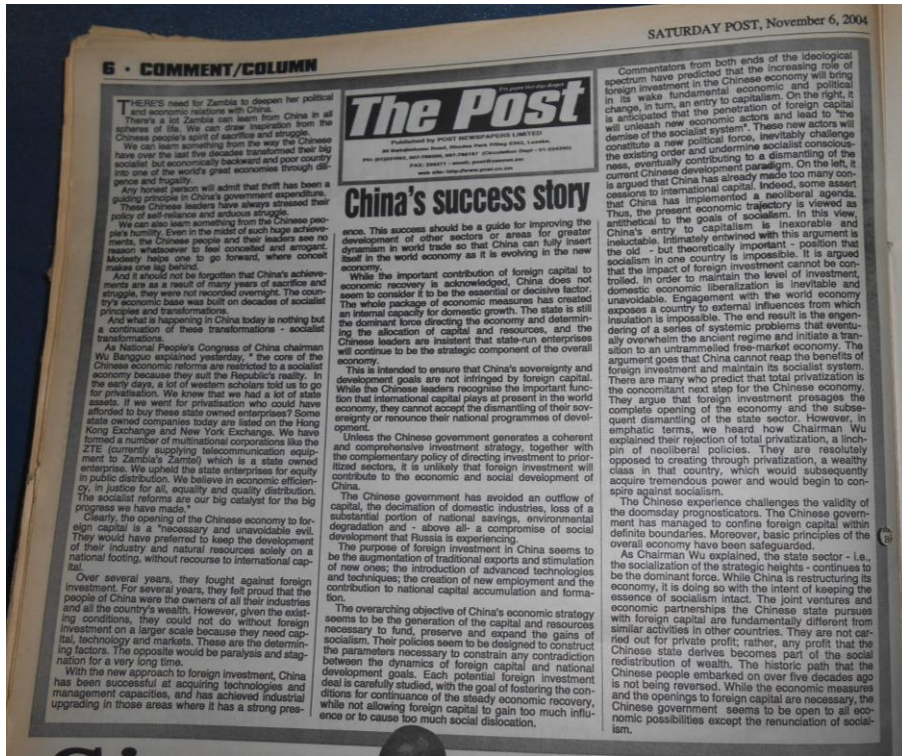


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Photo: Author

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Mufuchani Bridge ends Kafue river nightmare

AS PF delivers yet another infrastructure masterpiece

ISSUE

PHOTO: MUKWANDA LILYPA

PHOTO: MUKWANDA LILYPA

PHOTO: MUKWANDA LILYPA

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PHOTO: MUKWANDA LILYPA

100 metres bridge will carry access for the people to social activities such as schools, clinics and markets.

I am particularly pleased that my Government has continued to deliver projects we promised to our people. You will recall that, it is barely a month when I handed over two completed major road and bridge projects in Western Province, that is the Mungu-Kalabo road and the Stone Bridge.

"I am glad that these projects were immediately delivered to the people of Western Province and Zambia despite setbacks as may be expected with projects of such a magnitude. We do what we promise," President Lungu said.

The absence of a permanent crossing at Mufuchani was not only a hindrance to the growth and development of Kafue but it also posed serious social problems for the people of that area who rely on a pontoon and dug-out canoes to cross.

"For many years, people relied on a pontoon to cross the crocodile-infested Kafue River while others resorted to using dug-out canoes, particularly when the pontoon was malfunctioning. Many of our people lost their lives in accidents while trying to cross the river."

As Government, we could not allow the problems associated with lack of a permanent crossing here to continue. The new Mufuchani Bridge is a living monument and testimony of the PF government's commitment to improving people's living standards through provision of infrastructure. Those who mock you that you can't do it, tell them that here the bridge and road mean more than just eating but saving lives," President Lungu said.

In order to realise the full economic benefits of the bridge and envisaged future developments, President Lungu says Government will soon upgrade the road from Mufuchani, which is the earth road to bitumen standards.

The Kafue City Council also has plans to develop the area by putting up a new town in the same area with private developers already on the ground to establish a housing complex to provide decent accommodation for the residents and other towns.

President Lungu expressed sadness to learn that some unscrupulous people have already started vandalising electricity poles and other installations on the bridge that has been constructed at a huge cost.

He said the retrospective act forced the RDA to spend additional funds to replace vandalised cables and other installations to reinforce the bridge and prevent vandals from causing further damage.

President Lungu directed the provincial administration to work with the Copperbelt police command to establish a police post in the area and target residents of Kawama and Mufuchani townships to report the vandals to the police.

Such acts need to be condemned in the very strongest terms because they amount to sabotage. Not only are the vandals reversing Government's efforts to improve infrastructure, but they are also negating development and endangering the lives of road users by compromising safety features that have been provided on the bridge," President Lungu said.

The head of State revealed that the road covering approximately 48 kilometres will be constructed to run from Mufuchani bridge to join the Ndola-Mufuchani road and also from Mufuchani bridge to join the Ndola-Kitwe dual carriageway near Zanjan.



WORKS on the construction of the Mufuchani Bridge across the Kafue River.

PICTURE: MUKWANDA LILYPA

This is aimed at providing a by-pass for travellers from Ndola to Mufuchani without passing through Kitwe's town centre.

Mr Lungu said the PF administration will continue with its drive to provide the necessary infrastructure to the Zambians people throughout the country.

"Our commitment stems from our firm belief that infrastructure such as roads and bridges is a catalyst to national development," President Lungu said.

President Lungu showed accolades on the World Bank for funding the construction of Mufuchani and Chitwa's Michael Chilufya Sata bridges and its continued support to infrastructure development in the country.

"As we move the country forward, there will always be those who have no idea how Government work and who will perpetually criticise our efforts. Ignore them and focus on issues that matter. You should also be asking them to point at what they have done for Zambia."

"We have a job to do and they have noise to make. As we seek another five-year mandate, we can only promise that we shall do more for our people who have given us tremendous trust. We shall return your trust and together we shall win," President Lungu said.

Minister of Works and Supply Yanika Mukanga, in a speech read for him by Minister of Justice Ngosa Simbyakula, commended the contractor China Honan RDA and the rest of the people that were involved

for delivering equality product. Copperbelt Minister Moseya Musenga said the people of the Copperbelt would remain indebted to the PF administration for the unprecedented development taking place in the province that include the upgrading of the Kafue-Chingola road into a dual carriageway, the C400 road project and the full rehabilitation of the Chingola-Sata road.

"We are proud to have been part of the Mufuchani Bridge, which was commissioned on Saturday by our loved working President Lungu," he said.

"We are proud to have been part of the Mufuchani Bridge, which was commissioned on Saturday by our loved working President Lungu," he said.

of Kitwe are happy that PF administration has continued delivering the major projects promised the citizenry before assuming office.

"On behalf of the Kafue residents, I would like to thank the PF government for yet again delivering on its campaign promises by constructing the Mufuchani Bridge, which was commissioned on Saturday by our loved working President Lungu," he said.

There is no doubt that infrastructure such as roads and bridges the PF is pushing across the country catalyses to national economic development.

El Niño weather



C-400 transforms Copperbelt roads

Roads have opened up unreachable areas and made movement of goods and people easier

Infrastructure is the backbone of any nation. It is the foundation upon which economic growth is built. In Zambia, the C-400 project is a landmark achievement that has transformed the Copperbelt region, opening up previously unreachable areas and making the movement of goods and people easier.

The C-400 project, a dual carriageway road, has opened up previously unreachable areas and made movement of goods and people easier. It has also improved the quality of life for the people of the region by providing access to social services and markets.

The project has also opened up new opportunities for business and investment in the region. It has attracted investors and created jobs, contributing to the economic growth of the country.

The C-400 project is a testament to the commitment of the PF government to improve the living standards of the Zambian people through the provision of infrastructure. It is a project that has brought hope and progress to the Copperbelt region.

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EXAMINATION COUNCIL OF ZAMBIA PUBLIC NOTICE

VERIFICATION OF ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS FOR 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS

The Examinations Council of Zambia will be verifying Grade 12 academic qualifications for persons wishing to participate in the forthcoming 2015 General Elections to be held on 11th August 2015. The verification exercise will start on 14th March 2015 and end on 13th May 2015.

The verification exercise will be conducted during working days only (Monday to Friday) at the Examinations Council of Zambia Service Centre, Plot 1028 Masuku Field, Woodlands, Lusaka.

REQUIREMENTS

The following will be required for admission to the Examinations Council of Zambia:

- Completed verification form (to be found at ECZ)
- Two (2) photographs of Qualifications
- Deposit slips for fees paid
- Copy of National Registration Card or Valid Passport

After verification, the following documents will be collected from the Examinations Council of Zambia:

- Letter of Confirmation
- Verified copies of the Certificates

SCHEDULE OF FEES

The following non-refundable fees will be paid on submission of documents:

- Verification - K170.00 per copy
- Verification and transmission of foreign qualification - K1 070.00 per Certificate
- Letter of Confirmation - K20.00 per copy

NOTES

- When collecting the confirmation letter and the Verified copies of Certificates, one will be required to present the Original Certificate(s) and National Registration Card or Valid Passport to the Examinations Council of Zambia.
- Those who already have verified copies of Certificates should present the copies of the Certificates to the Examinations Council of Zambia so that they are issued with a Confirmation letter.
- Payment of fees should be made at any ZANACO Branch using the ZANACO bill must deposit slip.

ISSUED BY: The Director
Examinations Council of Zambia
Halls Building
P.O. Box 5432
LUSAKA

This advertisement was first issued on 14th March, 2015.

Likewise, good roads will help Government deliver farm inputs such as fertiliser and seed on time.

The two-way traffic of quick delivery of farm inputs and transporting the produce to the market is crucial for enhancement of food security not only in the province, but the nation as a whole.

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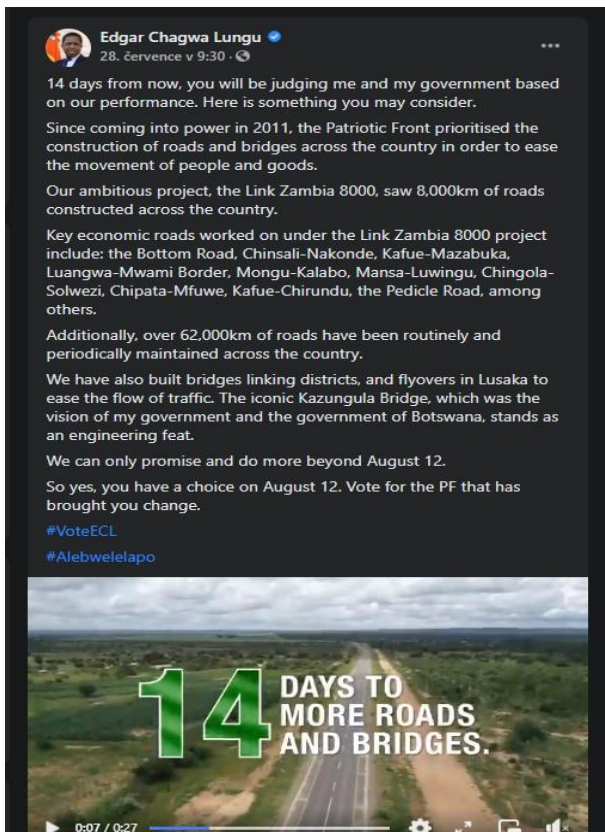
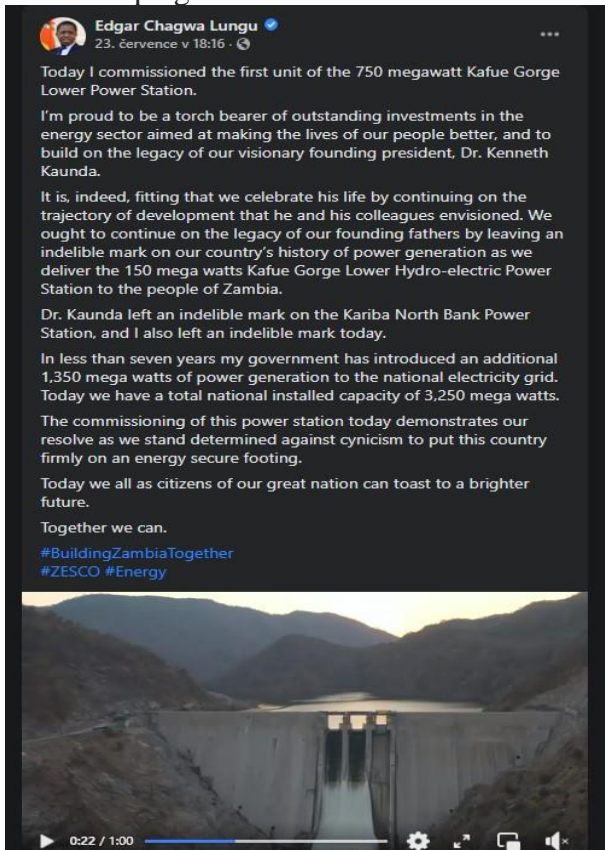
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Photos: Author

Appendix 17: Screenshots from Edgar Lungu's Facebook account during the 2021 campaign



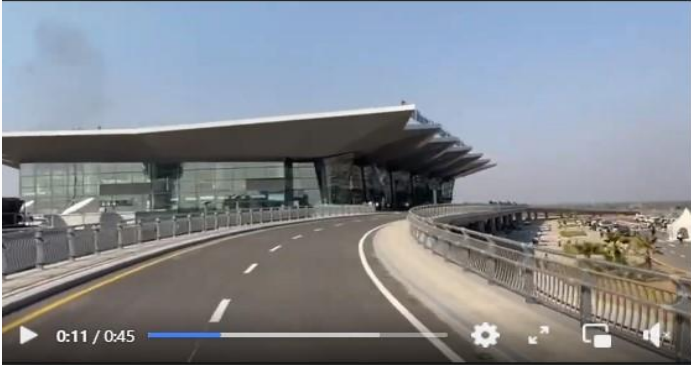
Edgar Chagwa Lungu ✓
 5. srpna v 18:04 · 🌐

Today was another historical day for our great nation when I commissioned the Simon Mwansa Kapwepwe International Airport in Ndola, Copperbelt Province.

Through optimism and hard work we have turned our dreams into reality, for we have not just built an airport, but a marvel.

Today we have proved once again that we mean business - we deliver what we promise.

[#BuildingZambiaTogether](#)



0:11 / 0:45

👍❤️ 5,1 tis. 1,2 tis. komentářů 273 sdílení

Edgar Chagwa Lungu ✓
 4. srpna v 13:01 · 🌐

With eight days to go before you make that important decision, I want to remind you that we are the party that brought you change and now promising to build on the strong foundation we have laid.

For decades, economic diversification - to take our country away from its over-dependence on copper - has been pursued by successive governments but with little success.

However, my government has successfully put our country on a path to economic diversification where agriculture, tourism, energy, manufacturing and ICT will drive our economy.

Our plan to diversify our economy is clearly outlined in the Seventh National Development Plan, which we have backed with action by establishing Multi Facility Economic Zones and industrial parks.

Our vision is to boost manufacturing and reduce on imports, which will create jobs locally and improve our economy.

We believe the future of our country lies in manufacturing – adding value to our raw materials.


The industrial parks and Multi-Facility Economic Zones are already employing thousands of people and injecting millions of dollars into our economy.

Our plan is to upscale industrialisation and establish more Multi-Facility Economic Zones and industrial parks.

We can only promise and do more.

On August 12, vote for the party that made it happen.

[#LeavingNoOneBehind](#)



0:32 / 0:56

Edgar Chagwa Lungu 57 min · 🌐

Today, with only three days before the general elections, I will be commissioning another major milestone in the aviation industry for our country - the new terminal at the Kenneth Kaunda International Airport.

Since 2011, my government has taken major steps in improving the air transport sector.

We have upgraded the Livingstone airport to international standard, and built a whole new airport in Ndola, which I commissioned last week.

Our goal is to make Zambia a hub of air transport in the region.

My government has also invested in the improvement of airstrips, particularly at tourism and commercial centres.

Our dream for our country to have its own airline is also within reach.

My government has made yesterday's dreams into reality.

Our aviation industry is now set to take to the skies.

Together we have achieved our dreams; together we can do more.

Vote for the party that has brought you change.

[#VoteECL](#)
[#Abwelelepo](#)

Source: Lungu, 2021