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# Optimism Versus Pessimism: An Exploratory Analysis of China in Zambian Media

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*The huge interest in Zambia-China relations globally, both in academia and popular press, inspires several inquisitions. How have these relations changed and panned out in the present, from a Zambian media perspective? Would a Zambian media approach help provide insights into the ebb and flow of perceptions about China inside Zambia? What can we gather from the Zambian media on the September 2011 regime change in Zambia vis-à-vis China's engagement? In other words, how did Zambian media craft perceptions on and of China in the era of late president Michael Chilufya Sata's leadership? To answer these questions, this exploratory study applies a framing theoretical approach to analysis of content from three Zambian news media: Daily Mail, The Post Online and Zambian Watchdog. The objective is to offer perspectives from this sample of the Zambian media scene with a view to determining optimistic versus pessimistic perceptions on China's image. Selected international media are included for a transient, loose comparative comment. The news framing analysis is fore grounded by literature review to set the background and context in which the selected media reported China between January 2013 and January 2014. After a systematic content review, this article concludes that the three newspapers frame China in more optimistic than pessimistic terms. The article concludes by arguing for the need for audience-based fieldwork as an important next step.*

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## Introduction

Even the most cursory of glances at the Africa-China relations would yield Zambia as one among few other African countries to have attracted an above-average amount of media reporting and scholarly research output. Alden (2007:72) for instance characterizes Zambia as 'China's perfect storm', while Sautman and Yan (2010:746) reckon Zambia as one of the countries 'held up in Western discourse [of which media is all pervading] as exemplars of negativity about China in Africa'.

Park (2013:153) points out that Zambia is one of the countries where 'Chinese in Africa are becoming targets of increased anti-Chinese sentiment led by opposition political parties and civil society organizations'. Noted Africa-China scholar Deborah Brautigam explains her choice of Zambia (as well as Tanzania) as the site for her fieldwork on the basis that its relations with China are long-standing (Brautigam 2009:20). For both Zambia and Tanzania, bilateral relations with China were established immediately after their independence from British colonial rule in 1964 and 1962, respectively.

A viewing of television news programmes, documentaries, and films on the Africa-China topic available on *YouTube*, the open source video content platform, show generous space allocated to Zambia relative to other African countries in a good number of the episodes. Focus on Zambia by global broadcasters can be seen in the documentary, *The Chinese are Coming* (BBC, March 2011), as an example among many others in which China is portrayed as inimical to Zambia's interests. In balanced productions such as Al Jazeera's *People and Power: King Cobra and the Dragon* (November 2012) and *When China Met Africa* (February 2011)<sup>1</sup> one sees a dichotomy

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<sup>1</sup> Accessible at [www.whenchinametafrica.com/distrify](http://www.whenchinametafrica.com/distrify)

between China as force for good in Zambia and a more deleterious side of things on the other hand. Zambia is equally a popular subject in proliferating blogs and podcasts on Africa-China two of the perhaps most significant ones being Cowries and Rice<sup>2</sup> and China Africa Project<sup>3</sup>.

The huge interest in China-Zambia relations globally, both in academia and popular press, inspires several inquisitions. How have these relations changed and panned out in the present from a Zambian media perspective? Would a Zambian media approach help provide insights into the ebb and flow of perceptions about China inside Zambia? What can we gather from the Zambian media on the September 2011 regime change in Zambia vis-à-vis Chinese engagement? In other words, how did Zambian media craft perceptions on and of China in the era of former president Michael Chilufya Sata's leadership?

### *Historical Background*

Why is China – at least in some section of Africa-China intelligentsia - portrayed as an all-weather, long-standing, south-south partner of Zambia and why is this so important today? Along with Tanzania, Zambia is one of the sub-Saharan African countries where China's engagement registered a pioneering Chinese presence with the Chinese state/party, under Chairman Mao Zedong providing material and ideological support (Brautigam, 2009). This was in the form of the well-acknowledged construction of the 1800-kilometre Tanzania-Zambia railway (from Dar es Salaam on the Indian Ocean coast to Kapiri Mposhi in northern Zambia's copper-belt, between 1967 and 1975).

Zambia is a landlocked country and copper has been its economic lifeline since the period before independence. At independence, Zambia's neighbours, namely, Zimbabwe, Angola, and South Africa remained under colonial regimes (apartheid regime in the case of South Africa). The colonial regimes in Zambia's neighbourhood and which had access to international waters were unfriendly to the newly independent nation. This meant that Zambia was hard put exporting copper – the lifeblood for a fledgling nation – through the hostile neighbouring territories and on to the international markets. Tanzania was the only Zambian neighbour under a friendly independent African regime. Thus Tanzania was the only feasible route through which Zambia could export its copper, but the challenge was the uncharted territory marked by poor transport infrastructure between the Copperbelt hinterlands in Zambia and the Indian Ocean port of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. It is in this context that China's construction of the Tanzania-Zambia railway was a crucial undertaking and this is the springboard of the historical solidarity between Zambia and China (Shinn and Eisenman, 2012:324).

Over and above the construction of the railway, China established bases in Zambia for the training of liberation fighters in southern Africa nations that suffered delayed independence. Further, close ties were cultivated through China's construction of the United National Independence Party's (UNIP) headquarters in Lusaka in 1987 (Shinn and Eisenman, 2012: 325). As it is, therefore, China is anything but a new, twenty-first century player in Zambia's socio-economic space, although it trailed western powers, particularly Britain, which set that base in Zambia's Copperbelt in 1928 (Human Rights Watch, 2011: 17).

Under Zambia's founding president, Kenneth Kaunda, the copper mining sector was nationalised in the late 1960s with the state-owned Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM) as the sole copper management entity (Spilsbury, 2012). A combination of factors however led to Kaunda's ouster from power via democratic means in 1991. It is largely acknowledged that Kaunda's

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<sup>2</sup> Accessible at [www.cowriesrice.blogspot.com](http://www.cowriesrice.blogspot.com)

<sup>3</sup> Accessible at [www.chinaafricaproject.com](http://www.chinaafricaproject.com)

political fortunes tumbled on the back of the collapse of the copper-based economy (Human Rights Watch, 2011; Spilsbury, 2012).

Chinese leaders wasted no time in embracing the regime of Zambia's new leader in 1991, the late Fredrick Chiluba (subsuming political party ties), and soon China entered the Zambian mining sector as part of the ensuing, 'ruinous' IMF-World Bank-backed privatisation of the mining sector, better known as Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) (Sautman and Yan, 2007:78; Spilsbury, 2012: 251-52; Shinn and Eisenman, 2012:325-26; Alden, 2007:73). At the inaugural Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing in 2000, Chiluba apportioned blame for the poor state of his country's economy on the West (which is sometimes bundled with Bretton-Woods Institutions) ostensibly in the context of welcoming Chinese investors who were making forays into the Zambian sphere (Spilsbury, 2012: 253; Kopinski and Polus, 2011:184).

### **Chinese Investments in Zambia**

The point in time during which Zambia was shifting from a nationalised economy to a liberal one coincided with a period during Chinese companies were stepping up a search for opportunities abroad in what is known as the 'going out policy'. In turn, it has been pointed out that China's going out policy had the objective of providing a market for Chinese products, improving resource security, enabling technology transfer, and promoting research and development (Brautigam, 2009:74-75; Human Rights Watch, 2011:14). One company that best illustrates Chinese interests in Zambia – both on the positive and negative continuum – is the state-owned China Non-Ferrous Metals Mining Corporation (CNMC).

CNMC purchased an initially government-owned mine in Chambishi, northern Zambia in 1998 and operates it under the name Non-Ferrous China Africa (NFCA). After initial investments, the Chambishi mine was revived in 2003 after being out of operation for more than a decade. In quick succession, CNMC opened four more mining and related operations: Sino Metals Leach Zambia (Sino Metals), a copper processing plant, 2006; Zambia-China Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone (ZCCZ), also in Chambishi, became the first special economic zone in Africa with an extension in Lusaka, 2007; Chambishi Copper Smelter (CCS), 2009; and China Luanshya Mine (CLM), an underground, open-cast mining operation, 2009 (Human Rights Watch, 2011:3; 21; Spilsbury, 2012: 255; Shinn and Eisenman, 2012: 325; Brautigam, 2009: 82; 201; Alden, 2007: 73).

Such is the strength of Zambia-China partnership that the China Development Bank's and China Export-Import Bank's have a strong presence in Zambia providing low interest loans for a host of projects (particularly infrastructural). The China Development Bank established an office in Lusaka in 1997 (Brautigam, 2010: 8; Shinn and Eisenman, 2012:325). China has also cancelled a number of Zambian loans (Africa-Asia Confidential, 2013: 34; Shinn and Eisenman, 2012: 324-328).

### **Controversial Events and Issues in Zambia**

That labour relations generally constitute the epitome of harsh judgment on the China-in-Zambia discourse is hardly contestable. Literature however shows four incidents as standing out in the defining of the negative dimension of the otherwise embraced Chinese investment, all of them in the mining sector. The most tragic of these is the 2005 explosion at the CNMC/NFCA Chambishi explosives manufacturing plant where many Zambian workers died – in literature; the number varies from 46 to 51 (Human Rights Watch 2011; Spilsbury 2012; Shinn and Eisenman, 2012; Brautigam, 2009; Alden, 2007). The second incident relates to the 2006 riots in the same Chambishi area that ended with the shooting of five Zambian miners allegedly by a Chinese manager. In the third incident, 11 workers were shot at the privately owned Collum Coal Mines,

(which though Australian owned, has strong links with Chinese interests), in the southern region town of Sinazongwe. Fourthly, a Chinese manager was killed at the same Collum mines in August 2012 (Human Rights Watch, 2011:22-23; Shinn and Eisenman, 2012:325; Alden, 2007:74; Brautigam, 2009:5-6). Conflated with myriad other issues, these incidents shone media, civil society, and scholarship spotlight on China in Zambia like nowhere else on the continent. Distinguishing circumstances under which Chinese interests have been targeted in Africa as falling in the categories of criminal, labour, political, and maritime/piracy motivated (Yun Sun 2014:9-10) suggests the Zambian case falls in the labour disputes category, although as the literature makes clear, the labour disputes wend into political discourse.

While the Chinese involvement in the Zambian copper and coal-mining sector draws the most analysis, Chinese investments in other sectors also make it to the controversially framed list of issues. The Chinese are seen being on-and-off in terms of support for the Mulungushi Textile Corporation from the mid 1980s to present (Alden, 2007:73; Eliassen, 2012:84; Shinn and Eisenman, 2012:325). Chinese funding for various infrastructure projects such as China Exim Bank's funding of the Lower Kafue Gorge Dam, are seen as deleterious for the environment (Strange et al., 2013:10-11). The number of Chinese migrants is seen as disconcerting, including their failure to assimilate in Zambia as well as the allegedly poor quality of products and the potential of importation of manufactured products from China to undermine Zambia's manufacturing sector (Spilsbury, 2012:238, 257; Alden, 2007:48; 73; Jura and Kaluzynska, 2013:96; Lee, 2009). Chinese state-owned and private companies investing in the agricultural sector are seen as improving Zambia's food security but also introducing competition with local farmers (Shinn and Eisenman, 2012:138; Brautigam, 2009:254-55, 266-69).

Arising out of these engagements, various scholars suggest a paradox in China-Zambia relations. This is best exemplified by the Human Rights Watch report's binary characterisation of 'the Chinese' as: 'good investors, but bad employers' (Human Rights Watch, 2011:3; 30-31). In June 2011, former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton chastised China for pursuing a neo-colonial agenda in Africa. She made the remarks on the sidelines of an African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) conference in the Zambian capital, Lusaka (see Bloomberg, 2011). The charge of Chinese neo-colonialism in Zambia has been woven into 'human rights' issues relating to labour relations and encompassing low pay, excessive working hours, poor health and safety standards, frequency of accidents, environmental destruction, barring workers from joining labour unions, summary dismissals, etc. (Human Rights Watch, 2011:4; Strange et al., 2013:10; Salisbury, 2012:238). According to Shinn and Eisenman (2012:325), the negative perceptions emanating from the above mentioned challenges have left 'a legacy of ill will'.

But on the upward looking continuum, it has been noted that Chinese capital played a pivotal role in breathing life into some of the mines that had been abandoned by previous investors, for instance the 2002 departure of Anglo American (Moyo, 2012:150). Chinese capital is seen to have helped with revamping the efficiency of mining technologies as well as expanding operations (Human Rights Watch, 2011:30).

### **China in Zambian Politics**

Sautman and Yan (2010:749) attribute 'international media depiction of Zambians as anti-Chinese' on Michael Sata, during his opposition leadership period. It has been well noted in literature that in challenging his also deceased competitor, Levy Mwanawasa, for the presidency in 2006, the late president Sata mobilised, launched, and sustained a scathing, fierce attack on the Chinese, taking advantage of '... [of] disenfranchised, fiery hearts that were already burning with anti-Chinese sentiment' (Sautman and Yan, 2010:749-52; Human Rights Watch, 2011:26; Spilsbury, 2012:264).

One of Sata's often quoted statements on the campaign trail was the reference to Chinese as 'infesters' rather than 'investors' (Strange et al., 2013:6; BBC, 2011). He framed the 'China question' as 'Zambia is becoming a province – no a district – of China' (Alden, 2007:75). Shinn and Eisenman (2012:72) point out that 'in the run-up to Zambia's 2006 presidential elections the CPC (Chinese Communist Party) publicly supported the MMD (Movement for Multiparty Democracy)' – the latter party being the one Sata's Patriotic Front (PF) was campaigning against. Observers of China-Zambia relations identified a change in both Mwanawasa and Beijing's policies – somewhat improved labour practices for instance – in view of the anti-Chinese sentiments during the 2006 electioneering (Spilsbury, 2012:260; Fraser and Larmer, 2007:611-12).

Probably to the alarm of the Chinese officials in Beijing, Sata went so far as to touch a raw nerve by pledging recognition for Taiwan's independence from Mainland China 'alarming', given the never-ending Beijing-Taipei decades-long sovereignty tug-of-war (Brautigam, 2009:151). Chinese ambassador to Zambia at the time, Li Baodong, dispensed with diplomatic etiquette to threaten China's withdrawal from Zambia in the event Sata won. While concluding that ambassador Li's public altercations with Sata amounted to 'a political misstep', Shinn and Eisenman (2012:327) also imply Beijing may have given tacit approval to this diplomatic incident in view of Li being allowed to stay on 'for a face saving period and then (being) transferred to a senior position in Geneva'. In the end, Sata and the PF party lost to Mwanawasa's MMD at the 2006 plebiscite and the matter went to the back banner. Nonetheless, the fact that Sata's PF emerged victorious in the Copperbelt indicated that the anti-Chinese message had indeed sunk in areas of Chinese investment heft (Human Rights Watch 2011:26; Shinn and Eisenman, 2012:73 and Brautigam, 2009:150-51).

Mwanawasa – a staunch supporter of Chinese investments in Zambia – passed on in 2008 (with former Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi attending the state funeral) and his deputy, Rupiah Banda, took the reins of power in an acting capacity in lieu of a snap presidential election held in October the same year. Banda won the election with a waver thin margin; Sata lamented electoral malpractices for his loss. But 'King Cobra', as tenacious Sata was known, was not done with presidential ambitions and would emerge victorious in the subsequent elections of September 2011.

A distinction has been made between the Sata of 2006, whose political stock in trade was to lay Zambian economic woes at the feet of 'the Chinese', and the much more mellowed Sata of the 2008 and 2011 election, who though still critical of the economic model, was less acerbic of the Chinese (Human Rights Watch, 2011:27; Spilsbury, 2012:261; Carmody et al., 2012:224; Shinn and Eisenman, 2012:327-28). There are those who surmise that Sata's anti-Chinese rhetoric of 2006 had such a staying power as to contribute to his 2011 victory (Spilsbury, 2012:238). Many recent works and journalistic pieces have concluded that Sata embraced a pro-China stance once he became president (Spilsbury, 2012:263; Africa Asia Confidential, 2013:1), although he occasionally made nationalistic or patriotic moves (Shinn and Eisenman, 2012:328).

Some suggested that Sata's anti-Chinese rhetoric was no more than the antics of a populist politician whose criticism was meant to satiate a burning hunger power (Spilsbury, 2012:259; 263; Fraser and Larmer, 2007). According to Spilsbury (2012:264) citing a local newspaper – *The Post* – 'Sata (was) a populist who (would) say what he (thought) newspapers want(ed) to hear...he (had) no morals to defend, no principles to fight for'.

## **What Communication Scholars Say**

The preceding review suggests Zambia-China relations have been studied with a measure of depth from economic and geopolitical perspectives. The missing link for the current paper is



communications/media review. Wekesa (2013:27) points out that Zambia was the second most 'talked about' country in East African newspapers in 2011 with respects to China (after Sudan and followed by Zimbabwe; Wekesa, 2013a:27). This is consistent with social science literature indicative of Zambia as a hotspot for the overall China-in-Africa phenomenon. Citing Chinese migration and reclusiveness, Sautman and Yan (2010:735-36) found that Zambia is a country where negative sentiments against China are comparatively higher, though this should not be confused with Zambians being more negative than positive about China. Indeed the survey pointed out both 'a beneficial and harmful' sentiment about China but with approval supplanting disapproval ratings (Sautman and Yan, 2010:738). Yu-Shan Wu (2013:17) brings in a proximate view but from a Chinese social media perspective, in the sense that the 2012 killing of a Chinese coal mine manager may have forged negative attitudes in social media.

The use of Chinese capital to establish a Special Economic Zone in Lusaka can be seen through economic rather than say, cultural lenses. However, as Kim (2013) demonstrates, this can be interpreted from a soft power – largely a communicative consideration – point of view and within that, as either salutary or negative. In their study of Chinese soft power in Zambia (and Angola), Jura and Kaluzynka (2013:48) concluded that not only were Zambian perceptions on China were positive, but also that 'economy, business and development occupy a central position in the media'. They further observed that discussions on economic matters tended to be 'concrete' (mines, investments and energy for instance) rather than 'abstract' (economic terminologies such as GDP and inflation for instance). As Sautman and Yan (2009:734) have argued, the Zambia-China schisms are obviously a negative perception builder but perhaps not to the extent of blighting a positive view as received wisdom would have us believe and as evident in the fact that Sata lost both the 2006 and 2008 elections in which his pitch was an anti-Chinese fervour. We may argue that other factors rather than the China question might have spurred Sata's 2011 election victory contrary to claims that his win was a no confidence vote in China. At any rate, some analysts point out that Banda's tenure in office was marred by factors such as the global recession that lessened global copper demands in turn touching off a spate of redundancies that made him unpopular (Spilsbury, 2012:262).

Jura and Kaluzynska (2013:65) also concluded that issues revolving around Chinese labour and human rights practices were highly localised or domesticated rather than bundled with other global developments on this score such as the Tibet question, the sagas of Chinese dissidence, or any number of human rights issues. It would indeed appear – as we saw in the analysis on the Chinese question in Zambian politics above – that this localisation percolates deeper into Zambian geography with some areas more favourable of China than others. Flipping the analysis to the Chinese dimension, Shubo Li and Ronning (2013:115) reveal that an article in the Chinese newspaper, the *Southern Weekend* of 8 April 2010, concluded thus: '[f]or ordinary Zambians, the image of China is far from perfect. Local people told us frankly that in their mind, China is associated with cheap, low-quality products and low wages'.

### **Framing China in Zambia**

From a cautious viewpoint, analyses of China in Africa along optimistic and pessimistic lines, is, in a general sense, also true for Zambia-China relations. In the multifarious Sino-Africa literature (Wasserman, 2011; Alden, 2007; Shinn and Eisenman, 2012), there are typologies and metaphors that attempt to nail down the phenomenon, in a word, to 'frame' the China Africa relations. Wasserman (2011), in a study of China in South Africa, points out that discourses on China's role in Africa falls into a stark binary (read, framing) as either an exploitative, predatory force or a benevolent development partner.

The above insights dovetail with Alden's (2007) assessment of China in Africa along three poles: Is China a development partner, an economic competitor, or a colonizer? Shinn and Eisenman

(2012) depict the relations as either optimistic or pessimistic. These metaphors that have been used to describe China in Africa can be theorised as frames of reference. We propose to undertake a qualitative analyse China in a representative sample of Zambian media, specifically, the *Zambia Daily Mail*, *The Post Online*, and *Zambia Watchdog*, for the entire period of January 2013 to January 2014 using deductive sociological (rather than psycho-cognitive) framing theoretical concepts. We take a qualitative rather than quantitative turn because a proper measurement of media-driven perception of China in Zambia would require access to all media forms, including broadcast media, for it to meet validity thresholds. In addition, a proper understanding of the Zambian media system would be required if a quantitative study is to reveal meaningful results. Yet an incisive understanding of the Zambian media scene would have distracted from the core objective of the study: what are the media-charted perceptions of China in Zambia. Nonetheless, this study could provide entry points for measurement of media perceptions of China in Zambia.

We also use a generic, relaxed rather than a specific, strict, or reductionist-framing approach drawing on framing scholars' counsel that overarching issues – such as one country in another – are better analysed this way (Wekesa, 2013:18). Of the distinctions made on China in Africa, we propose to leverage Shinn and Eisenman's (2012:10-14) optimism versus pessimism framing bolstered by Alden's (2007) partner, role model on the one hand and competitor, exploiter for on the other hand. Thus the two frame categories are: 1) optimistic, partner, role model and 2) pessimist, competitor, exploiter.

Space constraints limit us from giving a full account of how news media frame issues as a consequence of which they come to shape opinions and perceptions. Suffice to mention that framing was seminaly defined by Entman (1993:52) as 'the selection of some aspects of a perceived reality (making it) more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal relationship, moral evaluation, and/or treatment'. Four decades of framing as a significant theory in the communication field indicate that frames have the following qualities: persistency/frequency/consistency, selection/placement, unique contextualisation, inclusion/exclusion/insertion, emphasis/elaboration (Wekesa, 2013:17).

In a nutshell, the optimist perspective is motivated by the perception that China needs what Zambia is naturally endowed with, while Zambia needs investment capital to exploit her natural resources especially with respect to copper (Spilsbury 2012:254). Optimism, therefore, subsumes considerations such as China as partner, role model, benevolent force, etc. The pessimist frame reclines on the understanding that Zambia might not be extracting a fair share from its natural resources or that the relations are slanted in favour of China, to the detriment of Zambia. It would include considerations such as Chinese malevolence, exploitation, China as a predator and China as a competitor.

In their study of agencies of Chinese soft power in Angola and Zambia, Jura and Kalusynzyka (2013: 44) rely on articles derived from online editions of newspapers and internet portals. Among other factors they advanced for this choice was ease of access to archives. We similarly find this approach worthwhile for the current study. We applied the framing/content analysis approach to *Zambia Daily Mail*, *The Post Online*, and the *Zambia Watchdog*<sup>4</sup>. We selected headlines with the 'China' keyword/code in them published between 1 January 2013 and 23 January 2014 to capture the ebb and flow for a whole year's period. We collected a total of 91 articles. Using frame analysis, we deduced the inclination of articles towards a pessimistic, competitor, exploiter frame or optimistic, partner, role-model frame on the basis of the nature of the Zambia engagement and the tonality of the words and phrases used. With frame analysis as

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<sup>4</sup> All content was collected from the online editions of these news media.



the theoretical approach of choice, we did not undertake discourse analysis given that our objective was to categorise the content and demonstrate how selected words, phrases, sentences, language use, and episodes contribute to the overall optimistic or pessimistic themes. Indeed, framing analysis scholarship identifies five signifying devices that can be used in the study of media content namely; 'metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images' (Gamson and Modgiliani 1987). We liberally used these devices save for visual images, which would have required a different analytical framework. A quick note here is that future research might find it useful to triangulate frame analysis and discourse analysis or indeed use discourse analysis on its own. For the current paper – focused on determining whether Zambian media frame China in optimistic or pessimistic terms – we deemed it sufficient to mine evidence from the content that supports the polarity of the two positions while only transiently commenting in what may be referred to as interplay between optimistic and pessimistic frames.

After collecting the articles, we read each one of them, keeping an eye on language, instances, and topics that would support either an optimistic or pessimistic view. We created a matrix<sup>5</sup> and using researcher-discretion, placed the most telling instances that speak to optimism, role model, partnership, pessimism, competition, and exploitation in their relevant columns. Again, in the interests of space, we decided not capture all the headlines but to cite the publication dates with the understanding that readers interested in particular headlines can obtain them from the online archives of the papers. We capture publication dates as 'month' and 'date' and leave out 'year' except for the month of January which traverses 2013 and 2014 in the understanding that the rest are all for the year 2013. For a good number of articles, the optimism or pessimism starts at the headline level; however, we still went into the body of the articles to mine evidence on either side. We kept fidelity to the fact that some articles had both optimistic and pessimistic framing and duly captured this in the placement of evidence of pessimism and optimism in the relevant columns of the matrix.

After presenting the main findings, we proceed to analyse the contribution of these news media to the framing of perceptions about China. We conclude the study with a discussion on some of the questions posed in the introduction of this article.

## Data Analysis and Findings

### *Zambia Daily Mail*

This newspaper has the highest amount of coverage on China in Africa at 38 articles for the study period. A government-owned newspaper, it overwhelmingly frames China in Zambia from an optimistic dimension. Such is the positive framing of China by this newspaper that incredulity would be entertained as to why there is no negative view in line with normative journalistic values, especially balance. Nonetheless, the mere fact of optimistic framing by *Zambia Daily Mail* (hereafter referred to as *Daily Mail*) is indicative of the close ties between the Sata administration and the Chinese partners in government and business. Indeed the editorial bent of *Daily Mail* towards an optimistic framing of China is decipherable in a commentary article: 'Chinese in Schools to Narrow Gulf between Zambia and China' (17 April), by the newspaper's editor, Charles Chisala, hailing the commencement of Hanban classes in schools as means of enhancing the partnership.

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<sup>5</sup> Space limitations do not allow for the appending of the matrix but it can be availed on request.

### *Optimist, Partner, Role Model Frame*

Chinese firms' involvement in infrastructure development in Zambia is generally a celebrated trope (for instance, 14 June; 28 July; 27 December). An insight gleaned from the reporting is that Chinese firms cultivate close relations with Zambian officials as seen for instance in the courtesy call by a manager of China Henan International Industry Group, Chen Zhiqiang, on Luapala Province Minister, Brigadier General Benson Kapaya. In a series of articles (14 June; 28 August; 24 September; 27), we learn that the cultivation of close ties with Zambian officials by China Henan might be quid pro quo as the company has won contracts for the construction of an airport, a car park, and a major road, as well as offering to design a new town and create a preferential economic trading zone all in the Luapala Province. Indeed, seeking mutual partnership can be seen in a Zambian official ostensibly 'appealing' to China-Henan company to help build a university in rural Zambia (27 December). China-Henan emerges as a major player in Zambia's Luapala Province, its influence spawning the creation of a formal twinning programme between Luapala and the Chinese province of Henan with an eye on increased investments from the latter to the former (24 September).

To the extent that the *Daily Mail* covers China in positive light, it can be said to be a platform for Chinese media-based-public-diplomacy towards Zambia and vice versa. Further still, one sees explicit efforts to tap media for a Zambia-China political partnership project. We learn for instance that the ruling Patriotic Front (PF) party youth visited China to hone skills such as 'how to clearly articulate party policies to the public through the media', at the invitation of (China's) State Administration for Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) (26 June; 10 July). Quite interesting in terms of how PF and CPC have buried the hatchet and embraced is the candid words of the Chinese ambassador: 'the Patriotic Front has been in touch with China more than the MMD (the former ruling party) was' (10 July). At the time of the PF youth media strategy training in China, the Zambian leaders who had been hosted by the CPC included former vice president Guy Scott, PF national chairperson Inonge Wina, and secretary general Wynter Kabimba; the latter being of strategic significance by dint of his being president of the Council of African Political Parties (CAPP) (May 29).

A good number of articles can be seen as China unleashing her soft power through donations, assistances, and cultural linkages. These include: *China donates 25 motor vehicles to Zambia Police* (October 23); *China boosts police operations* (June 23); *China pledges to paint Chingwele Clinic* (August 10); *China gives Zambia 480 solar panels for rural areas* (April 17); *China, Brazil and India up aid to Zambia* (March 17); *China keen to train stadium managers* (June 27, as part of the soft power package attendant to the Lusaka stadium built through a grant) and *China gives Zambia 480 solar panels for rural areas* (April 17).

As a strategic illustration, a donation of vehicles to Zambian police – overseen by China's ambassador to Zambia Zhou Yuxio – is on the occasion of Zambia's 49<sup>th</sup> Independence Day. Zhou used the occasion to reinforce the Zambia-China 'all weather' partnership via reference to the two nations' historical solidarity while the Zambian Home Affairs Minister, Lungu's, response was reciprocal. Another article to demonstrate the ambassador's media-based public diplomacy mission is the optimism he expressed in the robustness of the Zambian economy in 2014 in an exclusive interview (September 26).

Indeed, trawling through the content, it is evident that a major remit for the Chinese ambassador is to shape positive perceptions and in the case of Zambia, this is against the backdrop of the diplomatic fall out of earlier years. Various framing scholars point out that inclusion and exclusion/presence and absence are some of the strategies used to create frames in audiences. It is evident that Chinese officials (and some extent their Zambian counterparts) are long on the earlier history of the close ties – with the role played by founding president Kenneth Kaunda

particularly primed – while Sata’s anti-Chinese vituperation between 2006 and 2011 appears to be a no go zone. In the same breadth, while official narratives are silent on economic disputes, the longevity of the Tazara project is nearly a standard mention in speeches as reported.

Space does not allow accounting for all direct Chinese investment articles, thus we shall illustrate the articles that frame the relations as partnership with just two exemplars. An August 15 2013 article highlights the Zambian Development Agency’s interests in seeking opportunity for small businesses in China via the globally acclaimed, annual China International Fair for Investment and Trade (CIFIT), also known as the Canton Fair. Quite proximate is the reporting on a business match-making initiative by China Ministry of Commerce that would see Zambian and Chinese companies collaborating in seeking international markets (including the African products exhibition centre in Yiwu, China) for Zambian produced goods (August 12). Investments in the tourism sector can be seen in the headline: *China intends to promote Sino-Africa tourism* (August 28).

In some respects, Chinese economic links with Africa are construed more favourably than those from the West. An article commenting on US President Barak Obama’s visit to Africa paints an optimistic picture of China. It lambasts US’ preoccupation with what has been termed ‘Western Consensus’ ideals (July 12). An article critical of the West and supportive for China is tellingly entitled: *Friendly dragon: China’s investments in Zambia* (June 11). An analysis of all the opinion articles in *Daily Mail* in which China and the West are compared holds up China-optimism against decided West-pessimism.

An interesting point to note with regards to opinion articles is that while they generally carve a positive perception for China, opinion articles by their very nature must respond to or argue the case against certain topical issues. In so doing the opinion writer is constrained to include or at least touch on the position he or she is contesting. This, in news framing terms, ends up availing a counter frame to the audience. Such is the case with an opinion article by Qu Xing, president of the China Institute of International Studies (Qu Xing, 2013) in which he counters the widely discussed article by Nigerian Central Bank governor Lamido Sanusi and published in the influential Financial Times. Sanusi (2013) pointedly wrote that Africa ‘must see China for what it is: a competitor’ and ‘fight predatory policies’. The sting in the negative framing occasioned by Sanusi’s treatise is not just that he is the chief executive of Nigeria’s reserve bank of but also the fact that his father was Nigeria’s ambassador to Beijing. A quick observation here as well is that most opinion articles in Zambian papers are likely to analyse China not just from a Zambian pigeonhole but from a wider Pan African standpoint.

Based on the definitive consideration of news frames as charted by the consistency and frequency of topics and rhetoric, the single most important event in positive framing of China-Zambia relations and therefore the height of the China optimism is the ten back-to-back articles reporting or based on former president Sata’s maiden, week-long visit to China published between April 3 and April 19).

The optimism, partnership and role model aspects of the trip are seen in the following sample of evidence: The signing of several multimillion agreements with potential for Zambia’s economic development (for instance discussions for establishment of a Zambian national airline); the special treatment accorded Sata (in a manner to suggest he was treated ostensibly better than other past African visiting heads of state); the fact that he was the first African head of state to meet then newly elevated Chinese leaders, President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang; Sata’s pledge to recognize the one-China policy and CNMC’s sponsorship of the Zambia-China Economic and Investment Forum.

### *Pessimist, Competitor, Exploiter Frame*

The few articles in the *Daily Mail* in which salience is placed on the pessimist frame seem to revolve less on ideological matters and more on the competence of Chinese firms or failure to extract maximum value out of natural resources (August 28; April 26).

As we saw earlier, China-Henan officials have forged close ties with officials from the Luapala Province. Interestingly however, the same company may be seen in reverse as authoring a pessimistic view of China in Zambia. The headline: 'China-Henan risks being blacklisted' (August 28) is particularly instructive. It transpires that the China Henan officials' visits to Luapala government officials in December 2013 and the twinning program of this Zambian province with China's Henan Province in September 2013 followed a threat to rescind a road construction contract awarded to the company apparently in another region of Zambia (Kafue-Lusaka road) in August 2013. Even without the benefit of finer nuance, it is evident that China Henan's contribution to positive framing in one region of Zambia may be offset by charges of shoddy work and delays in other parts of the country (it appears the company had attracted the ire of Zambian officials on at least two other infrastructure projects). Caution would however be exercised before judging the company harshly in that one project for which China Henan was criticised was funded by the World Bank in addition to the plausible reasons advanced by the company for the delays. But this does little to remove the sting in the words of a Zambian minister: 'when I heard that China Henan has been awarded this contract I was very worried'.

In what amounts to an exception to the rule, the lone article critiquing the failure of Zambians to extract maximum value from their natural resources is by Anthony Mukwita, then managing director of *Daily Mail* (March 31). In a visit to a company in southern China, Mukwita realizes that its globally competitive products are made from copper mined in Zambia. This insight motivates him to pen a piece decrying Zambia's failure to add value to her copper while the Chinese company in question boasts a balance sheet 'several times higher than Zambia as a country'. This then introduces probably the only potential China-as-exploiter plank in the corpus of articles from *Daily Mail* for the study period.

### *The Post Online*

We collected 25 items from *The Post Online*. It is privately owned news media thus would be expected to take a much more independent editorial bent in covering China in Zambia; thus, it would be expected that the newspaper would frame China in both positive and negative hues. Evidence from data however presents a contrary picture in that most stories are positive (optimistic) rather than negative (pessimistic). The reasons of this would require further investigation to appreciate this rather startling finding. A quick finding is that *The Post Online* seems to have changed from bashing Sata before he became president (as we saw in the literature review) to being positive about links with China during his presidency.

Because *The Post Online* resembles and reflects *Daily Mail* in more respects than one, we decided to discuss only framing considerations peculiar to it (*The Post Online*), leaving out those that bear a 'cut and copy' outlook with *Daily Mail*.

### *Optimist, Partner, Role Model Frame*

Erroneous or otherwise, the perspective that the Chinese state encourages state-owned firms to compete with their private counterparts in the Zambian market rather than lobbying for them, charts an optimistic frame (November 26). The gist of this article is that Zambians should learn from factors that have made China an economic powerhouse key among them the culture and ethics of diligence, tenacity and hard work as opposed to Zambian workers' lethargy and

indolence. Other articles with a similar 'China as a role model framing' were published between January and April 2013.

If events play an important role in optimistic framing of China, then the Chinese Spring Festival presents a particularly opportune moment. During the January 2014 edition, no less than the Zambian first lady, Christine Kasemba, graced the celebrations to extol the strides made in China-Zambia relations in 2013 with expectations that 2014 held even better prospects (January 26 2014). We see a cultural turn to public diplomacy perspective when the Chinese ambassador to Zambia inaugurates the 2014 spring festival (January 24 2014).

A November 1 article highlights three optimistic framing perspectives: the Chinese ambassador doing public diplomacy in the sense of damage control, China as a responsible force for good in Zambia and Chinese firms as helping Zambia overcome infrastructure challenges. The training aspect embedded in a contract awarded to China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation – the company that is the subject of the story – furthers the optimism. Along the same lines is China Gansu (company's) building of the first government secondary school in a rural Zambian region (April 24).

There is a surfeit of other items constructing the optimistic frame and which we saw in the analysis of the *Daily Mail* above. These include investments and development partnership such as the potential for Zambia to emulate China in rice production or the commendation of Chinese investments reported April 12 and April 28; political solidarity/partnership such as the headlines, '*PF inspiring, protecting citizens - Communist Party of China*' (June 25) and '*Communist Party of China urges caution on West forces*' (July 1); assistance such as '*China pledges continued support to Levy hospital*' (September 19) and '*Chinese care for Zambia's development - Ling*' (April 19); cultural partnerships such as '*Chamanga, Katongo on target in China*' (April 16) and '*Chinese club prunes Chansa*' (March 30); infrastructure development partnership such as '*TAZARA acquires new locomotives from China*' (December 31), '*China Jiangxi spends \$2.5m on Green equipment*' (June 13) and '*China Jiangxi imports road equipment worth \$25m*' (April 4) and geopolitics such as '*China, old friend or new colonialists?*' (July 18).

*Pessimist, competitor, exploiter frame*

In some cases, a negative sentiment about China emanate from straightforward legal disputes as in the case of a contempt of court proceedings against China Jiangsu instituted by a Lusaka businessman (August 1). Rational audience would give the benefit of doubt to either party. However, the possibility for Zambian readers to see the legal clash from a nationalistic, patriotic viewpoint might mean a negative view on the Chinese company.

To the extent that small-scale Chinese traders entering local markets to sell goods are considered an illegality, this forges a pessimistic framing of China. Indeed no less than the Zambian trade and then industry deputy minister, Miles Sampa, is reported warning dire consequences for Chinese nationals found 'trading chickens and vegetables' (August 26). A closer look reveals that the minister's ire might have been tied to his political interests in that he represented a constituency in which the market in question is located. A trader is quoted posing the question as to whether a foreigner would be allowed to 'sell things like sweets (candy), vegetables or chickens in China?'

Another China-as-exploiter frame is presented in the implied flouting of a stipulation requiring foreign contractors to give 20% of their work to Zambian firms (August 27). Indeed the PF government's enactment of this policy – known as 8,000 Link Zambia Project – may have been spurred in the first place by the clamour by local contractors to be protected from their more competent counterparts in a manner to suggest the negative side of infrastructure contracting. The 8,000 Link Project is Zambia's plan to construct 8,000 kilometres of roads and was



developed with legal backing for the implementation agency – The Roads Development Agency – to ensure that Zambia engineers and other technical professionals and companies get a mandatory 20% sub contract. The plan is to ensure that Zambians gain monetarily from the infrastructure project as well as enhancing their skills and in terms of technology transfer. In the article, the Chinese companies specifically accused of resisting this requirement were mentioned as AVIC International Project Engineering Company and Sinohydro Company Ltd (August 27).

A fairly innocuous negative framing is with respect to speculation that the Zambian government intended to import maize from China, dismissed by the government spokesman as a mere rumour (December 13). This would fall in the pessimistic column on the back of allegations of corruption and collusion – real or perceived – between Zambian officials and Chinese firms whenever a tender for procurement of goods and services is on the cards.

In ‘expressing shock at allegations that Chinese-run mines produce more of Zambian copper but contribute little to the country's economic growth because profits are being taken to develop China’, the Chinese ambassador Zhou may have been on a mission to furnish a counter frame. However the possibility that this would only serve as confirmation of this potentially deleterious allegation cannot be discounted out of hand thus contributing to an exploiter view (September 9).

### *Zambia Watchdog*

We collected 28 items from *Zambia Watchdog*. It is an independent online platform that places itself in opposition to the government. It collaborates with yet another online platform – *Zambia Reports* – and between them constitutes critical, gate-keeper-against-government voices. Because of its stance, *Zambia Watchdog* attracted a backlash from the Sata administration and as of the time of this study was being hosted outside the country. Some of the articles from the site use rough-hewn expletives that must have tested the tolerance levels of both the Sata regime and Chinese authorities’ tolerance to the limit.

### *Optimist, Partner, Role Model Frame*

The rare occasions when *Zambia Watchdog* charts an upward looking sentiment for China is when undertaking straightforward reporting on events. One article, (May 28) starts with subtle negative valance: ‘Zambian army commander fully supports the so-called ‘one China policy’. We notice the use of ‘so-called’ as frowning on ‘one China policy’, which is in quotes in the original text. Also, satirical mention is made of ‘General Mihova visiting China as part of Zambia newly gained love for countries like China, Cuba, Sudan’ (May 28). However, the greater part of the article reports the positive aspects of long term friendly Zambia-China cooperation in the military and political fields. Optimistic framing, although inserted in critical articles, continues the pattern we saw in the *Daily Mail* and *The Post Online*, of extolling China’s involvement in the infrastructure development arena (roads railways, ICT, energy and sports facilities) and Sata’s invitation of Chinese investors (May 7).

Equally, much as a lingering negative tone is perceivable in headlines relating to Sata’s visit to China as seen in the sarcasm in the headlines, these remain some of the few occasions when *Zambia Watchdog* represents China in positive terms (April 11; April 6; April 1; 22 March 22).

While *Zambia Watchdog* may be through-and-through an anti-establishment platform, the fact that it allows a Chinese national to push back on some of the accusations made against his nation reflects positively on it along fair-comment-normative-journalistic principles (April 18). Among the positive frame elements that ‘China man’ propounds is: China as ‘the only country in the world that shows...willingness to invest in Africa’, China availing low interest loans as well as aid,

the affordability of Chinese goods, and the disinterest or incapacity of countries such as ‘USA, UK and India’ to help Africa in similar ways.

### *Pessimist, Competitor, Exploiter Frame*

Analysing *Zambia Watchdog* articles, it is evident that this web-based media is both a news provider covering other sources as well as engaged in defence of its own role as a vanguard of Zambia’s democracy. Taking an advocacy approach, the news site accuses China of supplying equipment to the Zambian government for internet surveillance and blockage of critical content flow (September 6; February 21). The articles indicate that the *Zambia Watchdog* and a kindred online site, *Zambia Reports*, are some of the targets of the alleged surveillance. The implication here is that China is aiding information and press repression and rolling back media freedoms in Zambia.

Citing anonymous sources the article makes sweeping assertions: ZTE is involved in corruption over a security camera surveillance contract in Lusaka and Huawei is ‘a Chinese military and secret service wing of the Chinese government that was barred ‘from operating in America and other major Western Nations’. Apparent responses to these allegations on the Huawei website are treated with utter incredulity. Ultimately ZTE and Huawei are used to frame a thoroughly pessimistic image of China bordering on antagonism (September 6; February 21).

A related article sees the launch of a newspaper to serve the Chinese community in Zambia - *The Oriental Post* – as ‘borrowing repressive media trends from the far East’ (July 19). Within this pessimistic frame, criticism is levelled at ‘President Michael Sata’s dictatorial regime (which) has praised China’s media record despite that country’s repressive media laws’ (February 21). This activist/advocacy journalism is appreciable when one reads further in the article that ‘the popular *Zambian Watchdog* is inaccessible in Zambia, ostensibly blocked by the regime. Thus, we are invited to see the *Zambia Watchdog* as a defender of free press and related democratic ideals as well as, ostensibly, a victim of ‘bad press laws’. The message here is that China is not good for Zambia’s press freedom. It is probably in the interest of protecting the identity of the ‘investigative journalists’ writing these stories for *Zambia Watchdog* that nearly all articles have no by-lines, supposedly to protect them from reprisals.

The *Zambia Watchdog* positions itself as an anti-corruption crusader. One article written without a by-line purports to ‘expose’ a top Zambian army officer destined for China allegedly found with ‘elephant tusks in two of the suitcases’ at the Kenneth Kaunda International Airport (June 5). The dramatic article suggests collusion between Zambian and Chinese military officers under the cover of diplomatic immunity in the illegal trafficking of wildlife trophy and further implies impunity in the ostensible allowing of the army officer to proceed to China despite being ‘caught red-handed’.

From a geopolitical viewpoint, Sata’s embrace of China and his criticism of the West are seen as a case of double standards (June 3)., and why would Sata give potential Western investors a wide berth while embracing their Chinese counterparts? *Zambia Watchdog* posits the following pessimistic hypothesis: investors from the West would not condone corruption; Western investors would demand respect for human rights as pre-condition; Chinese investors ‘invest where there are loopholes and room for bribing government officials’ (June 3).

*Zambia Watchdog* is both an enterprise news media as well as an aggregator of news from other sources. In an article sourced from *Africa-Asia Confidential* magazine, one sees a blend of both optimism and pessimism. The balance however swings towards a pessimistic valance especially with respect to instances of Chinese firms’ – such as Sogeco, a subsidiary of Anhui Foreign

Economic Construction Group – allegedly bribing former president Rupiah Banda to win lucrative contracts, among a litany of other cases (May 7).

While the prosecution of former president Banda is presented as old corruption, the Sata regime is seen as having fallen in the same trap it sought to cure. The above article (May 7) quotes a Zambian university professor saying: ‘we still see Chinese waiters, bartenders, even guards at gates in Chinese hotels and buildings... and these are the jobs Sata and the PF promised to grab and give to the one million Zambian youths who voted for them in 2011., and who is issuing work permits to those Chinese nationals to come and do donkey jobs here? It’s the PF government’. In a nutshell, this lengthy article implies a let down, some kind of betrayal on the part of Sata and ends up painting a pessimistic view of China.

With respect to Chinese nationals competing with locals for jobs, a similar perspective is seen in a heated exchange between a Zambian writer and a Chinese commentator (April 18 and April 18) with the latter article explaining that poor work ethics is the reason why Chinese companies hire Chinese nationals even though it would have made economic sense to hire Zambian workers.

Whilst we do not see reportage on labour unrest in *Daily Mail* and *The Post* during 2013, it is only in *Zambia Watchdog* that such an incident is reported (January 3). This not only reinforces the widely reported variants of labour schisms of yesteryears but also dovetails with allegations of failure to employ locals to further cement a pessimistic outlook on China.

In terms of China’s image in Zambia, what can we make of a story that claims Sata is involved in nepotism by sending his niece to China as an ambassador (November 25)? At the surface level, it may appear that China has little to do with the nepotism charge. However, when read from the perspective of Sata being keen to have a reliable relative as envoy in Beijing, an interpretation could be made to infer the significance of China in the Sata administration’s international relations architecture. By extension, an inference could then be made that having a niece for plenipotentiary to the Great Hall of the People court may have ominous albeit not immediately decipherable goals. But then we learn that the niece-ambassador is related to Sata by being a relative of the Zambian first lady. On another more direct pessimism front, Sata is indeed quoted as saying: the ‘Chinese (are) cleverer than Zambians so (the niece-ambassador) should be careful’ (November 25).

An equally abrasive article claims that President Sata is sinking Zambia into a debt trap by borrowing money used to pay civil servant salaries (August 8). Sata is first labelled as an ‘ailing dictator’ and then an implied complicity of China in Zambia’s debt burden is made. While the writer’s criticism is directed at Sata and not China, China still suffers collateral damage. Even more abrasive to frightening proportions is an article that alleges that Zambia has borrowed US\$19 million for the production and supply of bombs and gunpowder (April 15).

Given its historical importance, can anything negative be said about China in reference to Tazara? Nay, so goes received wisdom, given the arduous sacrifices in blood and money that the Mao Zedong/Zhou Enlai generation expended to build the railway at a time when China herself was in need of development resources. *Zambia Watchdog* thinks otherwise. In one article, a writer wonders how many times Zambians should thank China for Tazara (April 12). In other words, the writer implies Zambians have already thanked China enough about Tazara and need not belabour it any further. What reasons are advanced in attempting to convert this iconoclastic exemplar of positive framing for China into a pessimistic one? Among others, the following can be delineated: it is as if Zambians are being reminded that they are beggars; the project was built through a loan being paid for to date; a substantial amount of the money went back to China in terms of paying for Chinese construction workers; the railway is strategic for transporting

copper to China...in sum, the article turns an optimistic framing of Tazara into a pessimistic one. The negative portrayal coming out of the positivity associated with Tazara is further bolstered in an article that claims that Chinese trains acquired by Tazara had been found to be faulty (April 12).

## Discussion

The key finding of this study is that collectively, the three Zambian media outlets – constituting a substantial section of the Zambian media system – are more optimistic about China than they are pessimistic. Even though this is a limited study to extent that it does not cover the Zambian media lay-of-the-ground in its entirety, we can cautiously conclude that the selected media are a reflection of the optimistic inclination of the Zambian media in general in lieu of a more thoroughgoing study. For the current study, it is sufficient to conclude that the government-owned *Daily Mail* crafts an optimistic perception by dint of Zambia's good relations with China, while, and as we see below, *The Post Online*, is virtually a government-allied newspaper and therefore equally optimistic on and for China.

While we can affirm Zambian media as a source of knowledge, information and data on Zambia-China relations, we must exercise caution on the basis of this article's findings. Using only a government paper such as *Daily Mail* or an oppositional news site such as *Zambia Watchdog* may present images of China in Zambia so divergent as to give pause to a reader, an analyst or a researcher. Additionally, huge discrepancy on balance and fairness from the sampled news media suggests the audience research dimension cannot be ignored if the real perceptions of Zambians on the China question are to be appreciated with a measure of comprehensiveness.

While *The Post Online* is closest to editorial independence on the China theme, evidence abounds to demonstrate that this editorial independence is only relative in the Zambian media ecology, as it swings decidedly to a pro-China stance. China optimism is quite fine and in some instances should be applauded. However, for a sophisticated reader, the ululation and gushing towards China in some of the *The Post Online* content may be overly optimistic as to forge suspicion on the dalliance between this outlet and Zambian and Chinese officialdom. The same would apply to *Zambia Watchdog* whose take-no-prisoner approach is, in many a case, too abrasive as to raise suspicions about the possibility that this site's default is to be a China-basher.

A related observation is that, as we saw in earlier sections, *The Post Online* (as well as *Daily Mail*) were critical of Sata during his opposition heydays but switched to a pro-Sata stance once he took power (see Spilsbury 2012: 264 for instance). This may indeed be a function of Zambian media allying themselves with the regime in power for a variety of political economy factors that further research could reveal. One line of inquisition would be whether supposedly independent newspapers such as *The Post Online* are so dependent on the Zambian government for economic survival that they can't dare 'bite the hand that feeds them' and thus willingly lose their independence. With respects to China, it is worthwhile noting that indeed Sata had transformed from an anti-China crusader to one who cautiously embraces China and with the government-owned *Daily Mail* and 'independent' *The Post Online*, following suit.

In light of the many instances of open partisanship of Zambian media questions arise about fidelity to normative journalistic models in view of the fact that Zambia follows a Westphalia modus operandi. For instance, while the *Daily Mail* and *The Post Online* are long on the historical links between China and Zambia, the *Zambia Watchdog* glosses over this agency of positive framing for China in Zambia. Indeed, *Zambia Watchdog* goes so far as to question the benefits of the relations in a manner analogous to Alden's (2007) characterization 'China's perfect storm', or Shinn and Eisenman's (2012) conclusion that certain aspects of the relations have left 'a legacy of ill will'.

While literature indicates that the copper industry is the main source of negativity about China, this study finds that as of 2013, things may have changed. Indeed, articles to do with investments promotion and attraction hog much more space than the already established mining sector. Only one incident of labour action related to mining is reported while a dispute over mining regulations is reported in the context of the problem having been solved. Could this be an indication that the mining woes of yesteryears are on the way to a smoother ride under Sata? Indeed, the China Non-Ferrous Mining Company, which is critiqued for labour mishaps and controversies, is the same company that hosts Sata during his state visit to China with discussions decidedly upbeat. This trope indeed dovetails with charges in the *Zambian Watchdog* that craft the character of Sata as an opportunistic turncoat whose earlier criticism of China were in the pursuit of political power by all means.

An interesting observation is that Zambia and China have entered cooperation in the media sector beyond the hardware media assistance that we synthesised in the literature review section above. The ruling Patriotic Front youth invited by China's State Administration for Radio Film and Television (SARFT) to learn how to package and channel media messages is a demonstration of this collaboration. A top manager-editor of *The Post Online* is invited to China from where he writes a positively framed opinion piece. This 'capacity building' assistance can be distinguished from the material support that China offered Zambia in the past such as China's donation of radio transmission equipment to Zambia in the 1960s, 1980, 2002, 2005, 2006 and 2011 (Yu-Shan Wu 2012:13-15; Shinn and Eisenman (2012:324). Would this capacity building dimension of Chinese assistance to Zambia serve as confirmation of the suppositions by writers such as Farah and Mosher (2010) and Banda (2009) that there is an ideological 'reshape' of African and Zambian media underway? An extension of this media dimension of cooperation can be seen in the wider context of Zambia-Africa-China cooperation at political party level in the case of the Zambian politician, Wynter Kabimba reported as securing the position of president of the Council of African Political Parties (CAPP) coincidentally headquartered in Khartoum, Sudan (*Daily Mail* May 29). Investigation reveals that a Chinese Communist Party graced the occasion of the launch of CAPP with Western representatives missing at the event (Raziq and Hai, 2013). This is an important development to note because literature indicates that Sudan and Zambia are the polar countries where Chinese involvement in Africa has been framed controversially.

As with other forms of Zambia-China links, Chinese media assistance - whether of the hardware or software variety - has been framed in a Manichean way. For instance, Brautigam (2011:10) argues that Radio transmitters apparently supplied by China were 'delivering primary education to out of school children' many of them orphans. However, Farah and Mosher (2010:16) see the Chinese media support for Zambia in the context of China attempting to prop up regimes keen on rolling back press freedom and democracy and aiding despotic regimes. In 'gotcha journalism' fashion, they conclude that this support was 'awarded during election years [and] timed to support the pro-Beijing MMD in its electoral campaign effort', a viewpoint advanced by Shinn and Eisenman (2012:73) who state that: 'the Chinese side also gave the MMD FM transmitters to help get out the vote in rural areas'. From Franks and Ribet (2009: 131) we get the perspective that Chinese media support was meant to 'potentially diffuse the electoral power that the opposition parties might have had'. The instances of media cooperation that we see in the content analysis of this article, however, demonstrates that Chinese media assistance is not necessarily timed to coincide with electioneering periods but one that is temporally continuous as equally argued by Brautigam (2011:9-10).

China-Africa literature indicates that Chinese media are in Africa on a public diplomacy mission. Indeed, Ngomba (2012:58) sees Chinese media support for Zambia more as 'media-focused public diplomacy' rather than as an 'ideological commitment'. Less appreciated is the fact that African media can themselves serve as platforms for Chinese public diplomacy in Africa. This



media-based public diplomacy is seen in the case of the Chinese ambassador's interviews with Zambian media as well as the coverage of several Zambian elites in full praise of China. Indeed, the content analysis in this study sustains our earlier literature review findings that economic assistance by China to Zambia is the source of Chinese soft power (Yejo Kim 2013; Jura and Kaluzynka 2013). In the particular context of this study, it would appear that efforts are made to ensure that as many of Chinese assistance to Zambia are reported as possible.

What can be said of *Zambian Watchdog* reporting, heavily slanted towards pessimism? In their critical report, the Human Rights Watch report (2011) mentioned in its methodology that it relied in part on journalistic sources in painting a grim picture of China in Zambia's mining sector. Sautman and Yan (2013) fault the Human Rights Watch methodology charging that in an apparently premeditated agenda, the advocacy organisation 'sees what it wants to see and thus again fosters the entirely predictable result of feeding anti-Chinese sentiment in Zambia'. Brautigam (2009:151) points out the role of journalists in the misrepresentations over the 2006 fall out between Sata and Chinese authorities. This is a perspective analogous with Franks and Ribet's (2009:134) argument that Sata's anti-Chinese political campaign platform may have been latched on to forge negativity in Western media. Against this background, this study finds that *Zambian Watchdog* may be more inclined towards a Western view of China in Africa in such a manner as to regurgitate some of the suppositions of China's bashing that are often not backed by fact.

It will be important going forward for proper audience research to be undertaken to prime insights that the internet with all its conveniences can never reveal. Not even the fact that 'internet coverage in Zambia is relatively high by African standards' (Jura and Kalusynska, 2013: 48) replaces the efficacy of an audience dimension to a perceptions study such as this. Thus this article, as well as many others of a similar nature, must be considered as work in progress. The audience survey could sample not only Zambians from different age, social and geographical cadres but also media practitioners would also be targeted in order to hold up today's China-Zambia relations against the global headline grabbing events of yesteryears.

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