Raw Encounters: Chinese Managers, African Workers and the Politics of Casualization in Africa's Chinese Enclaves*

Ching Kwan Lee

ABSTRACT This article examines one of the pre-eminent logics of global capital flow – the pursuit of flexible labour regimes – as a window to explore the interaction between Chinese investments and African communities. It analyses the respective "politics of casualization" in the Chambishi mine on the Zambian Copperbelt and the Tanzania–China Friendship Mill in the port city of Dar es Salaam. Both Zambian and Tanzanian workers have witnessed and resisted precipitous "informalization" of employment since the Chinese assumed full or majority ownership in the late 1990s. Wildcat strikes were staged by workers in both cases. Nevertheless, Zambian copper miners, but not Tanzanian textile workers, seem to have successfully halted this tendency of casualization. After several years of struggle, in 2007 they signed new collective agreements with the Chinese management, who agreed gradually to convert all casual and contract jobs into "permanent" pensionable ones. By explaining the divergent outcomes of these two cases of labour resistance, I hope to identify the major factors shaping the encounter between Chinese managers and African workers.

China's return to Africa from the late 1990s flows from decades of political, ideological and economic ties cemented since the Bandung Conference in 1955. While the Bandung rhetoric of anti-colonial, Third World-ist development still finds a faint echo among both elite and ordinary people in Africa, the more prevalent public discourse these days is the one promoted by the United States and former colonial powers in Western Europe. It focuses on China's capitalist, even "imperialist" impulses: its hunger for raw materials and financial prowess, and its wide-ranging investment portfolio throughout Africa.[1] The frenzy of alarmist

* I thank Ron Aminzade, Michael Burawoy, Peter Evans, Alastair Fraser, Amy Hanser, Gary Herrigel, Miles Larmer, Jamie Monson and Mark Selden for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

1 The Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, US Congress, "China's influence

 doi:10.1017/S0305741009990142

media reports as well as a rapidly growing academic literature on China in Africa have recycled many aggregate statistics of the volume of Chinese investments, casting China as a formidable competitor for global energy resources and diplomatic influence. Yet without comparative and grounded analysis on how these investment projects operate, the diverse agents and local conditions that enable their interplay with workers, unions and communities, these remain sweeping and unproductive generalizations. Neither Chinese capital nor Africa is singular, and the dynamic of their encounters, raw in many ways as this article will show, can be grasped only from within these Chinese enclaves.

This article examines one of the pre-eminent logics of global capital flow – the pursuit of flexible labour regimes – as a window to explore the interaction between Chinese investments and African communities. Casualization (alternatively termed "informalization," "precarious employment" and "non-standard jobs" in the academic literature) has become a global problem, afflicting even the advanced industrialized world. In Africa, it is being discussed with great urgency among trade unionists whenever Chinese investment is the subject.[2] This article analyses the respective "politics of casualization" in the Chambishi mine on the Zambian Copperbelt and the Tanzania–China Friendship Mill (or "Urafiki" as the firm is known in Swahili) in the port city of Dar es Salaam. Both Zambian and Tanzanian workers have witnessed and resisted precipitous informalization of employment since the Chinese assumed full or majority ownership in the late 1990s. Wildcat strikes were staged by workers in both cases, and Zambian copper miners, but not Tanzanian textile workers, seem to have successfully halted the tendency of casualization. After several years of struggle, in 2007 they signed new collective agreements with the Chinese management to convert, gradually, all casual and contract jobs into "permanent" pensionable ones.

Just as the "labour question" was key to European colonial domination and post-independence political struggles, it is also the fulcrum of Chinese capitalism in Africa today. By explaining the divergent outcomes of these two cases of labour resistance, I hope to identify the major factors shaping the encounter between Chinese managers and African workers. This involves an understanding of their worldviews and mutual expectations, rooted in their respective classes and national histories, particularly their experiences with socialism and post-socialism. The first part of this article highlights the historical, political economic parallels across the two cases, providing a baseline for comparison and the backgrounds that inform the behaviour and mentality of the Chinese managers and

footnote continued

in Africa," serial no. 109–74, 28 July 2005, http://www.house.gov/international_relations; "Age of the dragon: China's conquest of Africa," Spiegel (online), 30 May 2007; "Chinese influx revives colonial fears," *The Guardian Weekly* (online), 3 August 2007.

2 I have attended two continent-wide trade union conferences in the past two years on "China in Africa" and both highlighted casualization as the main challenge for African workers employed by Chinese companies.

African workers discussed in the second part. The third section analyses grass-roots militancy, and how Zambian miners are able to exploit a resource nationalism in national politics and a hike in copper prices in the global market to arrest the trend of casualization, at least for now. Lacking these favourable conditions, Tanzanian textile workers' resistance has not been as effective.

Of Mines and Mills: From African Socialism to Structural Adjustment to Chinese Investment

Copper mines and textile mills in Africa have been the sites of hopes, struggles and desperation from the colonial period to post-independent socialism, and more recently neoliberal privatization. Nowhere in the continent was China's role in African development more prominent than in Zambia and Tanzania. Presidents Kenneth Kaunda and Julius Nyerere were then household names in China. They consolidated close ties with the Chinese communist government and proclaimed to pursue African socialism (or humanism in the case of Zambia) after their countries gained independence in 1964. China constructed the famous TAZARA railway, or "freedom railway" between 1965 and 1975, linking the Zambian Copperbelt to the port city of Dar es Salaam, and liberating Zambia from its dependence on railways controlled by the then white colonial regime of Rhodesia.[3] In the same period, China also built more than 100 factories in Tanzania, its largest beneficiary of aid in Africa, including the Tanzania–China Friendship Textile Mill, the largest fully integrated textile mill in East Africa when it was completed.[4] Not even the chaos of the Cultural Revolution raging through China at that time affected these foreign projects.

The Zambian Copperbelt had inspired intense expectations of modernity: it was where an epochal "African industrial revolution" would transform post-independence Zambia from a middle-income country to one gaining "ultimate admission to the ranks of the developed world."[5] In 1969, Kaunda announced the nationalization of all major industrial and financial concerns, including all mineral companies. The Zambian Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM) was formed in 1982, with the Zambian government holding the majority share. ZCCM operated a cradle-to-grave policy: free education for miners' children, subsidized housing, food, electricity, water and transportation, even burial arrangement for the dead. However, plummeting copper prices following the oil crisis of the mid-1970s and 1980s, and huge insolvency and mismanagement problems led to a deepening production crisis at ZCCM and a debt crisis for Zambia. Between 1974 and 1994, little investment was made in mining

3 Jamie Monson, *Africa's Freedom Railway: How a Chinese Development Project Changed Lives and Livelihood in Tanzania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

4 Gail A. Eadie and Denise M. Grizzell, "China's foreign aid, 1975–1978," *The China Quarterly*, No. 77 (1979), pp. 217–34.

5 James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 6.

equipment and machinery, no new mines were opened, and per capita income of Zambians declined by 50 per cent, leaving Zambia the 25th poorest country in the world. Zambia entered its first World Bank Structural Adjustment Programme in 1983, which entailed the devaluation of currency, a 5 per cent cap on wage increases, liberalization of prices of essential commodities, and removal of subsidies on maize and fertilizers. Violent food riots, strike waves and an abortive attempt by Kaunda to abandon the structural adjustment programme ushered in a newly elected government in 1991 headed by Frederick Chiluba, the leader of the national trade union federation. In the second structural adjustment loan package, signed in 1990, privatization of Zambia's 280 parastatals, including ZCCM, was a major condition.[6] Between 1997 and 2002, ZCCM was unbundled into seven different units and sold off to investors from Canada, Britain, India, Switzerland, South Africa and China who bought the Chambishi mine.[7]

In Tanzania, after the 1967 Arusha Declaration emphasizing socialism and self-reliance, parastatals were established in all economic sectors: beer, textiles, diamonds, coffee, cashew nuts, publishing, timber, railways, city transportation and so on. The textile sector, growing from four textile mills in 1968 to 35 by the 1980s, became the largest employer in the country with about 37,000 people, the third taxation contributor to the government, and the largest exporter of manufactured goods. As in Zambia, mismanagement and corruption plagued the parastatals. In Tanzania, the problem was exacerbated by a near breakdown in infrastructure, production and distribution in the late 1970s.[8] By the mid-1980s, even Julius Nyerere, the architect of Tanzanian socialism, agreed to implement market reform. Just as China launched its own market liberalization at around the same time, and as the developed capitalist world came under the sway of neo-liberalism, Tanzania embarked on major structural adjustment programmes. In 1995, after Premier Zhu Rongji's visit, the Chinese government decided to invest US$1.7 million in the Tanzania–China Friendship Mill and became the majority stockholder (51 per cent) of the revamped joint venture with the Tanzanian government.

Casualization under the Chinese

Casualization was among the most salient results of privatization on the Copperbelt and in Tanzanian textiles, even before the Chinese arrived. It is driven by a capitalist logic of accumulation and is not a uniquely Chinese practice.

6 Miles Larmer, *Mineworkers in Zambia: Labour and Political Change in Post-Colonial Africa* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007); Neo Simutanyi, "The politics of structural adjustment in Zambia," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (1996), pp. 825–39.

7 Alastair Fraser and John Lungu, *For Whom the Windfalls? Winners and Losers in the Privatization of Zambia's Copper Mines* (Lusaka: CSTNZ, 2006).

8 John Loxley and John S. Saul, "Multinationals, workers and the parastatals in Tanzania," *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 2 (1975), pp. 54–88.

On the Copperbelt, the new international investors reduced the workforce by almost one-third, from 31,000 at the sale of the first mine in 1997 to 19,145 in 2001, compared to a peak of 62,222 in 1976 under ZCCM.[9] When employing new workers, the privatized mines offer casual positions (including day jobs) or fixed-term contract jobs with no pension or security, or they subcontract entire units to other companies. The traditional "permanent" positions, those of open-ended duration and with pension contributions by employers, account for only half of all mining jobs in the five major mining companies.[10]

The Chinese company NFC Africa Mining plc (NFCA), which has become the new owner of the Chambishi mine, adopted a similar flexible strategy in managing its workforce. NFCA is a subsidiary of the state-owned China Non-Ferrous Metal Industries Corporation and, like many Chinese state-owned companies, it responded to the new national policy of "going-out" or outward investment announced in 1997. "Going-out" is meant to create externally driven economic growth, find new raw material supplies and investment opportunities for state companies, and in the process make them more globally competitive. The Chinese bought the mine for $20 million and have since invested over $150 million in updating its technology. Among the major mining houses, the Chinese have had the highest proportion of casual and contract workers. Before signing the 2007 collective agreement with the two miners' unions, out of a total of about 2,063 employees only 56 were on permanent contracts. They were among the original 218 ZCCM employees the Chinese decided to keep when they arrived in 1998, and have not yet reached the retirement age of 55. There are 189 Chinese "expatriates" occupying major managerial and technical positions. The major drilling and underground mining work, done by more than 979 miners, has been subcontracted to a company called Mining One, and the remaining 1,028 employees in the smelter, foundry, exploration and other mechanical departments are either casuals or are on fixed-term contracts of between six months and three years.[11] These casual workers do not get a pension, only an end-of-service gratuity, and they are entitled to less housing, medical and educational allowances than permanent workers. The Chinese are widely known to be paying the lowest wages among all major mining companies. Workers call them "slave wages" as they range from 1 million to 2 million kwacha, or $250 to $500. Only the highest paid among the unionized workforce are able to cover the costs of the Basic Food Basket computed by a Zambian civil society group.[12]

Similar casualization took place under Chinese management in Urafiki in Tanzania. The first Chinese general manager sent to head the mills in 1996 emphasized that the Chinese government at that time already had a transformed notion of "friendly assistance." "It could not be like foreign aid in the past. It has

9 Fraser and Lungu, *For Whom the Windfalls?* p. 21.
10 *Ibid.* appendix 4, p. 73.
11 Interview with the human resource manager at NFCA, 28 August 2007. For instance, in 2002, they employed 627 casuals and 306 contracts; in 2004, the respective figures were 588 and 232.
12 Fraser and Lungu, *For Whom the Windfalls?* p. 23.

to be financially viable, although the joint venture is also partially politically motivated," he said.[13] The 25-person management team came from a Chinese provincial state-owned textile company in Changzhou city in Jiangsu province which won the bid for undertaking the project. In 1998, the Chinese selected 1,923 employees from Urafiki's original roster and resumed the three-shift production. The workforce was gradually reduced to about 1,260 by December 2002. Casual workers were recruited from 2003, initially at about 200 a year, or one-fifth of the workforce, increasing to more than half of all the employees (869 casuals to 818 permanent workers) by December 2006.[14]

Again, as in Zambia, casualization is an industry-wide phenomenon: the entire Tanzanian textile industry witnessed a dramatic turn towards casual employment between 1991 and 2004. Permanent jobs accounted for 98.5 per cent of employment in the industry in 1991, but by 2004 the workforce was about 90 per cent temporary.[15] In November 2007, as the new Labour Law and a new Minimum Wage Law were about to take effect, Urafiki summarily dismissed all casual workers, throwing into sharp relief the precariousness of casual employment.

In short, casualization is part and parcel of the respective post-socialist transition in Tanzania and Zambia, and not least in China. By the 1990s, all three countries had dismantled their socialist employment system. For the Chinese managers, adopting a casual employment system was a natural response to the political economic circumstances in both China and Africa. China's own state-owned enterprise reform had smashed the "iron rice bowl" and stripped enterprises of all welfare functions. Twenty years of reform shed about 55 million workers from the state and collective sectors.[16] But China's post-socialist reform has been undertaken largely independently of the dictates of the World Bank and the IMF, which thrust upon these two African countries extremely unpopular austerity measures without bringing about the economic growth that China has achieved. These conditions have converged to produce a consequential irony: China has become a compelling and effective conduit of capitalism in Africa. Its unparalleled rise from a Third World socialist country to the growth engine of the world economy have given it enormous credentials as a model of development for many African countries struggling to catch up. This pre-eminent "model" status is enhanced by the strong foundation of Sino-African "socialist" friendship from previous decades. While the governments and political elite welcome China's return, African workers are less sanguine. They bear the brunt of a total collapse of the socialist social contract and a cadre of Chinese managers

13 Interviews with Urafiki management, 22 August 2007.

14 Data compiled by the Urafiki branch secretary of Trade Union of Industrial and Commerical Workers (TUICO), 15 December 2007.

15 George Kebelwa and Josaphat Kweka, "The linkage between trade, development and reduction (TDP): a case study of cotton and textile sector in Tanzania," *Economic and Social Research Foundation* (June 2006), p. 13.

16 Ching Kwan Lee, *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), ch. 2.

convinced by reform at home that China *and they* know the way to break out of poverty and underdevelopment.

Inside the Chinese Enclaves: Managerial Ideology and Worker Consciousness

The notion of "enclaves," as distinct territorial, cultural or social units enclosed within or as if within foreign territory, quite aptly describes China's presence in Africa. The Chinese translation of "enclaves," *feidi* 飞地, meaning "flying lands," even captures the alien nature of these spaces. But there are significant variations among the enclaves, some more socially embedded and integrated with the local society than others. This section shows that despite maintaining similarly strong social and cultural boundaries, the Chinese company in Chambishi has been compelled to develop a greater community presence than the one in Dar. This is because of the different imperative of the respective type of capital and varied pressure from workers and civil society in each locale.

The Chinese management teams in both firms lead segregated lives from the local workforce. The "China houses" in Chambishi and Kitwe (a major town on the Copperbelt about 15 miles from Chambishi) and the "Chinese compound" across the street from Urafiki are secluded residential quarters for Chinese personnel, complete with their own security guards, cooks, satellite dishes, television and karaoke rooms, videos and DVDs from China, ping-pong tables and basketball courts. Inside the Chinese compound for the 25 Urafiki managers, engineers and office staff, there is a huge vegetable garden where African caretakers grow Chinese vegetables, and raise pigs, ducks and chickens. They rarely buy food from the local market. They even dug their own wells. A Chinese-style stone bridge, with engraved Chinese characters for "friendship" on the side, crosses a small creek. Traditional Chinese New Year couplets and paper decorations don the entrance to the dormitory quarter. The Chinese are chauffeured every day from the factory to the canteen in the compound for lunch and dinner, even though they are only half a mile apart. The China house in Kitwe, Zambia is also a spacious compound, with basketball fields, large areas of greenery and low-rise staff quarters, and it is more heavily guarded than the one in Dar.

Over lunch, a Urafiki manager explained why the Chinese managers do not get paid locally:

> Our staff doesn't get paid in Tanzania. Their salaries go directly to their bank accounts in China where their families can withdraw the money. This way, they can save. Everything they need here is provided for. But they need some local money to buy little things like fruit or toiletries. So we give them allowances every month, which amount to an annual bonus of 10,000 yuan per person. We also advise them not to go downtown or mingle with the locals, for their own safety.[17]

17 Interview with Urafiki management, Dar es Salaam, 24 August 2007. Thanks to Jamie Monson who pointed out to me that this salary payment practice was already in place in the 1960s and 1970s.

Language barriers only reinforce the company policy of not venturing into town or going to films or other local entertainment. Chinese managers in their 50s and 40s usually speak little English, and younger ones who can, complain about the "impure" and heavily accented English which Zambian and Tanzania workers speak. Almost no one among the Chinese speaks Bemba (a Zambian dialect on the Copperbelt) or Swahili (the national language of Tanzania). At Urafiki, a young college graduate with a degree in Swahili was recently hired as a translator for the managers, and the human resource managers in both Chambishi (until recently) and Urafiki are Africans who have studied or worked in China and can speak fluent Mandarin. African workers complain all the time about the Chinese playing games with the language barrier. Their general observation is that when African workers make demands, the Chinese pretend they do not understand English. But when vendors or government officials visit, the same people suddenly become conversant in English. A trade union representative in Chambishi who has met senior managers several times during annual collective bargaining sessions said: "They do not speak to us directly, only to their translators. But it is obvious that they speak English very well. I saw one manager who did not utter a word of English … start correcting errors in the draft of the collective agreement while the translator did all the talking."

More profound than the communication barrier is the gap between what managers call "work ethics" and workers see as "exploitation." Modern conflicts echo the colonial discourse of African indolence and poor work ethics of earlier periods,[18] but with a post-socialist twist. Both sides use their respective experience with socialism and underdevelopment.[19] Chinese managers have come to Africa with personal career experience in reformed state-owned enterprises, and have now basically rejected the socialist firm as a viable form for economic development. They often attribute China's lift from backwardness and poverty to its abandonment of the "iron rice bowl" mentality and practice. They demand of their African workers the same work ethics and sacrifice they believed have allowed the Chinese to develop, and which have yet to be found among the African workforce. Zambian and Tanzanian workers, on the other hand, appeal to the moral economic standards and labour rights that were established during the "government periods" and insist that foreign investors today should at least match those conditions of service. The socialist ethos lingers as standards of fair return to labour, an ethos that the Chinese (along with other foreign investors) insist on wiping out and deem unproductive.

18 See for instance, Frederick Cooper, "Colonizing time: work rhythms and labor conflict in colonial Mombasa," in Nicholas B. Dirks (ed.), *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 209–45; Keletso Atkins, "'Kafir time': preindustrial temporal concepts and labour discipline in 19th century colonial Natal," *Journal of African History*, No. 29 (1988), pp. 229–44.

19 In Tanzania, during the construction of the Tazara, the Chinese also demanded and demonstrated an ethics of "hard work," a desire for haste and for accomplishing tasks ahead of schedule, in the name of the superiority and efficacy of socialism. Monson, *Africa's Freedom Railway*.

The manager of Urafiki's finance department reflected on his experience with Tanzanian workers at the end of a nine-year stint at the textile mill. He was about to return to China for good. Contrasting African workers' "backward" work ethics and their unwillingness to make sacrifice with his own efforts in breaking out of poverty, he insinuated racial stereotypes:

Maybe because they have lived a much longer time in a primitive state. So much land with so little industry. You see Africans sleeping under the trees all the time and when they wake up they look for fruits on the trees. They are content with having enough to eat … Workers said our wages are too low. But they do not want to work harder for more. I understand their lives are hard, prices are high and they have to support six to 12 people in the household. I told them to be more serious about work. I grew up in very poor and backward rural areas in Anhui province. Before I turned 17, I had never tasted milk. When I first arrived at Changzhou, I did not have enough to eat. No rice, just porridge, a bit of cabbage, salt and oil. Three times a day, the same porridge. Now these Africans all spend their money on Coca Cola. They could use the same money to buy eggs or milk to get more nutrition. Chinese would never waste their money on Coke. We Chinese will save their money for the family. But here whenever they have money in their pockets, they just spend it without thinking. One month's wage can only support half a month's expenses. Then they turn to stealing.[20]

Indolence and poor work ethics constitute the frame through which managers interpreted the union's rejection of a more flexible and intensive work schedule. To the Chinese management, the cyclical product market requires flexibility of employment. Each year, the high season for kangas, the cloth that Urafiki produces, runs from July to October, because those are the months when farmers obtain cash after their harvests, and they will buy kangas for themselves and as gifts. Orders and labour requirement will then shrink from December to June. Managers have repeatedly demanded a 12-hour work schedule during the busy months but the union does not approve of overtime work because workers do not want to work more than eight hours a day. To the Chinese, this just confirms their views that African workers are lazy.

If the Chinese managers see themselves as imparting a more modern work ethic and discipline to the Africans, they are quick to refer to their own working conditions and hard work as living proof. Chinese managers constantly referred to "eating bitterness" when speaking about their experience in Tanzania. The first general manager of the mills recalled with gruelling detail how the Chinese staff suffered and overcome a serious drought in 1997:

Altogether I have worked here for eight years. I have many stories of eating bitterness. When I first arrived in September 1996, it was really really harsh. Power and water stoppage was so frequent and irregular that we did not even count that as hardship. In China, we had rolling blackouts; here no plans, no warning, that's Tanzania's national situation … I went to the electricity bureau and water bureau numerous times, all days, asking their heads to give us special consideration. The living conditions, sanitation and housing for Chinese personnel were really terrible. Only in 2002 did we renovate the Compound. We had the money but at that time we wanted to uphold the principle of productive investment first, living conditions second. Bitterness first, enjoyment later, this is our old Chinese wisdom. We only had oil lamps in the dormitory. I still remember the historic drought in 1997. When we ran out of water, we found a large tank of dead water inside the factory, covered with dead rats and cockroaches.

20 Interview with Urafiki management, Dar es Salaam, 23 August 2007.

The 23 of us removed the dirt and sterilized this dead water for our daily use for an entire month. Still we could not use that as drinking water. So, we went to the Chinese expert team at Tanzara who shared their well with us.[21]

Similar stories of overcoming hardship were related by Chambishi managers: "The geological conditions here are very complex. We have to dig down to 900 metres below the ground to find any ore. The British only dug down to 480 metres. Only the Chinese have the technology to do this, the Zambians cannot do it themselves. This mine was abandoned for years when we bought it."[22]

In both the Chambishi mine and the Urafiki mill, Chinese "work ethics" and Chinese experience with reforming old socialist practices are ubiquitous refrains among managers, whether Chinese or African. Work ethics, understood to be a devotion to work, a willingness to make sacrifices without a concomitant demand for rights, rewards or privileges, is invoked by these managers to explain China's recent economic development and to justify their demands on workers. At the Chambishi mine, the Zambian human resource manager related to me what to him was the most "inspiring" moment of his visit to NFCA's headquarters in Beijing:

This lady in the head office is amazing. She works so fast, walks so fast in the office that she was literally running from one desk to another, only two metres apart, to grab things for her work. She is a high achiever, very motivated, but not necessarily for the salary. Here [in Zambia] you see people dozing off at their desks. Zambian government employees are four times slower than those here in the mine whom I think are slow. We don't have a clocking system yet, and everyone was up in arms when I tried to introduce one. Now I am trying a "discipline campaign," to raise consciousness among our employees about the importance of being on time, putting in effort at work, etc.[23]

Chinese managers use their own hard work as examples to demand similar sacrifices from their African workers. Echoing a popular saying in post-socialist China, managers in these two plants in Africa claim "sacrifices are necessary for economic take-off," and workers are the implicit sacrificial lambs.[24]

At Urafiki, a Chinese senior manager related the experience of his Tanzanian human resource manager who spent seven years in Shanghai as a foreign student:

Mr Swai has seen how China was once backward and poor too. People did not have cell phones or televisions. Why did the country develop? We eat bitterness and make sacrifices. [African] Workers do not see that Chinese made sacrifices for progress. Here they think because this is a Chinese-owned factory, that we have come to assist them so it's natural that we should feed and pay them everyday they are alive. They don't have any ambition, or motivation to improve themselves or work hard. China's reform experience has taught us that you need sacrifice. Our own industrial enterprises have turned the corner from losing money to making profits by intensifying the labour process and reducing manpower.[25]

Workers, on the other hand, have an alternative standard of fairness. Despite their different capacity to assert their demands on the Chinese, as the following section explains, Zambian and Tanzanian workers share a similar understanding

21 Interview with Urafiki management, Dar es Salaam, 22 August 2007.
22 Interview with NFCA management, Chambishi, 1 July 2007.
23 Interview with NFCA management, Chambishi, 28 August 2007.
24 Jamie Monson described a similarly insulated living arrangement, relentless work pace and an ethics of hard work among the Chinese sent to build the Tazara in the 1970s. See her *Africa's Freedom Railway*.
25 Interview with Urafiki management, Dar, 24 August 2007.

of worker rights that have roots in their respective "government periods." Zambian miners in particular have been used to a rather paternalistic labour regime since the colonial period when the Roan Selection Trust and the Anglo-American Corporation ran the mines. The government-controlled ZCCM continued many of the welfare provisions including housing, free water and electricity, medicine for miners and their dependents, and a football team. The centrality of copper mining to the national economy made miners the labour aristocracy enjoying high salaries and social prestige unavailable to the ordinary working masses. What were then the standard terms of employment have to be fought for under the Chinese. Whereas the Chinese allowed medical coverage of one child per family, Zambian miners demanded all dependents, usually four to six, to be included. "How could the Chinese impose such painful choice on us? All four are my children and they make me choose only one? Can you do that? During the government period, all miners' children were covered. We are not Chinese who only have one child!"[26]

Whereas Chinese managers drew moral boundaries between themselves and Africans around the theme of "work ethics," the latter explicitly talked about class exploitation, especially in Urafiki where workers' pay rates were lower and the Chinese managers made fewer concessions to workers' demands, a difference explained below. At Urafiki, comments about "cruel" Chinese "exploitation" were common, and reminiscent of a long tradition of antagonistic discourse against foreign, non-African exploitation.[27]

During the government period, we had thieves [corrupt officials] but the stolen wealth was maintained in our country; but in the current period, the Chinese steal our labour power and wealth and profits and send them to China.[28]

The Chinese are cruel: they don't treat us like people, but like animals. Many workers only get little transport allowance but have to travel 16 or 20 kilometres to get home. The Chinese live in the Compound across the street but they have a car to take them back and forth. They don't even want to walk that short distance.[29]

Even the dogs owned by the Chinese were well off compared to the Tanzanian workers.[30]

If you want your cows to give more milk, you have to give them more grass, but the Chinese give them less grass. They are really bad employers. White colonialists were better, at least they greet you. The Chinese don't greet you when they pass by you. Last year, there was a leaking problem; I asked the Chinese to buy some tarmac but the Chinese said to me that I am Tanzanian and therefore I cannot give him advice. A year later, they finally bought the tarmac, but from China, at a price three times higher than local Tanzanian tarmac … The Chinese are thieves. They steal our wealth and send it to China. Everything used in the mills is from China.

26 Interview with a union representative, Chambishi, 29 August 2007.
27 James Brennan, "Blood enemies: exploitation and urban citizenship in the nationalist political thought of Tanzania, 1958–1975," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (2006), pp. 1–25, and Ronald Aminzade, "From race to citizenship: the indigenization debate in post-socialist Tanzania," *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2003), pp. 43–63. There are differences in African perceptions of Chinese as compared with European, South Asian and white domination, but this will require a separate analysis.
28 Interview with a female electrical engineer at Urafiki, Dar es Salaam, 20 October 2007.
29 Interview with a female weaver at Urafiki, Dar es Salaam, 12 December 2007.
30 Interview with a male technician at Urafiki, Dar es Salaam, 15 October 2007.

Even second-hand and poor-quality machines are from China, bought with Tanzanian shillings.[31]

On the Copperbelt, on the other hand, people's views are more mixed and layered. The intense public discontent caused by the fatal explosion in an NFCA-affiliated facility in 2005, killing 52 casual workers, is still palpable but it is counterbalanced by the prosperity that the Chinese have brought to the community. While assailing the Chinese for treating them as cheap labour, many miners also credited them for reopening a bankrupt and abandoned mine and creating employment. Their Zambian government managers during the ZCCM period had failed them abysmally and Chambishi was resuscitated by the infusion of Chinese capital and technology. Some miners also appreciated the Chinese work style, especially when compared to expatriates of other nationalities on the Copperbelt. Comments like these are common:

The thing I like about the Chinese is that if a Chinese is not designated as a boss, they will bring him down to work with us and they will not discriminate in his favour because he is a Chinese. He will do the same job as everyone else. I had Chinese guys working under my supervision. This is something you don't see a Boer, a Canadian or Indian doing. To me, who has worked with them closely, I like them because they are down to earth.[32]

There was massive unemployment in Chambishi … But with the coming of the Chinese you find that almost everybody, as long as he can work, is now employed in the Chinese mines. So we are happy … the Chinese are able to give us at least an income to feed and keep our children. Before the Chinese came people would just be loitering on the streets while some would go into the plant to steal things like cables and scrap metals but those are things of the past. So despite the poor conditions being offered we appreciate what the Chinese are doing.[33]

New investments by the Chinese also have also created a sense of optimism:

This town has been designated a Free Economic Zone and the Chinese are to build a multi-facility economic zone. As such workers are to benefit because by next year worker housing will be built, two big colleges and two stadiums, a shopping complex and a smelter which is in progress.[34]

The difference in the degree of class and racial tension between the two cases also throws into sharp relief the need to distinguish different types of Chinese capital, with their varied degree of (dis)connection from local communities. The parent company of NFCA is one of China's largest state-owned enterprises and has branches in many countries. Chambishi has also been designated the site of the first of the five special economic zones which the Chinese government has pledged to construct in Africa. On the other hand, the Changzhou No. 2 Textile Company that holds the majority share of Urafiki is a provincial-level share-holding company, and does not carry the same level of state economic and political mission. The nature of their industry also generates different incentives to be embedded in the local society. Copper mining is place-dependent whereas textile mills are more foot-loose. The different interests of these two

31 Interview with a construction department worker at Urafiki, Dar es Salamm, 10 December 2007.
32 Interview with a miner, Chambishi, 29 August 2007.
33 Interview with a worker in the concentrator, Chambishi, 28 August 2007.
34 Interview with a shop steward, Chambishi, 28 August 2007.

investment projects produce different patterns of engagement with the local communities. NFCA's long-term interest in Chambishi and the Copperbelt region makes it very sensitive to local popular sentiments, and attempts are made to shore up its image as a good corporate citizen. For instance, in 2007, NFCA launched a Corporate Social Responsibility Plan, which covers repairing roads, building bus shelters, setting public recreation facilities on the Copperbelt, donating stationery to Chambishi school children, supporting the women empowerment plan, and participating in Malaria and HIV/AIDS campaigns. In contrast, at Urafiki, Chinese managers have no plans to make similar social investments. In short, the more capital-intensive extractive project in Chambishi turns out to be more constrained by and responsive to local pressures than a manufacturing concern in a competitive sector. This difference also shows up in the ways the two companies react to worker resistance, and cautions against an undifferentiated view of "Chinese capital."

Grassroots Militancy and its Divergent Outcomes

Strikes occurred in both the enterprises in this study after the Chinese became owners, staged by disgruntled workers demanding higher wages and more secure terms of employment. Zambian miners' misgivings about "low" wages arose in relation to wages at other foreign-owned mines on the Copperbelt and to the windfall profits the Chinese were presumably reaping with the sharp rise in copper prices. Thanks to the transparency of the global copper trade, centralized and priced at the London Metal Exchange, miners know the value of the commodity they produce and use it to claim for better conditions of work:

> We are lowly paid compared to other mines. Even when you compare our wages with Chambishi Metals which is in the Chambishi area, we are paid less. If you compare with other mines like KCM, Kansanshi Mines and Lumwana Mines, the disparity is even greater. It is like we are just paid to get some strength to work in the plant, and not to live. At Kansanshi Mines, workers are getting about 5 million Kwacha per month, and what about us, we only get 1 million.[35]

For workers, this became particularly unacceptable when copper prices rose from $1,400 a ton in November 2001 to about $7,000 a ton in April 2006.[36] Miners refer to the BBC broadcasts and their company magazine as sources of information on copper prices and are enraged by the gap between corporate profits and worker salaries.

At Urafiki, livelihood is even more precarious than on the Zambian Copperbelt, if only because workers' earnings are much lower. Miners take

35 Interview with a NFCA miner, Chambishi, 28 August 2007.

36 Copper prices have been stable for many years. In fact, from the late 1990s to 2003, the London Metal Exchange copper price sat below US$2,000 per ton. It climbed sharply in 2004, peaking in mid-2006 at almost $9,000 a tonne. More recently it has traded between $5,000 and $7,000. It's worth noting that the average price between 1998 and 2003 was only $1,650 a ton. Paul Stathis, "What's really driving the price of copper?" 20 August 2007, http://www.electricalsolutions.net.au/feature_article/article.asp?item=1435.

home on average $250–$500 at Chambishi, but casual workers at Urafiki are paid only $50 and permanent workers $65, inclusive of transportation allowance and a sick leave allowance. Workers reported accruing multiple debts, cutting back on food, eating only beans and rice without meat or fish, not being able to send their children to school and having to rely on irregular incomes from informal jobs (usually peddling vegetables and other sundry items on the streets). When asked about the main differences between the government and the Chinese periods at Urafiki, most workers pointed first and foremost to the decline in living standards. They earned less in terms of shillings during the government period, but were able to afford more food, clothes and services. But unlike copper miners, textile workers in Urafiki cannot easily establish how much surplus value is produced and extracted by their employers, as there is no international pricing mechanism for textiles.

"Putting fear among the Chinese"

In Chambishi, workers reported two strikes (June 2004 and July 2006) since the Chinese came, and both were instigated by workers without the blessing of the unions. The first strike was brief and was caused by discontent about differences in pay among different categories of workers: permanent workers were paid more in wages and benefits than casuals on contract, and those directly employed by NFCA were paid more than those in the subcontracting company Mining One. One worker said:

> Most of us are not happy because why should my friends with similar qualifications and doing the same job get double my salary? … After we heard that the management had refused to give in to our demands, we didn't even wait for a report from the union representatives. We started the strike right away. The corrupt union [Mine Workers' Union of Zambia] was able to convince us to go back to work and I guessed they were just bought off by management.[37]

The second strike, also initiated by workers without union approval, turned violent and became more frightening to the Chinese management. A branch union representative who participated in the collective bargaining with the Chinese said that "it was this strike that has put fear among the Chinese … It was illegal but it was necessary because it was the quickest way to achieve our goal."[38]

It took place as negotiations were going on between the two unions and the Chinese management. The Chinese had actually agreed to pay workers some back wages but unfortunately some calculation mistakes occurred in the payroll department, and instead of paying workers the back wages, deductions showed up in their pay slips. When the night shift workers saw the pay slips before they started work they became furious. They decided to show up at the front gate but refused to go in to start their shift. The day shift workers came

37 Interview with a miner at NFCA, Chambishi township, 28 August 2007.
38 Interview with the union branch secretary at NFCA, Chingola, 4 December 2007.

at 7 a.m. and joined them, and then the 2 p.m. workers also joined. All stopped working. Workers' wives and children gathered at the main gate too, carrying stones. There was talk about blasting the shaft but the union people talked workers out of this plan. They assured them that they were going to sit down with management that night and by the following morning everyone would get what was owed them. But then things turned ugly. A union representative at the scene recalled:

> Upon hearing this they started cheering as a way of congratulating us but the head of security thought the noise indicated a riotous mob, and that the workers wanted to beat up or manhandle the union leaders. They started firing tear gas to disperse the workers … Workers had stones in their hands so they reacted and caused lots of damage with the stones.[39]

Another worker recalled:

> Workers burned the trucks loaded with copper, trashing paper documents in the offices, and even attacked the China house on the edge of Chambishi township. The Zambian police used rubber bullets and one miner was shot in the leg. Workers also blocked the main road to Chingola and set logs on fire to prevent passage. Twenty-four hours later everyone went home, and two weeks later, management signed the new agreement.[40]

In the 2007 collective agreement, NFCA also agreed to a basic pay raise of 23 per cent, with the actual total increment including allowances amounting to a 65 per cent increment. Jobs that were previously on contract became permanent, and casuals were given contracts of between one and three years, with the promise that these would be changed to permanent in the near future.

"Shedding fish tears"

At Urafiki, low wages and casualization have also been major grievances among the workers. But workers could only accept casual jobs and suffer quietly, like "shedding fish tears," as one worker put it vividly in Swahili.[41] Also, many of the casual workers the Chinese recruited were relatives and family members of the permanent workers. Such nepotistic casualization helped assuage some of the discontent among workers. Still, there have been three strikes since the Chinese started operation, in 1997, 2002 and 2005. In addition, there were inconspicuous "cold strikes" or go slows, according to workers in the weaving and spinning departments. What is remarkable about these strikes is that over time workers seemed to become more demoralized by the futility of their actions. The Tanzanian government has staunchly supported the Chinese, and the union representing the textile sector, the Tanzania Union of Industrial and Commercial Workers (TUICO), has a penchant for bureaucratic arbitration rather than mobilizing workers for strikes. Demoralized, workers either continue

39 *Ibid*.
40 Interview with a miner at NFCA, Chambishi township, 4 July 2007.
41 This is a Swahili saying for those who are oppressed but cannot access any help. When fish cries, tears are washed away by water so no one can notice that it is crying. Interview with a male technician at Urafiki, 15 October 2007.

seeking the intervention of the government and the union or simply acquiesce to deteriorating employment conditions.

According to a worker who was part of the 2002 strike:

> Workers made 14 demands, including back pay of 10,000 shillings per worker for ten years, and reducing working hours from 12 to eight. But the Chinese refused. Workers called in the Minister for Industry, and when he failed to resolve the issue, workers chased after him and the police had to come and rescue him. Then the workers went to the Prime Minister, Mr Sumaye, who also came but he said to us, "those who want to work keep working, those who do not want to work, off you go." The Prime Minister is backing the Chinese so they dare to ignore us because they know the government is supporting them. The Chinese finally agreed to give us a paltry 2,000 shillings raise. The government supports the Chinese because the two governments are in good relations, and the Chinese government gives aid to the Tanzanian government, but they do no good to the ordinary Tanzanians. No party dares to declare itself anti-Chinese because they are big investors.[42]

The following account of the second strike in 2005, given by the current branch union secretary at Urafiki, also illustrates how workers were demobilized by their own unions:

> In 2005, two weeks before the strike, the TUICO regional office called together all the workers in the social hall and discussed the issues. Workers voted to strike by a three-quarters majority. They demanded that the entire Tanzanian management team step down, because they were all supporting the Chinese. They wanted a new management who would give them the raise. The District Commissioner came here on the second day of the strike and cheated the people, urging them to go home, promising he would talk to the President about their demands. The strike lasted for five days and he never returned. A rumour circulated that workers would all be fired if they did not return to work. Workers were scared and went back to work. But later they realized that it was the union leaders who spread the rumour. Angry workers later voted out the TUICO branch leaders. But the strike did not bring any result. The Chinese did not fire anyone, but deducted four days' wages from all workers.[43]

When 725 casual workers were summarily dismissed in November 2007, the branch union secretary persuaded the worker representatives not to strike or instigate violence, but to file a complaint with the Commission of Mediation, charging that the Chinese illegally denied them formal contracts which are required under the 2004 Labour Law. These workers had been at Urafiki for at least one year and some even for five years. The retrenched workers managed to pull off a little protest on the day when they were told to return to the factory to collect their last paycheck, but intervention by a member of parliament and wide reports in the local media resulted in no change in the Chinese decision. The workers were dismissed.

In short, the Chinese made significant concessions to Zambian miners' strikes but not the Tanzanian textile workers'. The notable difference in the effectiveness of the strikes is that Zambian workers were able to leverage a boom in the world copper market. Workers' bargaining power was also bolstered by a palpable "resource nationalism" in Zambian public discourse which has been forcefully articulated by opposition politicians. There is no equivalent windfall in the textile

42 Interview with a worker at Urafiki, Dar es Salaam, 10 December 2007.
43 Interview with a union branch secretary at Urafiki, 10 December 2007.

industry to increase workers' bargaining power with the Chinese. While the boom and bust of the product markets are not predictable, the difference in workers' political sensibility – the spontaneity and autonomy of rank-and-file workers – between the two cases is also partly rooted in their respective working-class history.

Organized labour in Tanzania has been politically weak but rank-and-file workers have also been relatively acquiescent, except for a brief strike in the early 1970s instigated by the Marxist-Leninist faction of the ruling party TANU. The Tanzanian government has obtained industrial peace not just by restricting the right to strike and the right to engage in collective bargaining, but also through a system of state paternalism. It gave workers minimum wage protection, and average earnings in parastatals were 1.4 to 1.7 times higher than the whole economy between 1967 and 1977. Moreover, workers obtained "new substantive rights, ranging from greater financial and tenurial security to industrial democracy and workers' education."[44]

In sharp contrast to parastatal workers in Tanzania, an enduring feature on the Zambian Copperbelt is grassroots militancy. The widespread scepticism and distrust among the rank-and-file miners towards their union leaders that came up in almost all the miner interviews I conducted has a long pedigree in the working-class history of that region. From Michael Burawoy's study in the late 1960s to Miles Larmer's more recent research in the 2000s, disunity within and among the unions, and schisms between miners and their union officials are consistent themes. The clashes between miners and their unions caused spontaneous and periodic outbursts of worker militancy that are not susceptible to control by the unions, political parties or arbitration committees. To the Copperbelt miners, an iron law of oligarchy has jinxed the unions for decades. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, short localized strikes continued to arise from grievances about food subsidies, racial hierarchy in wages,[45] fees for medical services and pension schemes, championed by miners and their branch representatives who tended to respond to increasing repression and declining terms of service and livelihood with more confrontational strikes.[46] Their targets were not just the government and the companies but also the union bureaucracy, as this miner explained:

> When they [union leaders] negotiate with management, usually they fail to reach an agreement. They don't have that zeal and courage … all the strikes we have staged have been started by the workers themselves and not the unions. They are cowards … Since it is not possible for us to speak to management at the same time, it pays to belong to a union But in terms of forcing management to raise our pay, it's the workers themselves who do that. A strike is most effective, but the union is always against it. In most cases, the unions will agree to terms which we don't like and usually force things they have agreed with management on us.[47]

44 Dudley Jackson, "The disappearance of strikes in Tanzania: income policies and industrial democracy," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1979), p. 251.

45 By 1980, expatriates represented only 4.7% of the workforce, down from 16% in 1964. Zambians earned between half and two-thirds of the wages of expatriates doing the same job, the latter also receiving additional benefits. Larmer, *Mineworkers in Zambia*, pp. 107–08.

46 *Ibid.* chs. 4 and 5.

47 Interview with a miner at NFCA, Chambishi township, 28 August 2007.

Corruption is the perennial problem that plagues the national offices of the two miners' unions.[48] Under the Chinese, free trips to China for union leaders invite the most suspicion among miners:

> Corruption is very serious in the current NUMAW. We have heard that many of the union officials are being sent to China not to work but for leisure. The big question is what work did they do to deserve this? Small things like this make us question the credibility of our union representatives. Those trips are usually done in secret with the knowledge of union members. Why? So to me it simply shows that there are bigger things happening behind our backs which we don't know and probably will never know.[49]

Miners have been aided by the Zambian presidential election in 2006 in which Chinese labour practices became a political issue. A year earlier, a tragic industrial accident enraged the local community and lent enormous moral legitimacy to miners' arguments that the Chinese are truly exploitative of Zambian casual workers. In April 2005, the single most deadly disaster in 35 years happened at the Chinese-owned Beijing General Research Institute of Mining and Metallurgy in Chambishi. All the 52 people who died in the incident were Zambian casual workers who were paid only $15 to $30 a month for working in such a hazardous environment. A national day of mourning was observed to mark the mass funeral of the deceased. Popular outrage was directed at both the Chinese and the government for not imposing adequate safety standards in foreign-invested mines. Anger continued to simmer after compensation of about $10,000 per killed employee was paid. Chinese President Hu Jintao's planned visit to Chambishi to lay the cornerstone for a new $220 million copper smelter in February 2007 was called off after threats of mass protests.[50]

In 2006, Michael Sata of the opposition party Patriotic Front, who was President Levy Mwanawasa's main challenger, made China's presence in Zambia's copper mining and trading sectors a campaign issue. "They ill treat our people and that is unacceptable. We are not going to condone exploitative investors. This country belongs to Zambians," Sata said of Chinese investors. Mwanawasa defended the Chinese when Sata first made the threat to review state contracts should he come to power. Later, Mwanawasa agreed with the general complaint about the quality of investment, saying he would order the arrest and prosecution of investors in the copper mines that broke labour laws. Sata's populist "Zambia for Zambians" campaign did not make him president but he won the majority vote in Lusaka, where Chinese traders have employed many locals, and the Copperbelt.[51] His "resource nationalism" has parallels in other parts of the developing world, spoken of by political leaders in countries with

48 Challenging the close ties between MUZ and the government, a new rival National Union of Miners and Allied Workers (NUMAW) was registered in 2004, representing miners who are new recruits in the privatized mining houses. At NFCA, NUMAW represented all but the 50-plus permanent employees staying on after privatization.

49 Interview with a miner at NFCA, Chambishi, 28 August 2007.

50 Yaroslav Trofimov, "In Africa: China's expansion begins to stir resentment," *Wall Street Journal*, 2 February 2007, p. A1.

51 Isabel Chimangeni, "Chinese presence met with resistance," 18 July 2006, http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=35152; see also Joseph A. Schatz "Zambian hopeful takes a swing at China," *The*

reserves of oil, natural gas and mineral resources from Russia and Iran to Bolivia and Venezuela. It is founded on widening income inequality amid soaring world commodity prices and demands by disenfranchised citizens for a larger share of the profits from their natural resources.[52]

Conclusion

Much has been said and criticized about China's intentions in Africa.[53] The rhetoric of Chinese colonialism (such as China's "scramble for Africa," "conquest of Africa," "the new Sinosphere") underscores the angst of Western powers about the rise of a formidable rival, but reveals little about the varied capacities, interests and constraints of the foot-soldiers of Chinese projects on the ground. Preliminary findings from this comparative research on the labour politics of Chinese capitalism in southern Africa challenge the mistaken notion, prevalent in current debates and reports, that there is a singular "Chinese" interest always capable of imposing itself on a singular and vulnerable Africa which does not have any political leverage in encounters with the Chinese. Instead of imposition, this article highlights interactions, and the many forces from African states and societies which shape the terms of those interactions with uneven effectiveness.

Specifically, the comparison generates several working hypotheses. Different investors have varying capacities and interests, and they encounter the local labour force with varied collective histories and power. The Chinese at Chambishi and Urafiki resort to casualization as a means to cut costs, but Chambishi's interest in securing long-term, territorially specific development has hamstrung its relentless pursuit of casualization, forcing it to yield to pressure generated by grassroots militancy that rode on the wave of resource nationalism at a time of a global hike in copper prices. Chinese investment in the competitive textile sector, in contrast, has a shorter time frame, less political burden and thinner profit margin. Smaller and less embedded investors may ironically turn out to be more formidable adversaries for workers. A fruitful line of inquiry is to re-evaluate the different logics and impacts of, for instance, extractive, industrial and merchant capitals from China which are all active in today's Africa.

---

footnote continued

Washington Post, 25 September 2006, A16; Miles Larmer and Alastair Fraser, "Of cabbages and King Cobra: populist politics and Zambia's 2006 election," *African Affairs*, No. 106 (2007), pp. 611–37.

52 The Economist Intelligence Unit, "Latin American politics: resource nationalism revived," 6 April 2007, http://www.viewswire.com/index; Joshua Kurlantzick, "The coming resource war, crude awakening," *The New Republic*, 2 October 2006.

53 For historical and contemporary analysis of Chinese state interests in Africa, see Chris Alden, *China in Africa* (London: Zed Books, 2007); Philip Snow, *The Star Raft: China's Encounter with Africa* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988). An overview of China's new south–south policy as the larger context of China–Africa relations is Alex Fernandez Jilberto and Barbara Hogenboom, "Developing regions facing China in a neo-liberalized world," *Journal of Developing Societies*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (2007), pp. 305–39.

Another theoretical issue is whether or not Chinese capital behaves differently from capital of other nations. The presence of a number of multinationals originating from different countries on the Copperbelt provides a natural experiment to study if class relation takes different forms under different national management. For a start, miners constantly make comparisons among the mining houses and realize that they all share an interest in making profits from their native resources and labour. For instance, all major international mining houses are found to employ casual labour and some of them subcontract more of their core activities to other companies than the Chinese. Wildcat strikes protesting against low wages and casualization have occurred in the past few years at mines owned by Indian investors. Yet the Chinese became the sole target of resource nationalism. Whatever the reasons for this bias, the vigilant international spotlight, cast more on the Chinese than at capital from other countries (such as India), may itself generate real effects on Chinese capital behaviour on the ground.

Finally, Africa is diverse and changing. African workers and governments bring with them different histories and evolving capacities in encountering Chinese investors. Zambian miners boast a long tradition of grassroots resistance and the Zambian government is becoming more assertive, thanks in part to the increasing assertiveness of civil society groups which demand more national share of the profits from copper. The recent imposition of the Windfall Profit Tax, though later rescinded in light of the global economic downturn in late 2008, signalled the potential form of resource nationalism.[54] Countries where export and foreign investment are less politicized, and civil society is more dependent on the ruling party, like Tanzania, may lack such leverage.

As this article goes to the press, the Copperbelt is reeling from a sharp downturn in copper prices triggered by the global financial crisis and recession. Prices have fallen from a high of $8,900 a ton in July 2008 to $4,900 a ton in mid-April 2009. Amidst public anxiety over mass layoffs on the Copperbelt and while some foreign companies actually dismissed workers or were on the verge of shutting down part of their production, the Chinese NFCA made a public announcement that everyone in the company would stay on the payroll. The Chinese have also bought the Luanshya mine shut down by a Swiss–Israeli joint venture company, vowing to retain and expand the local workforce. To many Zambians, the latest financial crisis only proves once again the exhaustion of the Western model of development. They are looking ever more eagerly to China as the key to the future of the African continent. As Chinese capitalism in Africa is poised to become a major story shaping the global economy, the spirit of Bandung, rather than the trite rhetoric of "colonialism," may provide a more relevant, productive and critical lens for observing development in the 21st century.

54 John Lungu, "Copper mining in Zambia: renegotiation or law reform?" *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 117 (2008), pp. 41–53.