

Curated Reading List: China-Zimbabwe Relations

This curated reading list aims to guide readers through the scholarly analyses of the China-Zimbabwe relationship. Despite the scarcity of official information available due to the general lack of transparency on both sides, several scholars have attempted to analyze Chinese involvement in the Zimbabwean economy. Several of the articles focus specifically on former President Robert Mugabe's Look East Policy and Chinese involvement in the agriculture and natural resource extraction sectors.

A number of scholars see China-Zimbabwe relations as a microcosm of China-Africa engagement. Quite a number of the scholarly works emanate from African scholars, including **Langston Mukwereza** and **Sam Moyo**; Chinese academics such as **Zhang Chun** bring a different perspective to the table.

Since 1979, China and Zimbabwe have enjoyed a friendly and committed relationship. The relationship was enhanced in 2005 as Mugabe unveiled his Look East Policy, moving away from European aid and towards greater China-Zimbabwe cooperation. Mugabe relied extensively on his Chinese counterparts to support his country. On the other hand, Chinese authorities often seem to find relations with Zimbabwe challenging; their seemingly close ties with the Zimbabwean government became a source of embarrassment as Mugabe became more and more erratic. Beyond this, the Zimbabwean government was often asking for more while often misusing Chinese loans and grants. Starting in 1987 with the construction of Zimbabwe's National Sports Stadium, Chinese investments in Zimbabwe increased and became the norm. Since then, investments focus primarily on the agriculture and mining sectors, through loans, foreign direct investments (FDI), and infrastructure development.

One of the primary areas of engagement is agriculture. Following Mugabe's major land reforms at the beginning of the 2000s, the Zimbabwean agriculture sector suffered massively. Between 2002 and 2008, Zimbabwean agricultural output decreased by 73%. Chinese state and private actors have been responding with a number of projects including an Agricultural Technology Demonstration Center at the Gwebi Agricultural College. Media reports seemed concerned that these agricultural investments were land grabs; research provides no evidence of land grabbing. Press reports over the years have reported that China had acquired up to 160 hectares. According to SAIS-CARI data, 14.5 thousand hectares were acquired by Chinese companies between 1987 and 2016. Sautman and Yan argue that the total number of hectares owned and cultivated by the Chinese are even smaller. They report that Zim-China Wanjin Agricultural Development Company, a joint venture of an Anhui company and various Zimbabwean entities, was formed in 2010 to develop seven farms totaling over 10,000 hectares. They found that the land is owned by the Zimbabweans but managed by the Chinese; however as of late 2018 the total land amounted only to "several thousand hectares." They assert that the Anhui partner has only invested US\$5 million, so the odds are that only a few hundred hectares have been cultivated.

China is also interested in Zimbabwe's natural resources. Over the years, Chinese companies have formed joint-ventures to operate in Zimbabwean mines. Some of these investments

appear suspicious because of the lack of transparency. However, others are more straightforward; for example in May 2018 Zimbabwe signed a \$1 billion deal to build a Coal-Methane power plant and mine coal. This is the first main state-sponsored Chinese investment in Zimbabwe's natural resources. Overall, the academic and political communities' main concerns are related to the political implications of mining engagements in Zimbabwe.

In order to analyze all these aspects of China-Zimbabwe relations, I have divided this reading list into four parts. The first four articles give an overview of cooperation between both countries. The next three papers focus on the impacts of the Look East Policy, and the last nine fit in the two main sectors of engagement, agriculture, and mining.

Overview

Alao, Abiodun. "China and Zimbabwe: The Context and Contents of a Complex Relationship." *South African Institute of International Affairs*, 2014.

In this piece, the King's University lecturer gives a comprehensive overview of the sectors of Chinese involvement in Zimbabwe. However, Abiodun does not limit himself to economic relations and also analyzes military, educational, and medical ties. For a country in which data and information are as complicated to compile, this reading is a gold mine. It also gives some insight as to the challenges awaiting the relationship after Mugabe's death.

Edinger, Hannah and Christopher Burke. "AERC scoping studies on China-Africa Relations: a research report on Zimbabwe." *Centre for Chinese Studies, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa*. March, 2008.
<https://www.africaportal.org/publications/aerc-scoping-studies-on-china-africa-relations-a-research-report-on-zimbabwe/>

This study of China-Zimbabwe attempts to debunk Western myths about the relationship. Acknowledging the scarcity of official information, this paper aims to give an overview of economic and military relations. Its use of graphs and visuals differentiates this article from most.

Hogwe, Fortune, and Handson Banda. "The Nature of China's Role in Development of Africa: the Case of Zimbabwe." *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 15.1 (Nov. 2017): 237–247. doi:10.21511/ppm.15(1-1).2017.11.

The two South African scholars Hogwe and Banda successfully attempt to analyze China-Africa relations through the case of Zimbabwe. While the piece does not go into details about specific aspects of China-Zimbabwe activities, it provides a good overview of all sectors of economic involvement. From mining to trade and agriculture, this reading is crucial to get a timeline of Chinese involvement in Zimbabwe.

Zhang, Chun. "China-Zimbabwe Relations: A Model of China-Africa Relations?" *South African Institute of International Affairs*, 2014.

In this paper, Zhang argues against the common belief that China-Zimbabwe ties are a microcosm of China-Africa relations. In fact, the relationship is a potential model for

China-Africa. Using historical review and analyses of current affairs, Zhang gives insight into the special relationship between China and Zimbabwe.

Look East Policy

Moyo, Thamsanqa and Theresia Mdlongwa, “Look east or look least? The Zimbabwean experience of Chinese economic investment in selected texts and examples.” *International Research Journal of Arts and Social Science*. 4.4 (2015):76-82.
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14303/irjass.2015.019>

This paper takes a strong stance against the Look East policy, arguing that it benefits China more than it benefits Zimbabwe. Through the analysis of fictional works, the authors analyze the underlying impact of the policy. Zimbabwe diminished its opportunities by overemphasizing the importance of friendships in foreign policy. Indeed, Zimbabwe looked least among former friends to “Look East,” and this impacted the country negatively.

Mudayanhu, Shingairai Belinda. “A Critical Analysis of Whether Zimbabwe Can Achieve Economic Development through Its Look East Policy.” *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 8. 8 (2014): 280–287.
doi:10.5897/ajpsir2013.0586.

In this article, the author focuses on Zimbabwe’s position in the partnership effectively implemented through the Look East Policy. This reading argues that Zimbabwean authorities need to get stronger in the relationship with China. Otherwise, China will take total ownership of the relation, impose its conditions, and act out of self-interest, utilizing smaller, weaker states.

Youde, Jeremy. “Look East or look least? The Zimbabwean Foreign Policy and China.” *Africa Today*, 53.3 (2007): 2–19. doi:10.2979/aft.2007.53.3.2.

In this piece, Jeremy Youde explores the impacts of the Look East policy and international imaginations. According to the author, Mugabe’s government’s revamping of Zimbabwean foreign policy in 2005 was not only a pragmatic move to rebuild Zimbabwe’s economy. It was also an attempt at redefining the country’s national identity as independent from outside domination.

Agricultural Sector

Goger, Annelies, Penny Bamber, and Gary Gereffi. “The Tobacco Global Value Chain in Low-Income Countries.” *Duke University, Global Value Chains (GVC) Center*, 10 (Feb. 2014):1–48.

This paper is a gold mine of information about tobacco in the world. The authors argue that the tobacco value chain is currently changing, heavily impacting small producers in favor of corporations. To resolve the issue, the paper advises that policies should favor tobacco alternatives for small producers. In addition, the authors devote a whole section to the analysis of the Zimbabwean tobacco industry, providing data and evidence for its evolution over the past decade. The authors' analysis heavily implies China’s role in these changes.

Moyo, Sam. “Changing Agrarian Relations after Redistributive Land Reform in Zimbabwe.” *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38.5 (2011): 939–966. doi:10.1080/03066150.2011.634971.

In this paper, Sam Moyo analyzes the impact of the land reforms of the early 2000s on the overall economy. Within the span of a few years, Mugabe brought back his country’s economy to an agrarian structure as the number of small and middle-sized producers broadened. While this paper does not go into detail about China’s role in Zimbabwean agriculture, it certainly is an interesting article to understand the agricultural structure in which China invested.

Mukwereza, Langton. “Reviving Zimbabwe’s Agriculture: The Role of China and Brazil.” *IDS Bulletin*, 44. 4 (2013):116–126. doi:10.1111/1759-5436.12047.

Mukwereza’s piece is crucial to understanding the logistics of Chinese involvement in Zimbabwean agriculture. While it also takes into account Brazil, it focuses heavily on the Chinese attempts to build agricultural cooperation with Zimbabwe after the 2000 land reform. In particular, Mukwereza analyses in details Chinese impacts on the tobacco and cotton industry.

Sachikonye, Lloyd. “Old Wine in New Bottles? Revisiting Contract Farming after Agrarian Reform in Zimbabwe.” *Review of African Political Economy*, 43. sup1 (2016):86–98. doi:10.1080/03056244.2016.1217836.

While this paper does not focus primarily on Chinese contract farming in Zimbabwe, Sachikonye gives a thorough analysis of the evolution of contract farming in the country. Studying the evolution of the role of growers and contractors throughout Zimbabwean history, the author comprehensively includes examples of Chinese companies to illustrate the current situation. This article is crucial to understand contract farming in Zimbabwe and not prematurely jump to conclusions.

Tang, Lixia & Li, Xiaoyun & Mukwereza, Langton. “Blurring the Lines between Aid and Business: An Ethnographic Study of the Chinese Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centre in Zimbabwe.” *China: An International Journal*, 16.1 (2018):23-44. muse.jhu.edu/article/688046.

I included this article because of its particular focus on the Agricultural Demonstration Center agreed upon at FOCAC 2006. While most papers focus on a single sector, this one analyzes a specific piece of Chinese investment in great detail. Through the study of the ATDC, the authors identify one of the main areas of concerns regarding China-Zimbabwe relations: what is aid and what is business. Ultimately, this paper calls for a better definition of the purpose of specific Chinese investments.

Mining and Natural Resources Sector

Hawkins, Tony. *The Mining Sector in Zimbabwe and Its Potential Contribution to Recovery*. Harare: UNDP Zimbabwe, 2009. Print.

This United Nation Development Program report argues that Zimbabwean economic recovery could come from the expansion of its mining sector. Written in 2009, this report allows

readers to better understand the mistakes made by Zimbabwe in the past ten years. Tony Hawkins also analyzes Chinese investments in Zimbabwe's mining in a short section.

Kärkkäinen, Annina. "Does China Have a Geoeconomic Strategy towards Zimbabwe? The Case of the Zimbabwean Natural Resource Sector." *Asia Europe Journal*, 14.2 (2015): 185–202. doi:10.1007/s10308-015-0445-7.

This article proposes an alternative analysis of Chinese Mining Investments in Zimbabwe. Rather than focusing on Chinese interests, Kärkkäinen asks whether these investments are part of a broader Chinese Strategy in Zimbabwe. The author argues that despite private company's investment seemingly not following a specific foreign policy official line, Chinese authorities still aim to gain more influence over the mining sector with loans demanding natural resources as collateral.

Mbila, Alain. "Chine-Zimbabwe entre richesses minières et droits de l'homme," *Outre-Terre*, 30.4 (2011): 83-86.

While other articles in this section focus primarily on the economics of mining in Zimbabwe, this very short paper (3 pages) by Alain Mbila, focuses on human rights issues related to Chinese natural resources and mining interests in Zimbabwe. The author argues that Chinese authorities' support of Mugabe's authoritarianism is not necessarily genuine but stems from a desire to remain Zimbabwe's main economic partner and keep a stranglehold on natural resources exploitation.

Saunders, R. "Crisis, Capital, Compromise: Mining and Empowerment in Zimbabwe." *African Sociological Review / Revue Africaine De Sociologie*, 12.1 (2009). doi:10.4314/asr.v12i1.43530.

This article from 2008 gives insight into Zimbabwean Mining sector ahead of subsequent Chinese investments. Saunders identifies the challenges awaiting the Zimbabwean government at the eve of the 2010s. This paper provides a comprehensive background to Chinese engagement in Zimbabwe's mining industry and dedicates a section to Chinese investments prior to 2008.

Additional Articles (added by Barry Sautman and YAN Hairong)

Gukurume, Simbarashe. "Chinese Migrants and the Politics of Everyday Life in Zimbabwe," *Asian Ethnicity* 20.1 (Jan. 2019): 85-102.

Ojakorotu, Victor and Rumbidzai Kamidza. "Look East Policy: The Case of Zimbabwe–China Political and Economic Relations Since 2000," *India Quarterly* 74.1 (Mar2018): 17-41

Masanga, Terrence. "Perspectives of Zimbabwe–China Relations in Wallace Chirumiko's 'Made in China' (2012) and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013)," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 29. 1 (2017): 81-95

Yan Hairong and Chen Yiyuan. "Land Reform in Zimbabwe, Class dynamics and Delayed Bandung: an Interview with Sam Moyo." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 17.1 (2016):128-139.

Mukwereza, Langton. "Situating Tian Ze's role in Reviving Zimbabwe's Flue-Cured Tobacco Sector in the Wider Discourse on Zimbabwe-China Cooperation: Will the Scorecard Remain Win-Win?" *Future Agricultures*, Working Paper 115, 2015: 9, www.future-agricultures.org/publications/research-and-analysis/1945-situating-tian-ze-s-role-in-reviving-zimbabwe-s-flue-cured-tobacco-sector-in-the-wider-discourse-on-zimbabwe-china-cooperation-will-the-scorecard-remain-win-win/file

Lin Shi, "A Chinese Azalea Blooming in Africa: an Economic Ethnographic Study of a China-Zimbabwe Joint Venture," paper presented at the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, Chiba, Japan, May 16, 2014, www.nomadit.co.uk/iaaes/iaaes2014/panels.php5?PanelID=2908

Clever Mapure, "Chinese Investments in Zimbabwe and Namibia: a Comparative Legal Analysis," Center for Chinese Studies, Stellenbosch University, Sept. 2014: 19, [/www.ccs.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/CCS_PhanW_Clever_2014.pdf](http://www.ccs.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/CCS_PhanW_Clever_2014.pdf)

Thompson, Reagan. "Assessing the Chinese Influence in Ghana, Angola and Zimbabwe: The Impact of Politics, Partners and Petro," unpublished master's thesis, Stanford University, 2012: 44, http://iis-db.stanford.edu/docs/785/CISAC_Thesis_Thompson.pdf