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Zambia's Media Perspective on China, the US, Japan, and South Africa: Comparative Exploration through Private Online Media

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Abstract

This paper examines Zambia's private online media perspectives on bilateral relations with China, Japan, the US, and South Africa. Methodologically, the study combines quantitative text mining and qualitative analysis using a five-factor model, which analyzes how domestic politics, economic conditions, peace and security, global international relations (IR), and regional IR shape Zambia's bilateral relations with each of the four countries. The analysis revealed that economic factors are most influential, with media attention focused on attracting foreign direct investment from the four countries to stimulate national economic growth and strengthen regional connectivity to achieve the national goal of becoming a trading hub in Southern Africa. Key topics covered in the online media articles related to each country include debt restructuring with China, anticipated investments from Japan, discussions on the human rights of sexual minorities with the US, and a strong commitment to enhancing trade relations with South Africa. Zambian media have emphasized the current government's political will to shape foreign policy based on national priorities and conveyed high expectations that the government will continue to exercise its agency in regard to each country. Domestically, the media coverage centered on the political divisions between the ruling and opposition parties, especially over foreign policy toward China and the US. While the current Zambian government seeks to exert its agency over both China and the US to resolve its debt problems, Zambia also aims to achieve two policy goals: first, balancing Zambia's policy toward China and the US to avoid the perception of taking sides; second, balancing domestic views with US preferences on human rights. Through the analysis of discourses of local media, this study sheds light on the importance of gaining insights from the local media to develop a deeper understanding of the agency of smaller countries in relation to their larger counterparts in pursuing their interests in today's changing international environment.

Keywords: Agency, Bilateral relations, Development, Investment, Online media

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1.Introduction

The advancement of information technology has dramatically transformed the mediascape worldwide. The internet now allows people to cross virtual borders and access information instantly. This transformation has redefined the influence of news media on both international and domestic societies. Although the information gap between developed and developing countries, urban and rural areas, rich and poor persists (Arora 2016), the proliferation of mobile devices and internet access continues to spread through developing societies.

This development has sparked a range of responses, with some Western liberal thinkers arguing that governments and political leaders in countries where democracy has not fully taken hold are wary that anti-government public opinion can easily form, allowing people to instantly connect with diverse forces critical of their regimes. As a consequence, these governments often implement media control policies (Bergère 2020). Many non-Westerners, including African scholars, view the information flow and infrastructure dominated by Western countries and mega-companies, such as Google and Meta, as nothing more than a form of platform imperialism and digital colonization (Nyamnjoh 2005; Mazrui 2006; Thussu 2022).

Others have reacted against the increased presence of Chinese media outlets, such as Xinhua and CGTN in developing countries, especially in Africa (Umejei 2018). For some observers, these media outlets play a crucial role in strengthening the relationship between Africa and China, and Zambia is a case in point (Gondwe 2022). However, some Western liberals have accused the Chinese media of using aid to control local media in the recipient countries as a way of strengthening their influence, an accusation that China dismisses (Li 2017). It is understandable that the West and China criticize each other's media strategies in developing countries, as this is one facet of their broader contest for influence.

However, this position does not reflect how local media in developing countries perceive the situation. In fact, new and valuable insights can be gained by examining the rivalry between the bigger states from the point of view of the media in smaller countries.¹ This can highlight how developing countries seek to exert agency, sometimes successfully, over the bigger nations (Kuik 2021b; Imai 2023a).

¹ The term 'smaller country' and 'bigger country' used in this paper refers to a 'smaller power' and 'bigger power' that is in an asymmetric position in terms of national power such as a country's economic and military strength, as well as its ability to influence the actions and words of other actors. Previous studies that analyze bilateral relations based on the asymmetry of national power between bigger and smaller countries include Womack (2016), Long (2017a), and Kuik (2021a).

Therefore, this study examines Zambia's perspective on its bilateral relations with China, the US, Japan, and South Africa. These four countries were selected based on the fact that China and the US have a greater impact on Zambian diplomacy, Japan plays a role as a historical aid donor, and South Africa has influence as a regional bigger country.² It does this by analyzing local media discourses, focusing on Zambia's two private online media outlets. The study compares the media's coverage of the four countries and analyzes what they identify as their focus in political issues to be resolved, economic benefits to be secured, and concessions to be extracted. The study also explores whether their attitudes are critical, reserved, or favorable based on Zambia's proactive engagement with these countries.

The analysis reveals that Zambia's media shares a common interest in attracting direct investment from larger countries, especially in the mining sector. Surrounded by countries that are potential markets, such as Botswana and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Zambia seeks to become a trading hub for the Southern African region. The mining sector could therefore play a crucial role in helping Zambia to achieve this goal by boosting national economic growth and strengthening regional connectivity.

The major topics of the articles covered by Zambia's media are specific to each country under study, including debt restructuring with China, expectations of investment from Japan, discussions on the human rights of sexual minorities with the US, and the strong commitment to enhancing trade relations with South Africa. Zambian media have recognized and reported on the current government's political determination to conduct foreign policy based on national priorities, expressing high expectations that the government will continue to exercise its agency in relation to each bigger country.

Domestically, the media focused on the debate between the ruling and opposition parties over Zambia's foreign policies toward China and the US. This shift in focus was triggered by the change of government in Zambia in 2021. As the relationship between the new government and the US grew stronger, opposition parties vehemently condemned it for being overly Western-oriented. Moreover, the opposition parties asserted that the government's approach jeopardized the historically tight partnership with China and that extending rights to LGBTQ communities would risk undermining local cultural values. Zambia's president responded that it was the previous government's misguided policies that had led Zambia into its current political and

² China, the US, Japan, and South Africa were selected for this study for the following reasons. China is Zambia's largest creditor, while the US is Zambia's largest bilateral aid donor. Japan currently ranks fifth among bilateral donors to Zambia, and Japan's development cooperation with Zambia began in 1970, following relationships with Tanzania, Ghana, and Kenya. As such, Zambia remains one of the key countries in the historical relationship between Japan and Africa. South Africa and Zambia have a history of cooperation in the struggle against apartheid, and today, most imports to Zambia come from South Africa.

economic difficulties and that remedial measures, such as improving the relationship with the US, are indispensable.

While the current government has sought to exert agency over both China and the US to secure Zambia's national interests in resolving the country's debt problems and attracting investment, it was also confronted by the need to balance two sets of policy tasks. The first was to balance Zambia's foreign policy toward China and the US while avoiding the perception of taking sides, and the second was the need to balance domestic views with US perspectives on human rights issues.

This paper is organized into five sections. The Section 1 explains the analytical and methodological framework of the five-factor model used in this study. The model is the analytical framework which consists of domestic politics, economy, peace and security, global IR, and regional IR to examine how these factors contribute to the evolution of the bilateral relations (Takahara 2023). The significance of this framework is to enable the analysis of the dynamism on bilateral relations from the perspective of the smaller state vis-a-vie bigger states. The Section 2 provides an overview of Zambia's media environment and online platforms. The Section 3 presents the results of the content analysis of Zambia's media coverage of China, Japan, the US, and South Africa. The Section 4 discusses the characteristics and commonalities that emerge from the comparative analysis of the media coverage. Finally, the Section 5 concludes with some generalizations about the relevance of media studies of smaller countries for understanding bilateral relations with larger ones.

2. Brief overview of the debates on media in Africa

2.1 Key concerns regarding the African mediascape

Chronologically, debates on African media can be divided into three periods: (1) the colonial period, (2) the post-independence period, and (3) the post-democratization period (Wasserman 2011; Esipisu and Kariithi 2011; Adegoke 2018). During the colonial period, the primary role of local media was to provide settlers with information and social communication. While the media served as a tool for maintaining the status quo under authoritarian colonial rule, African elites used journalism to promote Pan-Africanism as the momentum for independence grew (Omu 1974; Ochilo 1993; Ocitti 1999; Nyamnjoh 2005). During the post-independence period, the media's role was to build momentum for nationalism beyond ethnic differences as part of its social responsibility of nation-building, which took precedence over individual rights and led to the authoritative instrumentalization of media (Karikari 1990; Uche 1991; Bourgault 1996; Okon 2021). The wave of democratization in the 1990s, however, profoundly disrupted the African media landscape. In the post-democratization period, Western institutions provided substantial funding for the liberalization of African media and encouraged the establishment of independent

broadcasters. Nevertheless, African media remained caught in the tension between press freedom and the quest for nation-building within the constraints of procedural democracy (Kasoma 1995; Olukoshi 1998; Wasserman 2006; Okoro 2013).

Under these historical transitions, four major arguments emerged with respect to the relationships between African and non-African media. First, African media has been criticized for failing to observe the leading norms of media, which are freedom and fairness (Ochilo 1993; Ocitti 1999); second, African media has emphasized freedom excessively while paying little attention to responsibility (Kasoma 1994); third, Western media promotes Afro-pessimism through biased portrayals of poverty, corruption, and war (Mazrui 2006; de Beer 2010; Pointer 2023); and, fourth, media theories formed in the West have largely ignored African media studies (Mazrui 1994; Nyamnjoh 2005, 2011; Wasserman and de Beer 2009; Skjerdal 2012; Hamusokwe 2018; Mohammed 2021).

Moreover, a new argument has arisen with the expansion of the Chinese media influence in Africa. This development marks a shift in the discourse on African media, taking it into another chronological phase—the digital information era with China as a major catalyst (Wachanga and Mazrui 2011; Gagliardone 2014; Jedlowski 2016; Jiang et al. 2016; Wekesa 2013, 2017; Wasserman 2013, 2018). The West has criticized China's investments in the media of developing countries as an attempt to manipulate information and disseminate favorable reporting about China (Mosher and Farah 2010; Madrid-Morales and Wasserman 2018). However, China's goal is reportedly to counter the anti-China information operations conducted by the West, similar to the strategy used by the British under colonialism and the US when fighting the Cold War (Li 2017).

What makes Western countries so wary of China's media diplomacy in Africa? One of the main reasons is that the Chinese media has been very effective as an instrument of China's soft diplomacy in Africa. Some observers in the West see Chinese media engagement in Africa as a threat to the West's influence within the continent. However, these observers seldom look at how local African media view China and other bigger countries. This study is an attempt to address this gap.

2.2 Overview of media debates in Zambia

Media debates in Zambia have evolved, especially in the country's post-independence phase (see above). Since independence in 1964, the Zambian government has used the media as a tool for controlling the country. Zambia's ruling party, the United National Independence Party (UNIP), led by the country's first President, Kenneth Kaunda, established a one-party system in 1970 to prevent tribalism. The media's role was designated as the sole voice of the government to promote

Zambian humanism for national development. When a multi-party system was adopted in 1991, the new ruling party, the Multi-party Movement for Democracy (MMD), called for the privatization of the media. However, the main media outlets remained under government control, with only a few private media outlets permitted to operate. This situation continued until 2001, when a comprehensive media law was enacted to promote press freedom under President Levy Mwanawasa's MMD government (Phiri 1999; Ndawana, Knowles, and Vaughan 2021).

Previous research on the Zambian media has focused on issues related to strict government regulation (Phiri 1999; Pitts 2000; Makungu 2004; PiMA 2015). This includes discussions of government actions to suppress critical media, for example, a *Daily Nation* reporter was arrested and a *Zambia Watchdog* reporter was expelled in 2013, and *The Post*, a media outlet critical of the government, was banned in 2016, (Parks and Mukherjee 2017; Ndawana, Knowles, and Vaughan 2021). As recently as 2022, at least eight journalists were detained and arrested. As a result, Freedom House, a political advocacy organization focused on issues of democracy, political freedom, and human rights, gave Zambia's media independence the lowest ranking—1 out of 4 possible points—in its annual *Freedom in the World Report 2023 Country Report*.³

Ndawana, Knowles, and Vaughan (2021) classify forms of government media regulation into three categories: (1) state monopoly ownership and media control, (2) public service monopoly, and (3) private ownership. They analyze the situation in Zambia as a mixture of (1) and (3), despite the country's image as maintaining a liberal democratic system. In addition, Zambia is now at the forefront of China's media diplomacy. The *Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation* (ZNBC) and *TopStar*, a Chinese digital television service provider, formed a joint venture in 2017. Moreover, the *Times of Zambia*, a state-owned newspaper, has started publishing local articles in both Mandarin and English since 2018 to improve the image of Chinese contributions to development in Zambia (Gondwe 2022). There has been growing interest in China's media diplomacy in Zambia but little interest in how the Zambian media perceives China and other bigger countries.

3.Methodology

In Zambia, there are nine print media titles (Zambia Daily Mail Limited, Times of Zambia, The News Diggers, The Mast, The Sun, The Voice, New Vision, Daily Nation, and The Independent Observer). The number of internet users has increased dramatically from 4% in 2011 to 21% in

³ Freedom House, [Zambia: Freedom in the World 2023 Country Report](#), (accessed 15 June, 2023). Under the section titled "Freedom of Expression and Belief," categories such as freedom of faith scored 3, educational freedom scored 2, and expression of freedom scored 2 out of 4. These results show that media freedom in Zambia is relatively limited in comparison with other political and social activities. Overall, Freedom House scored the degree of freedom in Zambia as 54 out of 100, or "partially free."

2021 against total population,⁴ and mobile phone technology has brought about significant changes in the way audiences interact with media (PiMA 2015). Consequently, online media has also grown, with the emergence of twelve news platforms (Zambia Daily Mail, Times of Zambia, Daily Nation, Lusaka Times, Tumfweko, Zambia News 365, Zambia Reports, Mwebantu News, Lusaka Voice, Zambia Online, Zambian Observer, Zambian Eye, Zambian Watchdog, and New Digger). Two of the online media (The Zambia Daily Mail and The Times of Zambia) are state-owned.

Of the privately owned media examined in this study, Mwebantu and Daily Nation were selected based on three criteria: (1) they are the leading private media with a large readership, (2) they offer free online access, and (3) they publish in English, Zambia’s official language. The Daily Nation is also a print media outlet that seeks to promote journalism in Zambia. It has faced high-profile controversies, including the arrest of its editor-in-chief and reporters for criticizing government corruption. Among today’s most influential hybrid media (print and online), The Daily Nation is considered to occupy the political middle ground. Mwebantu, founded by Thomson Reuters Foundation alumnus Chilambe Katuta, is at the forefront of Zambia’s digital news revolution and has the widest reach, offering readers a way to engage with the news that was not previously possible through traditional media. Both broadly target local Zambians, with Mwebantu, in particular, adding the diaspora to its readership by focusing on web platforms.

The sample data for the analysis consisted of a total of 644 articles between 2016 and 2023. These were collected through their webpages’ automated keyword search function in Zambia using the keywords of China, Japan, the US, and South Africa.⁵ Table 1 shows a breakdown of the sample articles.

Table 1: Number of stories on each country by sample publication

	Mwebantu	Daily Nation	Total
China	72	108	180
Japan	34	79	113
US	68	85	153
South Africa	136	62	198
Total	310	334	644

Source: Author.

⁴ World Bank, [Individuals using the Internet \(% of population\) - Zambia, \(accessed 26 July, 2023\)](#)

⁵ Previous studies that have used this method of collecting articles for analysis by entering keywords into the search function of sample web newspaper websites include Montiel et al. (2014), Hinck et al. (2016), and Xi et al. (2022).

This study undertook a combination of quantitative text mining⁶ and qualitative analysis through three-step analysis (Imai 2023b). The first step is to extract the most frequently used keywords from all articles by text mining. The second step is to identify and examine the thematic clusters formed by the co-occurrence network analysis. The third step applies a five-factor model as an analytical framework, comprising factors of domestic politics, economy, peace and security, global IR, and regional IR (Takahara 2023). This five-factor model was used to code all articles to identify the key factors that the local media covered the most often and to qualitatively examine the major stories to explore media attitudes toward the bigger states.

4. Results of analysis

4.1 China

Step 1: Frequent words analysis

Table 2 summarizes the top 100 most frequently used keywords in news reports about China that are particularly important for understanding the relationship with China. In addition, Table 3 shows the most frequently used keywords, especially those related to debt and manufacturing, identified only in articles about China.

Table 2: Most frequent words in the top 100 words used in Zambian news coverage on China

China	creditor, loan, cooperation, IMF, agreement restructuring, engineer, electricity cadre, tax, construction, payment, leadership, lender, performance, production, friendship, fuel, demand, US, authority, relationship, cost, financial, politics, commodity, fuel
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Source: Author.

Table 3: Most frequent words from the top 150 words appearing only in Zambian articles on China

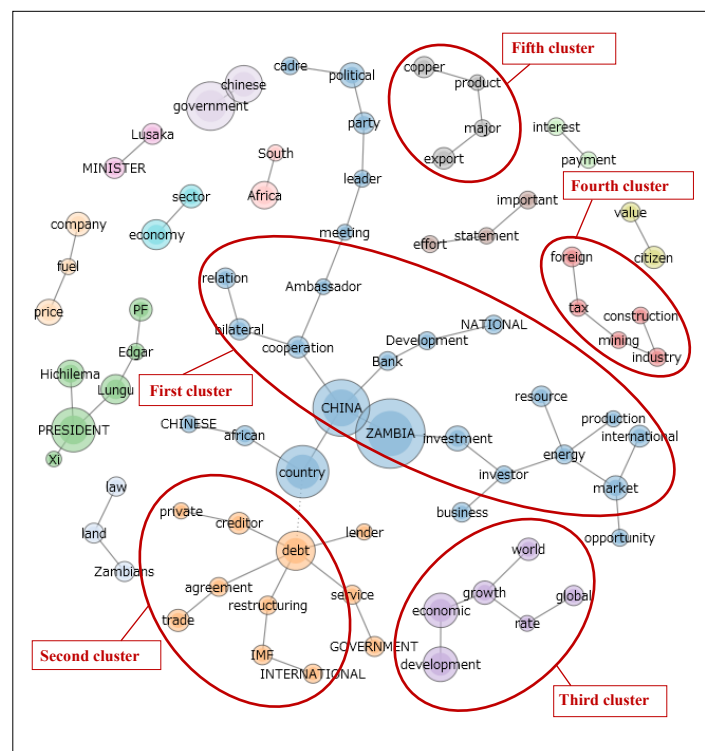
China	creditor, loan, cooperation, IMF, industry, fuel, production, restructuring, lender, commodity, financial, oil, agreement
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Source: Author.

⁶ Quantitatively, the free software called KH Coder was used (Higuchi 2016).

Step 2: Co-occurrence network analysis

To understand the context in which these keywords are used, a co-occurrence network analysis was conducted using KH Coder. Figure 1 presents the fifteen topic clusters, with the five main clusters illustrating the characteristics of news coverage about China. The first cluster relates to business factors, such as investment, markets, and manufacturing. The second cluster focuses on debt restructuring, including the involvement of the IMF and private creditors. The third cluster involves economic development and growth. The fourth cluster shows the links to construction, and the fifth cluster concerns the production and export of copper.



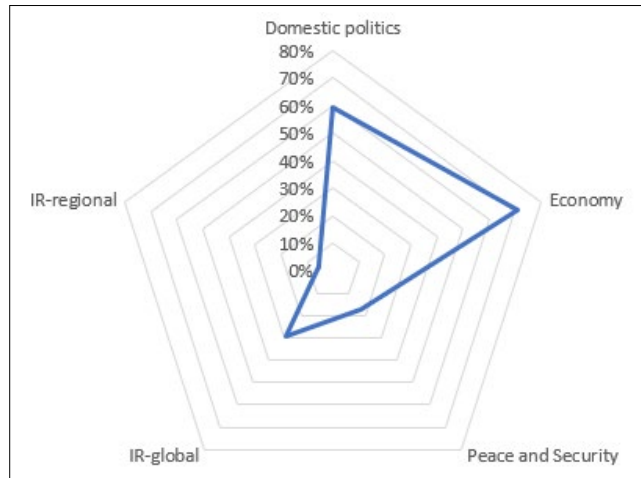
Source: Author.

Figure 1: Co-occurrence network analysis of Zambian news articles on China

mining, and tax revenues. The fifth cluster concerns the production and export of copper. The result clearly indicates that media coverage of China predominately focuses on issues such as economic growth, investment, mining, and debt restructuring.

Step 3: Five-factor model-based analysis

Figure 2 shows the results of the coding analysis of 180 sample articles applying a five-factor model. The economy received the highest coverage, followed by domestic politics and international relations. The characteristics of Zambian news coverage of China shown here are in line with the result of the co-occurrence network above. In the next section, selected key articles will be highlighted for qualitative analysis to complement this result.



Source: Author.

Figure 2: Five-factor coding analysis of Chinese news articles on Zambia

Former President Lungu visited China on his first foreign trip outside Africa in January 2015, two months after taking office. He emphasized the depth of the historically close relationship established by the two countries’ founding fathers, former Chinese President Mao Zedong and President Kenneth Kaunda. Chinese support for the construction of TAZARA, a bi-national railway linking Tanzania and Zambia, symbolizes the closeness of these two leaders. When Rhodesia—now Zimbabwe—unilaterally declared independence in 1965, it intensified the independence struggle in which Zambia played an active role as a frontline state supporting liberation movement. While the Smith regime tried to intimidate Zambia as a landlocked country by cutting the only route to the seaports in South Africa through Rhodesia, China supported the construction of TAZARA.

At various domestic occasions, Former President Lungu praised TAZARA as the foundation of the two countries’ friendship, recognizing China’s economic assistance and touting his administration’s achievements. These included the construction of state-of-the-art convention centers, stadiums,⁷ airports,⁸ and power plants⁹—large-scale infrastructure projects symbolizing the solid partnership between the two countries. This economic cooperation has continued under the current Hichilema administration, including the signing of a US\$3.5 billion Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) by ZESCO Limited and Integrated Clean Energy Power Company Ltd (CiEG) to produce 2,400 megawatts of renewable energy.¹⁰ Additionally, Stanbic Bank Zambia and

⁷ [Mwebantu](#) (August 9, 2021)

⁸ [Mwebantu](#) (February 22, 2021)

⁹ [Daily Nation](#) (July 24, 2021)

¹⁰ [Mwebantu](#) (April 23, 2023)

Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC)¹¹ jointly launched the “Zam-China Trade Connect” initiative to promote cross-border trade.¹²

Domestic politics in Zambia is also deeply connected with the Chinese presence in the country. Former President Lungu greatly valued the Chinese policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of African countries, while the international community criticized his administration as undemocratic.¹³ For example, in May 2017, his administration denied entry to a South African opposition leader who planned to visit Zambia to attend the court proceedings of the then-opposition leader—now the current President Hakainde Hichilema. In 2018, it denied asylum to a Zimbabwean opposition leader.¹⁴ It also restricted opposition leaders from neighboring countries from having contact with opposition forces in Zambia,¹⁵ and even shut down the independent media company, *The Post*.¹⁶ Lungu’s administration was able to enforce these strict policies with the powerful backing of China. However, at a meeting hosted by the Zambia Economic Association in December 2018, former President Lungu described the persistence of Chinese immigrants to adapt to any environment as like that of “cockroaches” since they poured into Zambia, settled in the country, and established a base for economic activities.¹⁷ This statement suggests that the previous administration had a two-sided view of China.

When Zambia defaulted on its debt in November 2020, the domestic and international environment changed dramatically. Longtime opposition leader President Hichilema won the presidential elections in July 2021 and his first foreign destination was the US—just two months after his inauguration. By comparison, his first interaction with Chinese President Xi Jinping was a telephone conversation that occurred eight months after taking office. In January 2023, President Hichilema met with US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva in Zambia. He also co-chaired the Second Democracy Summit in March 2023. Opposition leaders have continuously criticized the current administration’s pro-Western stance.

In response, Lusaka MP Geroge Chisanga praised China as being friendlier to developing countries than any other and being a constant supporter of Zambia since its independence.¹⁸ Opposition leader Brian Muntayalwa Mundubile urged the President to visit China, arguing that the current administration’s debt restructuring process ignored China and diluted relations with

¹¹ The amount of Chinese investment between 2019 and 2021 was USD 6,525,403,091 in 2019, USD 721,627,649 in 2020, and USD 2,835,713,181 in 2021.

¹² [Daily Nation](#) (May 25, 2023)

¹³ [Mwebantu](#) (February 22, 2021)

¹⁴ [Mwebantu](#) (October 4, 2018)

¹⁵ [Mwebantu](#) (October 2, 2018)

¹⁶ [Amnesty International UK](#) (June 22, 2016), [Economist](#) (July 14, 2016), [DW](#) (June 23, 2016)

¹⁷ [Mwebantu](#) (December 13, 2018) 2018)

¹⁸ [Daily Nation](#) (February 25, 2023)

the country.¹⁹ Former Lusaka Province Minister Bowman Lusambo called on the President to explain why he had abandoned China and Russia, since Zambia has benefited from Russia as a major fertilizer producer.²⁰ The Patriotic Front (PF) Acting President Lubinda strongly condemned US Treasury Secretary Yellen for accusing China of being responsible for Zambia's debt problems, saying that it is unacceptable for the US to speak for Zambia in order to criticize China.²¹ In response, the President countered that he has never been a stooge of any other country and held the opposition party responsible for bringing about the current state of crisis, arguing that the opposition is not in a position to criticize the ongoing process.²²

Diplomatically, however, President Hichilema, in his March 2022 congratulatory telegram on Xi Jinping's re-election as President, commended China as a model of socio-economic transformation for developing countries and emphasized the historic relationship between the two countries, dating back to the time of President Kaunda and President Mao.²³ While the President faces domestic pressure to maintain bilateral relations between Zambia and China, he has vigorously pursued multilateral talks on debt restructuring. These efforts culminated in an agreement with official bilateral creditors on June 22, 2023. The Western media has criticized China for the protracted length of the negotiations; however, the president clearly rejected this accusation and came to China's defense.²⁴ Amid domestic pressure to prioritize relations with China and beckoning from the West to be on its side critical of China, it is important to observe how the current President pursues all-weather diplomacy with China.

4.2 Japan

Step 1: Frequent words analysis

Table 4 summarizes the top 100 keywords in news reports about Japan that help to understand Zambia's relationship with Japan. Table 5 shows the most frequently used keywords identified only in articles about Japan. The results in both tables indicate that the characteristics of news coverage of Japan are related to social and economic development.

¹⁹ [Daily Nation](#) (March 5, 2023)

²⁰ [Daily Nation](#) (January 31, 2023).

²¹ [Daily Nation](#) (January 27, 2023)

²² [Daily Nation](#) (April 4, 2023), [Mwebantu](#) (May 13, 2023)

²³ [Mwebantu](#) (March 12, 2023)

²⁴ [Hichilema Refutes Western Accusations China Was to Blame for Delays in Zambia's Debt Restructuring – The China Global South Project](#) (June 26, 2023)

Table 4: Most frequent words in the top 100 words used in Zambian news coverage on Japan

Japan	Olympic, school, earthquake, JICA, rural, girl, district, border, quality, training, equipment, province, technology
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Source: Author.

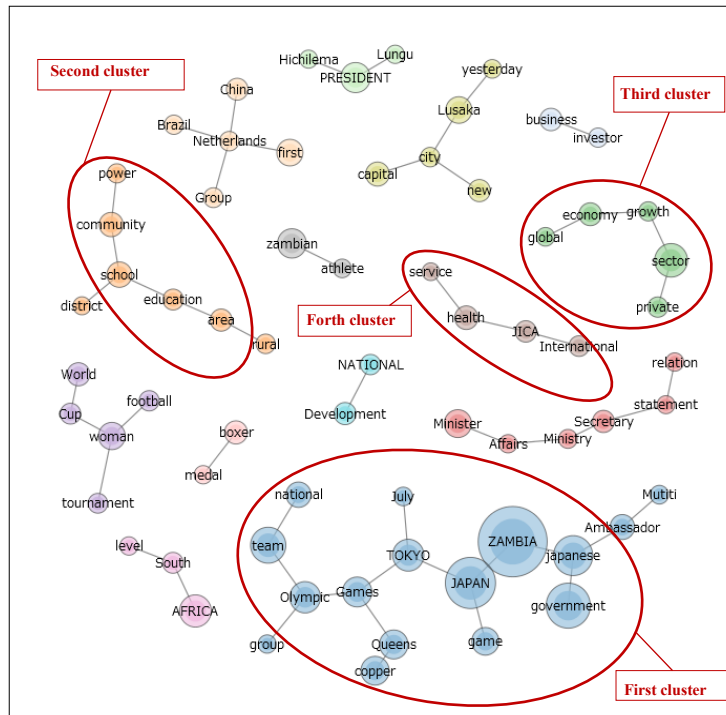
Table 5: Most frequent words from the top 150 words appearing only in Zambian articles on Japan

Japan	school, rural, district, agriculture
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Source: Author.

Step 2: Co-occurrence network analysis

Figure 3 shows the 14 topic clusters indicating that the characteristics of the main news coverage are related to social development. The first cluster—the largest—covers words connected to the 2021 Tokyo Olympics. The second cluster focuses on educational outreach in rural areas and communities. The third cluster covers economic growth by the private sector. The fourth cluster is related to health services provided by JICA. Other topics include investment and sports-related topics around the time of the Tokyo Olympics.

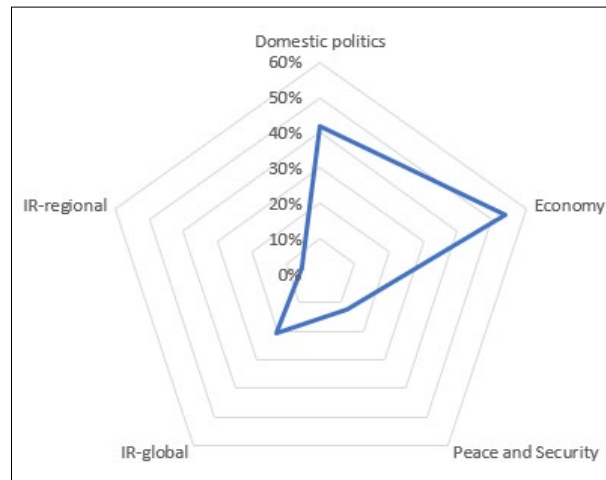


Source: Author

Figure 3: Co-occurrence network analysis of Zambian news articles on Japan

Step 3: Five-factor model-based analysis

For the qualitative analysis, a sample of 183 news articles was coded using the five-factor model. Figure 4 shows that the economy receives the most coverage, followed by domestic politics. This reflects Zambia’s strong expectations that Japan would strengthen private-sector economic cooperation following the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 6), which was held in Kenya in 2016.



Source: Author.

Figure 4: Five-factor coding analysis of news articles on Japan

At the first Quality Infrastructure Dialogue between Zambia and Japan in Lusaka in 2017, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the two governments. Four research groups studied and prepared reports on urban transportation, roads, bridges, public-private partnerships, and power and batteries. For the second Quality Infrastructure Dialogue, held in Japan in January 2018, 14 Zambian government officials visited Japan, more than 20 Japanese companies participated, and the Japanese government expressed its willingness to contribute to Zambia’s stability and prosperity through infrastructure development and advanced technology transfer to the Zambian people.²⁵ This trend of encouraging Japanese companies to invest in Zambia flourished, and in February 2018, the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) announced that it would encourage private Japanese companies to invest in Zambia’s agricultural sector.²⁶ There was an optimistic prediction that Zambia would become the food basket of the Southern African region and that Japanese companies could contribute significantly to the industrialization of the agricultural sector.

In May 2018, a bilateral meeting between Zambia and Japan was held at the Africa-Japan Investment Forum in South Africa with the aim of improving technology in the mining sector. The Japanese Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, Hiroshige Seko, emphasized the Japanese government’s willingness to support investment in copper and cobalt exploration, mining, and smelting facilities, and Zambia’s Minister of Minerals, Richard Musukwa, expressed high expectations regarding technology transfer to leverage mineral resources and building a manufacturing and value-added industrial base in Zambia.²⁷ In July 2018, the Japanese Deputy

²⁵ [Mwebantu](#) (January 30, 2018)

²⁶ [Mwebantu](#) (February 7, 2018)

²⁷ [Mwebantu](#) (May July, 2018)

Foreign Minister Masahisa Horii led a delegation of 30 private and public sector officials from the infrastructure, manufacturing, energy, agriculture, health, finance, and tourism sectors to Zambia, while 53 members of the Japanese business delegation also visited Zambia.²⁸

When TICAD 7 was held in Yokohama in August 2019, it was recommended that Japan and Africa should strengthen cooperation through the involvement of the private sector. The Zambian Embassy in Japan also began to actively promote investment in Zambia. In January 2020, when Asahi City in Chiba Prefecture and the Zambian Embassy signed an MoU to host Zambian athletes coming to Japan for the Tokyo Olympics, Ambassador Ndiyoi Muliwana Mutiti emphasized Zambia's investment potential in various sectors, including energy, mining, infrastructure, tourism, health, science and technology, agriculture, agro-processing and manufacturing.²⁹ In March of the same year, the Embassy of Zambia and the Japan Overseas Investment Organization (JOI) signed an MoU to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to Zambia. While expressing appreciation for Official Development Assistance (ODA), Ambassador Mutiti again called for the Japanese private sector to play a more active role and form partnerships with the Zambian private sector.³⁰

As evident from these news reports, expectations for Japanese private sector investment steadily increased after TICAD 6, leading to active correspondence, research and negotiations between the two countries. However, this momentum was weakened after the global spread of COVID-19 after March 2020, followed by Zambia's debt default in October 2021. Unlike European and Chinese private sectors, investment in Zambia seems challenging for Japanese companies due to the historical, cultural, and geographical distance from Africa. Today, only one Japanese company, Hitachi Construction Machinery, remains active in Zambia. However, Japan is still recognized as a "key friend" in Zambia's education sector,³¹ with reports of appreciation for the Japanese government's support in quality health services³² and value-added agriculture.³³

In March 2022, Finance and National Planning Minister Situmbeko Musokotwane expressed Zambia's hope for strong cooperation between the Japanese and the Zambian private sectors and to maximize the strengths of both countries' partnership in the areas of industrial development, manufacturing, commerce, and trade. It is clear that Zambia anticipates increased private sector investment from Japan, even as Japan faces various hindrances.³⁴ These observations highlight a

²⁸ [Mwebantu](#) (July 24, 2018)

²⁹ [Mwebantu](#) (January 17, 2020)

³⁰ [Mwebantu](#) (March 5, 2020)

³¹ [Daily Nation](#) (March 7, 2021)

³² [Mwebantu](#) (January 18, 2023)

³³ [Mwebantu](#) (May 20, 2022), [Mwebantu](#) (November 10, 2022)

³⁴ [Mwebantu](#) (March 24, 2022)

dilemma in bilateral relations between Zambia and Japan, with Zambia’s expectations at odds with Japan’s concerns about risks. Japan’s future presence in Zambia will depend on how this gap is addressed.

4.3 United States

Step 1: Frequent words analysis

Table 6 shows the top 100 most frequently used keywords in Zambian news reports about the US, demonstrating the country’s relationship with the US, with many keywords related to political issues. Table 7 presents the extracted frequent keywords identified only in articles about the US, which are characteristic of reporting on democracy and human rights.

Table 6: Most frequent words from the top 100 words in Zambian news coverage on the US

United States	democratic, diplomacy, administration, agenda, Russia, fund, human, constitution, opposition, corruption, rights, institution, vaccine, partnership, Israel, vaccination, freedom, industrialization, engagement, free, job, covid-19, governance, peace, decision, diplomatic, effective, China
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Source: Author.

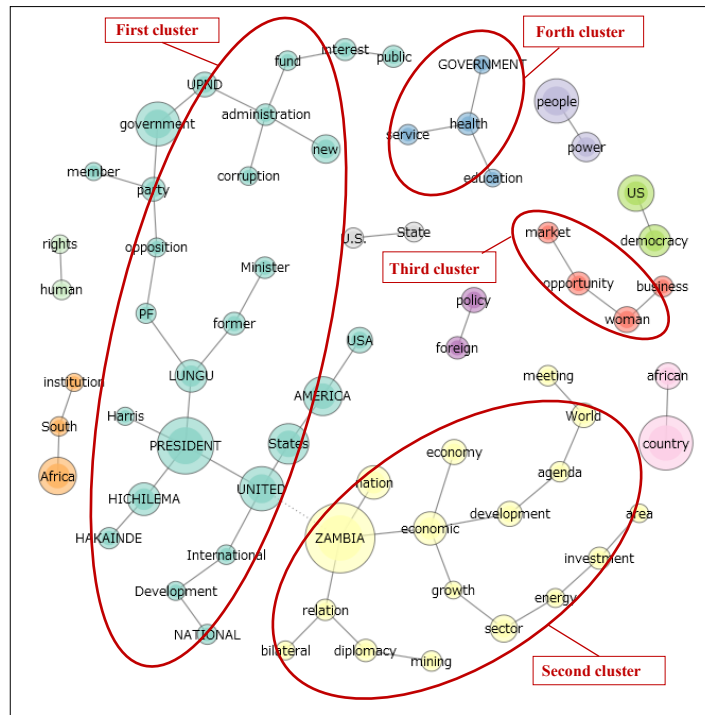
Table 7: Most frequent words from the top 150 words appearing only in Zambian articles on the US

United States	democratic, diplomacy, administration, agenda, Russia, fund, human, constitution, opposition, vaccine, corruption, vaccination, freedom, industrialization, diplomatic, military, sovereign, sovereignty
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Source: Author.

Step 2: Co-occurrence network analysis

Figure 5 presents the 11 topic clusters, with the main four clusters providing insights into the characteristics of news coverage about the US. The largest first cluster is related to domestic politics, including the names of Presidents and two leading political parties: the former ruling FP and the current ruling United Party for National Development (UPND). The second cluster is concerned with economic development, including the mining and energy sector. The third cluster relates to women’s economic empowerment, while the fourth is on social development, such as education and health. The topics of democracy and human rights are also identified.



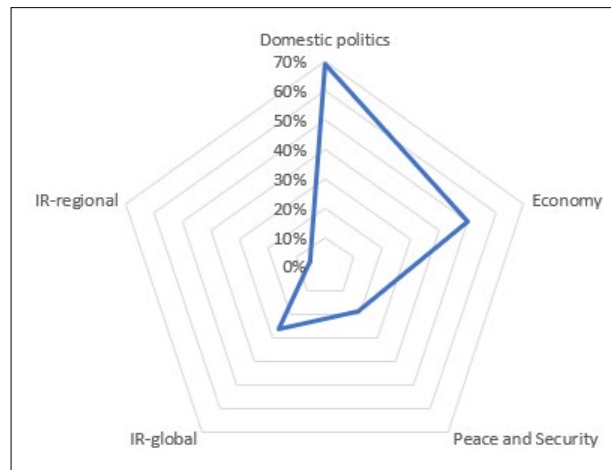
Source: Author.

Figure 5: Co-occurrence network analysis of Zambian news articles on the US

Step 3: Five-factor model-based analysis

For the next step, the qualitative analysis, 153 news articles were coded, and Figure 6 shows that the largest number of articles were related to domestic politics. This result is in line with the first cluster observed in Figure 5. Media coverage of the US in Zambia has increased since the Zambian presidential election in August 2021, when the current President was elected. Before this, many articles about the US discussed the US government’s criticism of the previous administration’s human rights violations and restrictive media policies, as well as the previous Zambian administration’s rejection of that US criticism.

There are several examples of Zambia and the US criticizing each other's values. In March 2019, when Zambia's Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) suspended the license of a private television company called Prime TV, the US Embassy in Zambia condemned it as a violation of democratic principles.³⁵ However, Zambian Ambassador to South Africa, Emmanuel Mwanba,



Source: Author.

Figure 6: Five-factor coding analysis of Zambian news articles on the US

warned that the pro-abortion and pro-LGBTQ policies of former US President Obama were potential threats that would ruin Zambia, just as in the past, with colonialism and exploitation of natural resources by Western countries.³⁶

In August 2021, the FP, the ruling party at the time, criticized US Senator Bob Menedez for his report submitted to the US Congress condemning Zambia as an authoritarian state.³⁷ In the same month, when US Ambassador to Zambia Young stated that Zambia could face sanctions if it violated the democratic rights of its voters, Bishop Maspa, president of the Independent Church of Zambia, responded that every electoral process has its own challenges and criticized the US for making unfair statements about the process.³⁸ Furthermore, in February 2022, US President Joe Biden condemned the PF at the UN General Assembly in December 2021 after a change of government. Consequently, the PF leaders Given Lubinda declared their refusal to receive any US diplomatic mission until the PF had received an explanation from the US. Indeed, when the US Political Unit Chief, Ms. Pile, visited the PF secretariat during her visit to Zambia, the PF refused to meet.³⁹

³⁵ [Mwebantu](#) (March 7, 2019)

³⁶ [Mwebantu](#) (December 3, 2019)

³⁷ [Daily Nation](#) (August 11, 2021)

³⁸ [Daily Nation](#) (August 21, 2021)

³⁹ [Mwebantu](#) (February 10, 2022)

Despite the strained relationship between the two countries, the new president, Hichilema, a longtime opposition leader elected in August 2021, made his first trip abroad as president in September to attend the UN General Assembly and meet with Vice President Harris. This summit-level meeting between Zambia and the US was the first of its kind in 20 years, marking a clear contrast with former President Lungu's decision to visit China as his first trip outside Africa. In response, opposition parties reacted negatively, intensifying their criticisms. Lubinda accused the ruling party of trying to impose Westernized sexual culture on Zambians and referred to statements by Internal Minister Jack Mwiimbu that Zambia would cease to be a Christian nation.⁴⁰ The former Minister of Water Development, Raphael Nakachinda, also condemned the President's visit to the US, calling it an attempt to promote non-traditional sexual values in Zambia.

In response, chief government spokesperson Chushi Kasanda clarified that while the UPND manifesto is clear on respect for human rights, it does not promote gay rights and that the new government recognizes and supports Zambia as a Christian country.⁴¹ In fact, Zambia's 2019 constitutional amendment officially enshrines the country's status as a Christian nation.⁴² While President Hichilema himself has made clear he will not contradict the Bible or the Constitution,⁴³ the issue of human rights will be a key to how Zambia measures and determines its distances from the US. For example, President Hichilema and President Biden were scheduled to meet on September 23, 2021, but the meeting was suddenly canceled after Vice President Mutale Nalumango made a statement denying the human rights of sexual minorities in the National Assembly on September 17.⁴⁴

Since 2023, the political environment has entered a new phase as Western countries have intensified their approach toward debt restructuring, with US Treasury Secretary Yellen and IMF Managing Director Georgieva visiting Zambia on January 22 and 23 to meet President Hichilema. In response, opposition leaders, Lusambo of the PF and M'membe of the Socialist Party, condemned the US for aiming to weaken China's position not only in Zambia but also in Africa as a whole.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, President Hichilema joined the Second Summit of Democracy on March 29–30, 2023, as co-chair, and Vice President Harris visited Zambia the following day. As bilateral relations between Zambia and the US have become stronger, the opposition has escalated

⁴⁰ [Daily Nation](#) (September 2, 2021)

⁴¹ [Mwebantu](#) (September 1, 2021)

⁴² [The Constitution \(Amendment\) Bill, 2019 | National Assembly of Zambia](#)

⁴³ [Daily Nation](#) (November 8, 2021), [Daily Nation](#) (July 23, 2021), [Daily Nation](#) (May 31, 2022)

⁴⁴ [Daily Nation](#) (September 20, 2021)

⁴⁵ [Daily Nation](#) (January 30, 2023), [Daily Nation](#) (January 31, 2023)

its criticisms.⁴⁶ Going forward, the government's ability to constructively respond to opposition criticism will be crucial to managing domestic politics and continuing to build cooperative bilateral relations with the US.

Regarding economic aspects, in May 2022, First Quantum Minerals announced a US\$1.35 billion investment,⁴⁷ and Anglo American (AAL.L) announced plans to acquire a majority stake in a joint venture with ARC Minerals (ARCMA.L), giving them access to its copper and cobalt exploration license in Zambia.⁴⁸ In November, the US-based mining company KoBold Metals announced a US\$150 million investment for the exploration and development of the Mingomba copper deposits in Chilabombwe.⁴⁹ Expectations for an improved investment environment have increased among Western investors through the implementation of mining tax reforms since the election of President Hichilema. On the other hand, environmental destruction caused in the 1990s by AAL.L is still adversely affecting the local population. The involvement of high-profile investors in KoBold Metals, including Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, Breakthrough Energy (founded by Bill Gates), and the UK's Virgin Group, has raised skepticism in Zambia about Western investors⁵⁰ due to the country's historical experiences with environmental degradation and pollution (Norrgrén et al. 2000; Syakalima et al. 2000; Kambole 2003).

Amid increasing caution and confrontation over Zambia's growing Western alignment following the change in government, an article published in January 2022 may hold significant implications for the debate over Zambia's pro-China or pro-Western foreign policy dichotomy.⁵¹ It suggests that rather than becoming a pawn in the geopolitical and economic rivalry between the US and China, Zambia should engage both sides to cooperate and strategically advance its own industrialization. To this end, it is important that economic diplomacy shifts toward a more concrete strategic diplomacy of industrialization rather than relying on general slogans to attract FDI and achieve a better trade balance. From the above observation and analysis, it is apparent that the current government needs to pursue its current foreign policy toward the US while managing domestically sensitive but crucial issues such as politics, economy, religion, and diplomacy.

⁴⁶ [Daily Nation](#) (March 11, 2023), [Daily Nation](#) (March 30, 2023), [Daily Nation](#) (April 2, 2023), [Daily Nation](#) (April 23, 2023)

⁴⁷ [Mwebantu](#) (May 12, 2022)

⁴⁸ [Mwebantu](#) (May 12, 2022)

⁴⁹ [Daily Nation](#) (December 16, 2022)

⁵⁰ [Daily Nation](#) (April 5, 2023)

⁵¹ [Daily Nation](#) (January 11, 2022)

4.4 South Africa

Step 1: Frequent words analysis

Table 8 provides a list of the most frequently used keywords in news articles among the top 100 words that are particularly important for understanding the relationship between Zambia and South Africa. Words such as Indaba and SADC are identified as keywords to understand the regional agendas in Southern Africa. Table 9 shows the most frequently used keywords identified only in articles about South Africa. These relate to the recent increase in attacks on Zambian truck drivers in South Africa, the history of the struggle for freedom, and agriculture and tourism as the main industries for investment.

Table 8: Most frequent words in the top 100 words in Zambian news coverage on South Africa

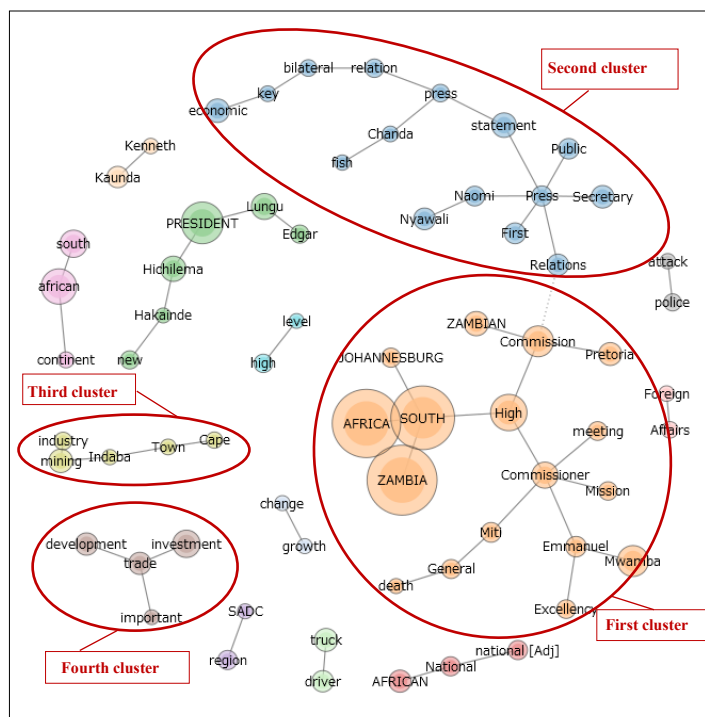
South Africa	truck, driver, Kaunda, game, press, mine, police, accident, attack, fish, Indaba, tourism, death, SADC, farming, liberation, platform, water, Zimbabwe
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Table 9: Most frequent words from the top 150 words appearing only in Zambian articles on South Africa

South Africa	Truck, game, fish, farming, liberation, water, tourism, road
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Step 2: Co-occurrence network analysis

Figure 7 shows the result of 14 topic clusters identified from the Zambian news coverage of South Africa. The first cluster highlights the strong bilateral relations centered on the role of the Office of the High Commissioner in South Africa. The second cluster is similarly about bilateral relations but is centered on press statements by the First Secretary of the Office of the High Commissioner to South Africa. The third cluster covers the mining industry that both countries commonly promote, and the fourth cluster concerns investment and trade. As with the result of co-occurrence network analysis, diplomatic relations at the regional level led by the High Commissioner are prominent in the coverage of South Africa.



Source: Author.

Figure 7: Co-occurrence network of Zambian news articles on South Africa

Step 3: Five-factor model-based analysis

To conduct the qualitative analysis, 198 articles were coded. As Figure 8 shows, bilateral relations between Zambia and South Africa are highly related to economy and domestic politics.

Bilateral relations between the two countries have historically been close, dating back to the time of independence in 1964. Zambia has supported many exiles from the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, including Oliver Tambo, the ANC’s President. The ANC’s headquarters were based in Zambia until Tambo returned to South Africa following the end of apartheid and the legalization of the ANC in 1991. Furthermore, Zambia’s first President, Kenneth Kaunda, and

Tambo shared the similar diplomatic policies. They sought military support from the USSR and China to strengthen their liberation efforts while also aiming to maintain a balanced relationship with Western countries to ensure continued support against apartheid.

With these deep roots forged through their respective liberation movements, there is little space for other countries to intervene in these two countries' bilateral relationship.

With the end of apartheid, Zambia continued to strengthen its partnership with South Africa. In 2017, the Congress of South Africa passed a resolution praising Zambia's independence as a turning point in the freedom struggle that led to the decolonization of Africa and the end of apartheid.⁵² In recent years, Zambia has focused on reinforcing its economic cooperation with South Africa by addressing trade imbalances. For example, in July 2017, Zambia's High Commissioner to South Africa led a trade and investment mission to Zambia consisting of 20 South African businesspersons with interests in agriculture, agro-processing, energy, advanced manufacturing, infrastructure development, tourism and mining. The delegates held consultative networking sessions to interact with the Zambian private sector and government institutions.⁵³

The following month, the two countries hosted the Africa Infrastructure Financing Forum in Johannesburg, South Africa, where Zambian Finance Minister Mutati emphasized that investment from South Africa had reached nearly \$1 billion in 2017 alone and that the two countries would work together as regional economic giants.⁵⁴ Two months later, Trade Invest Africa, under the Zambian Ministry of Development and South Africa's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Competition, co-hosted a bilateral business forum, "Invest in Zambia," attended by over 300 business professionals from both countries with the aim of strengthening economic, commercial and financial ties.⁵⁵ In the same month, South African President Zuma honored the spirit of Zambia's first President, Kenneth Kaunda, citing his selfless efforts and the sacrifice of Zambia during the freedom struggles across the Southern African region. It was also announced that bilateral relations between the two countries would be upgraded from the level of the Joint Commission of Cooperation (JCC), chaired by the Foreign or Defense Minister, to the higher level of the Bi-National Commission (BNC), to be chaired by the heads of the two states.⁵⁶

In 2019, Zambia established the National Advisory Board (NAB) on Impact Investing for Zambia to boost opportunities for investment, with a national vision to become a regional investment hub in Southern Africa for high-potential neighboring markets such as Botswana and the DRC.⁵⁷

⁵² [Daily Nation](#) (November 17, 2021)

⁵³ [Mwebantu](#) (July 23, 2017)

⁵⁴ [Mwebantu](#) (August 22, 2023)

⁵⁵ [Mwebantu](#) (October 30, 2017)

⁵⁶ [Mwebantu](#) (August 10, 2018)

⁵⁷ [Mwebantu](#) (September 16, 2020)

Zambia has become more aggressive in attracting investment from its economically bigger neighbor, South Africa, and vigorous efforts have been made at the national level. The term “economic diplomacy” has been frequently used in Zambian media coverage of South Africa, and strengthening this economic partnership has become a pillar of the Zambian foreign policy towards South Africa.⁵⁸ This aligns with Zambia’s vision of becoming a trading hub for Southern Africa, with private sector investment situated as the axis of Zambia’s economic growth. Thus, the current President is particularly keen to develop a resilient and sustainable mining sector, with an aim of increasing domestic copper production to 3 million tons over the next ten years.⁵⁹ It will be important to continue observing how President Hichilema, with his background in the private sector, leads the development of the mining sector through regional cooperation as an engine of economic growth.

Regarding political coverage, there was a period when the opposition parties of the two countries strengthened their mutual political engagement, especially during the period of the Lungu administration. Former President Lungu took strong measures against the opposition forces in both countries. For example, in May 2017, when South African opposition leader Maimane announced that he would rally the support of opposition leaders in the Southern African region to pressure the Zambian government to release Hichilema, who was imprisoned at that time as an opposition leader, Maimane was denied entry at the airport.⁶⁰ Also in August 2017, when former President Lungu attended Africa’s largest infrastructure summit in South Africa, he summoned a group of South African opposition leaders critical of the Zambian government, accusing them of disrespecting Zambia’s sovereignty and interfering in its internal affairs.⁶¹

Despite this history of political friction between opposition forces in both countries, diplomatic relations at the presidential level have been consistently stable through successive administrations in South Africa. Beneath the surface, there are some signs of disruptions that could create political ripples across Southern Africa that could potentially influence Zambian politics ahead of the next presidential election in 2025. Former President Lungu, who retired from politics after losing the 2021 presidential election, officially announced his return to politics in October 2023 after attending the inauguration of re-elected Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa. Also in April 2024, when the South African Electoral Court ruled in favor of former South African President Jacob Zuma—who had been barred from running because of his past convictions—being added to the list of candidates, former President Lungu announced his support for the ruling.

⁵⁸ [Daily Nation](#) (December 20, 2016), [Daily Nation](#) (August 7, 2021), [Daily Nation](#) (December 19, 2022)

⁵⁹ [Daily Nation](#) (May 9, 2022)

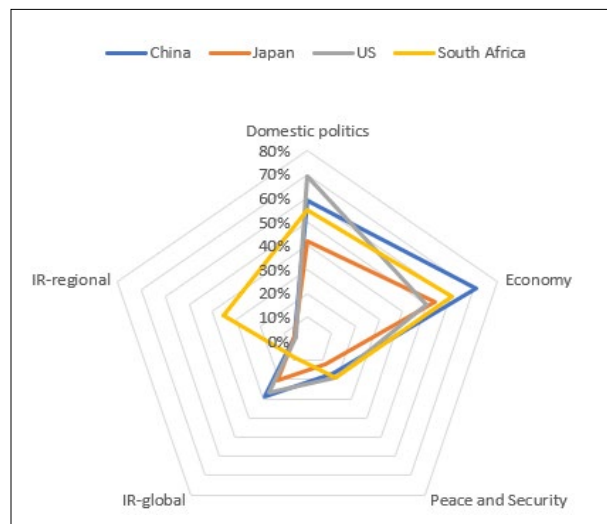
⁶⁰ [Mwebantu](#) (May 26, 2017)

⁶¹ [Mwebantu](#) (August 19, 2017)

The domestic politics of Zambia and South Africa have historically been interrelated. In this analysis, the most significant finding is that Zambia’s bilateral relations with South Africa remain firmly established with little influence from great power politics. Rather, Zambia has its own solid political and economic strategy toward South Africa. One of the reasons for this lack of interference from great politics is that South Africa is not caught in the rivalry between China and the US. Moreover, while considered the dominant regional power, South Africa has never been regarded as a threat to Zambia. Neighboring partnerships with sound historical ties enable stable regional diplomacy.

5. Discussion

Figure 8 presents the combined results of the coding analysis from all four countries. Based on these results, three key findings emerge: first, the media coverage on bilateral relations with China, Japan and South Africa gives most weight to economic development; second, media reports on bilateral relations with the US are often linked to Zambian domestic politics; and third, media reports on regional relations are exclusively weighted toward South Africa. As Table 10 indicates, the commonly used keywords in the media stories on the four countries are largely related to economic development. This shows that the Zambian government and media are highly interested in obtaining investment and trade opportunities for economic growth from bilateral relationships with four countries.



Source: Author.

Figure 8: Five-factor coding analysis of Zambian news articles on four states

Table 10: Common high frequency words in Zambian news coverage across all four countries

development, economic, economy, investment, market, company, growth, power, trade, global, business, local, energy, service, investor, service, investor opportunity, community, policy

Source: Author.

Furthermore, the characteristics of the media reports on each bigger country were well observed. Firstly, the relationship with China has been built on the historical relationship since independence, based on the funding provided for TAZARA construction, with other states unable to intervene. It also comes from solidarity with China's overwhelming presence in infrastructure investment. Respect for the assistance received from China when Zambia was struggling to survive has not yet faded. On the other hand, the current administration's foreign policy to address the debt default through active engagement with the West has shaken the traditional Zambian view of China as a primary partner.

Secondly, the media coverage on Japan indicates that despite the momentum to promote economic cooperation since TICAD 6, COVID-19 and the debt default have might have affected this path. Japan has focused its involvement on health and education, while Zambia eagerly awaits Japanese private investment. From the Zambian point of view, there is still a huge gap between expectations and the real situation on the ground.

Thirdly, while the US was described as the most critical country over domestic politics in Zambia before, it has now emerged as an even closer partner. Although the US has commended the strengthening of democracy in Zambia while at the same time, Zambia has welcomed the growing US private investment, the domestic political debates between the government and opposition groups over the human rights of sexual minorities are becoming increasingly intense. Thus, the media highlighted the challenges facing the Zambian President in navigating careful human rights diplomacy with the US.

Fourthly, Zambia's significant contribution to the struggle for independence in Southern African countries continues to be recognized, providing a solid foundation for bilateral relations with South Africa. The emotional and historical ties between the two countries have not been disrupted by competition from bigger countries. Zambian media report on the bilateral relations with each bigger state linking them to domestic politics. In contrast, relations with South Africa are discussed in the context of the regional IR as the figure 9 shows in align with the national strategy to become a regional trade hub. Today, expectations toward the bilateral relations with South Africa largely extend to investment and trade through economic diplomacy.

The Zambian media's own interests regarding bilateral relations with four countries have also become observable based on results shown in the five-factor model. Politically, the debates between the ruling and opposition parties over foreign policies toward China and the US have intensified since the 2021 presidential election, while arguments over liberal values such as democracy and human rights have heated up. Economically, the country's most pressing issues have been debt management and attracting foreign investment, especially in the mining sector, with the media giving the most coverage to economic development and expressing high expectations toward all bigger countries. For peace and security, while there is no direct threat to national security, general crimes related to xenophobia in South Africa targeting Zambian nationals are worrying. Regionally, strengthening economic relations with neighboring countries was emphasized to achieve the national goal of becoming a trade hub in Southern Africa. Internationally, the media reported the debt issue from the perspective of the international rivalry between the US and China. While other global media has also aggressively reported the debt issue from the viewpoint of bigger power politics, the perspectives of local media capture its complexities with other domestic issues such as corruption, human rights, power competition, and political survival.

The Zambian media have reported on the current government's political will to pursue a foreign policy based on national priorities, while also expressing the media's own expectations for the government to exercise more agency vis-à-vis each bigger country. At the same time, the media highlighted the political bickering between the ruling and opposition parties, prompting the current government to exercise its agency to attract support even from non-traditional close friends of Zambia. The President must balance two sets of policy tasks to exert agency over bigger countries as a means of resolving debt problems and promoting economic growth. One aspect is to balance foreign policy toward China and to avoid being seen as taking sides, while the other is to balance domestic views and Western voices on issues such as human rights in the US.

6. Conclusions

This study analyzed and identified the focus and tone of the debates in the Zambian media on bilateral relations with China, Japan, the US, and South Africa based on quantitative and qualitative data. While it is needed to examine the extent to which media coverage influences government policy and bilateral relations with each country in future research, the objective of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the policies of smaller states toward bigger states. Accordingly, the following generalizations can be drawn from the analysis: first, the historical memory of the bigger countries that provided assistance during the critical period of state-building since independence is etched in the memories of the smaller countries and serves as the basis for relationships of trust that continue to this day; second, if founding leaders played an important

role in shaping each countries' respective national identities, the nature of the relationship they developed with bigger countries remains an significant factor that the government of the day must consider in formulating its own foreign policy; third, infrastructure projects have a political impact that goes beyond physical development; forth, when smaller countries have stable relations with neighboring bigger countries, it reduces complications in relations with the bigger countries; and fifth, the most important factor for a smaller country is whether a bigger country is willing to cooperate when a small country faces a major crisis or is eager to achieve its own national targets (Imai 2023b).

The bilateral relationships between smaller and bigger countries continue to evolve amid the constant and dynamic changes in the international environment. In recent years, the intensifying US-China rivalry, exacerbated by the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, has drawn the attention of the international community as to which side African countries will take. Zambia's vote in favor of the UN resolution condemning Russia in March 2022 gave the impression that its traditional China-leaning foreign policy, followed by previous administrations, had shifted toward a more Western-oriented stance. However, President Hichilema's visits to Russia and Ukraine in July 2023 to call for a ceasefire, along with the heads of state and envoys of six other African countries, including the three that abstained from voting on the resolution, could be perceived as a sign of President Hichilema's desire to exercise Zambia's traditional all-weather-friendship diplomacy.

In May 2023, the US announced \$3 billion in aid for the construction of the Lobito Railway connecting Zambia, the DRC, and Angola. The following month, in June, Zambia reached a debt restructuring agreement with its creditors, including China. Three months later, in September, two years after taking office, President Hichilema visited China, where the bilateral relationship between China and Zambia was upgraded from "friendship" to "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership." Also during the visit, various investment-related MoUs were signed—worth approximately \$3 billion—for projects such as a smartphone assembly plant and the commencement of direct flights between China and Zambia. With these developments, the image of a "pro-Western President Hichilema" seemed to be becoming outdated. It appears likely that the US-China sparring over Zambia will continue, but by practicing traditional all-weather friendship diplomacy, the Zambian government seems to be securing commitments from the bigger countries to advance its national interests. However, there is one point that should not be overlooked. While the local media have reported extensively on President Hichilema's efforts to obtain promises from the bigger countries, they also ask calmly: when will people see the benefits in their daily lives? This question seems to suggest President Hichilema's next important task is to fulfill these promises before the next presidential election in 2025, while the local media continues to monitor progress.

Media coverage goes beyond simple fact-reporting. Through the analysis of discourses of local media, this research has demonstrated that domestic issues and foreign policy are intertwined: what do the media in smaller countries say about bigger countries? It is crucial that further studies should be undertaken to achieve a fuller understanding of smaller countries, enabling effective policymaking. Without this, even a big country with a significant GDP or substantial ODA contributions risks losing its influence and stable partnerships with smaller countries. Today, bigger countries need to be more strategic than ever to be seen as reliable partners by smaller countries.

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Abstract (in Japanese)

要 約

本稿は、ザンビアの民間オンライン・メディアが、同国と中国、日本、米国、南アフリカとの二国間関係をどのように捉え報道しているか、その内容と論調を比較検証したものである。分析の結果、四カ国に関する報道内容には共通点があり、それは、南部アフリカの貿易ハブとなる国家の目標を達成するため、経済成長を後押しし、地域の連結性強化に貢献し得る直接投資をいかにして誘致するかという点である。また、各四カ国との間で、現地メディアが重視する開発課題には特徴があり、中国との間では債務再編、日本に対しては投資の期待、米国との間では性的マイノリティの人権問題、南アフリカに対しては貿易関係の一層の強化という分野に高い関心が向けられていた。本研究は、分析の対象がメディアの報道内容であることから、考察に一定の限界がある点を踏まえたうえで、今日の国際社会において、小国が大国に対し発揮しようとする自律性の理解を深めるにあたり、現地メディアの言説に着目することの有用性を示唆するものである。

キーワード： 自律性、二国間関係、開発、投資、オンライン・メディア