

Beyond the “Chinese Scramble”: The Political Economy of Anti-China Sentiment in Zambia¹

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ABSTRACT:

Africa's relations with China gained worldwide prominence in November 2006 when 35 African heads of state gathered in Beijing to celebrate the rapid growth of Sino-African economic relations in the new millennium. But only a month earlier, riots had broken out in Zambia as Chinese shops and businesses were targeted by angry mobs following the electoral defeat of the anti-China Patriotic Front. Juxtaposing China's search for African oil and mineral reserves—the so-called “Chinese scramble”—with the growing resentment it is facing in places like Zambia, several analysts have termed China the new colonial power in Africa. This paper argues that the conceptual resuscitation of colonialism is problematic, but calls for a critical and contextual understanding of the Chinese presence in African countries. It shows that the political and popular opposition to China in Zambia is linked to a surge in economic nationalism and new challenges to neoliberal orthodoxy.

Key words: *China-Africa, Zambia, Copperbelt Province, China-US*

INTRODUCTION

China has emphatically registered its presence on the African economic and political landscape in the last decade. Among other things, the volume of trade between China and Africa has risen steadily from \$10 billion a year in 2000 to over \$40 billion in 2005, and is projected to cross \$100 billion by 2010 (Adandé 2008, 1). To celebrate and cement these growing ties, thirty five heads of state from Africa assembled in Beijing at the invitation of the Chinese president Hu Jintao for the inaugural China-Africa Summit (referred to as the Summit henceforth) in November 2006. More than 2000 trade deals were signed in Beijing as China promised \$5 billion in aid and credit to African coun-