

state or private, foreign or local—on either concessional loan or commercial projects.

### Conclusion

Against the grain of many international media and human rights reports that have often summarily accused Chinese state investors of practices that were actually shared by global private ones, this chapter reestablishes the comparative historical contexts for the prevalence of despotism and casualization prevalent across the two types of capital and two industries. Zambian labor has been disempowered over the past five decades, first by its own postindependence one-party state and later by neoliberal reforms imposed by global financial institutions and Western donors, all *before* the current investors arrived in the late 1990s. However, driven by different imperatives, the two types of capital pursued different strategies in mining and dealing with miners even though they operate under the same political apparatus of production. Due to its interest in securing copper for its use value and not just its exchange value, Chinese state capital organized a production regime that put a premium on stable and long-term physical production of ore. This contrasted with the more speculative, financial, and trade orientation of global private capital, whose primary interest was in selling copper for a profit. The difference in their underlying logic of accumulation led to different pivots in labor conflicts in the respective mines, presenting workers with distinct trade-offs (exploitation vs. exclusion). Still, miners fare better than construction workers due to inherent sectoral differences in the organization of work, the relative strength of unionism, and the government's differential strategic emphasis.

Just as the politicized imperatives of Chinese state capital made it more sensitive and accommodating to local elite strategies, as I argued in chapter 2, here I show that the varying strengths of organized labor across the two sectors resulted in different degree of concessions by Chinese state investors. In both cases, local politics and struggles (strikes and government intervention) mattered. Chinese state capital was more sensitive to fluctuation in politics than to fluctuation in prices. Yet, it must also be emphasized that Chinese state capital did not present an alternative to systemic capitalistic subordination and exploitation of labor. It only offered a different bargain in the strategic mining sector. In the nonstrategic and highly informalized construction sector, marked by weak labor capacity and lack of Zambian government support for its own workers, Chinese state capital was as exploitative of labor as the rest.

### Managerial Ethos: Collective Asceticism versus Individual Careerism

The corporate image of both Chinese state capital and global private capital in Zambia has been a subject of popular criticism and outrage. Interestingly, though, the flash points (labor exploitation and financial fraud) in their image war are reflective of their peculiar interests and practices, discussed in previous chapters. On the one hand, Chinese work culture is assailed as overly productive and inhumane and has fueled the rumor that Chinese employees in Africa are prison labor sent by the Chinese state. Popular discourse and consciousness do not distinguish between state and private Chinese investors, who were all lumped together as "Chinese companies." Serious industrial incidents, such as the 2005 explosion and the 2011 killing of Chinese managers at the privately owned Collum coal mine, have seared the image of exploitative Chinese investors into the national consciousness. On the other hand, the reputation of global private investors like KCM and MCM has been marred by reports of financial fraud, tax evasion, and cunning commercial deals. Public outrage simmered in the wake of a leaked 2010 report by an international auditing firm, which found that MCM had engaged in extensive transfer pricing with Glencore, its parent company. Even more indignation and resentment in Zambia were provoked when a video clip went viral on the Internet in the spring of 2014, featuring Anil Agarwal, the majority owner of Vedanta, KCM's parent company, bragging about making an easy profit of \$500 million each year since his purchase of KCM from the Zambian government for a mere \$25 million, even as KCM had declared losses every year since its inception. The intense public anger against KCM has inspired politicians and pundits alike to float the idea of "repossessing" (i.e., nationalizing) KCM.

For all the emotions and debates these corporate images have triggered in the public, they are not as important for understanding the distinct nature of

the two varieties of capital as the managerial ethos inside the respective companies. Capital does not simply "flow" into Zambia without friction or agents. Rather, capital of all varieties depends on expatriates on the ground, and their ways of life offer unique windows onto capital's peculiarity and capacity. Comparing the ethos of management in Chinese state mines and construction sites with that of expatriate managers working for global private capital, the former is distinguished by what Chinese themselves called "eating bitterness." As a way of life infused partly with an individual's moral compulsion and partly with corporate control imperatives, the Chinese ethos echoes Max Weber's memorable depiction of an "inner-worldly asceticism": "the ability of mental concentration, as well as the absolutely essential feeling of obligation to one's job . . . most often combined with a strict economy which calculates the possibility of high earnings, and a cool self-control and frugality which enormously increase performance."<sup>1</sup> The difference is that the Chinese ethos is collective rather than individualistic, patrolled from a distance by the Chinese state and the Chinese Communist Party. Whereas Weber postulated Calvinism as the religious source of this capitalist ethos, I found that state-sponsored nationalism rather than religion encourages and reinforces the collective ethos of eating bitterness. In contrast, the managerial ethos in global private companies is much more individualistic, careerist, and entrepreneurial, with a clearer boundary between corporate and personal domains. Even though eating bitterness is not limited to Chinese state-invested companies, as a regime of control inscribed into the institutional design of a residential compound, it found its fullest expression in central SOEs in mining, largely because of the strategic nature of this sector. In provincial state companies and privately owned companies in construction, I found collective asceticism but without the same degree of organizational discipline and mandate at the mines.

This chapter depicts salient organizational and cultural manifestations of this Chinese managerial ethos first in the mines and then on construction sites, using the lives of non-Chinese expatriates in global private companies as contrasts. The argument is that Chinese state capital had at its disposal a more controlled, collective, and disciplined agent, compared to the more individualistic and careerist management of global private capital. However, I also show that managerial ethos was not a totem edged in stone; like the logic of accumulation and regimes of production, it is embedded and contested, reacting and adjusting to pressures from within the company and the local social and political pressures. In the final section, I discuss how exposure to other ways of life changed the expectations of some Chinese managers and how Chinese managers and Zambians learned to accommodate each other's work habits. Beyond relations of class control and conflict, managers and workers were also

human beings trying to understand and reflect on their cultural differences, even as they strived to advance their respective interests and power.

### Eating Bitterness: Drawing Moral and National Boundaries

Who were the Chinese managers, the foot soldiers of Chinese state capital in Africa? Many Chinese senior and middle managers working in Zambia came from impoverished backgrounds in interior provinces (e.g., Shanxi, Jiangxi, Anhui, Henan, and Yunnan). Mining is not the most glamorous industrial sector in the Chinese economy, but for the secondary elites among China's rapidly growing middle class in the hinterland, technical careers in the mines still brought a degree of security, especially in the state-owned sector. There were roughly two generations of expatriates. The senior managers were mostly men in their forties and fifties who have spent most of their careers moving up the ranks in state-owned mining companies. The young generation consisted of college graduates with degrees in engineering or mining who speak better English but have no experience working in SOEs. Women accounted for about 5 percent of the Chinese employees, mostly working as interpreters, in human resources, and in accounting. Just as casualization had afflicted Zambian miners' lives since privatization, two decades of SOE reform in China had smashed the iron rice bowls of Chinese expatriates. Of the seventy or so Chinese employees at NFCA, only eleven were direct "permanent" employees of the parent company CNMC and were given Beijing resident status. The rest were either on five- or six-year contracts as seconded workers drawn from other subsidiaries of CNMC, or on two-year contracts recruited by the Beijing headquarters from "society," meaning outside the CNMC Group. To Zambians they were expatriate managers, but in the Chinese social structure, they confronted employment conditions resembling those of migrant workers struggling in Chinese cities. No wonder some of them half-jokingly described themselves as "higher-class migrant workers."

As poverty was visible everywhere in Zambia, everyday conversations among the Chinese were often peppered with memories of abject poverty in China, and how it was overcome with the unique Chinese capacity to "eat bitterness." During my first days at NFCA, in our first meetings, Chinese managers would inevitably allude to their experiences with poverty when we discussed a wide array of topics, from their personal backgrounds to subcontracting. The first time I talked to Mr. Cheng, the HR manager,<sup>2</sup> I asked him how he came to work for NFCA. His answer was a heartfelt rumination about eating bitterness: he grew up in a remote, poor village in Shanxi, and his family was so poor that when he attended a boarding primary school, he

could not afford the hot porridge served at school. In the summer, the bread he brought from home would turn green by the end of the week, but he still ate it because he could not afford anything else. When he found that he had been admitted to Kunming Polytechnic in 1984, his father advised him to buy "a jacket with zippers and some good underwear." To him, these things were luxuries reserved for important occasions such as college admission. Even when I met him, and he was earning a monthly income of \$5,000, his frugality was visible. He hung his beat-up white-turned-greyish wash towel on his office wall, and he used it to freshen up every day at the end of his siesta after lunch.

A week later, on our way to the annual collective bargaining meeting, as we drove on a bumpy and potholed road, Mr. Cheng lamented, "Zambia will never develop because of the laziness of the people, their inability to eat bitterness." During a break in the negotiation, angered by the double-digit pay raise demands of the union representatives, he lectured his HR staff about the Chinese merit of frugality: "If you work hard, you will get what you want. This is what we Chinese believe in. In our five thousand years of history, we never wanted to beg for money or borrow. We'd rather tighten our belt than shamelessly ask others for money. We are so different from our Zambian workers. They cannot earn but want to consume. They are lazy but want an increase every year."<sup>3</sup> Like many Chinese managers, Mr. Cheng deployed the narrative of "overcoming poverty by eating bitterness" to draw a moral boundary between them and Zambian workers, and as a summation of their experience of economic development at both the personal and national levels. To them, the willingness to work hard, defer gratification, and save methodically was the reason for their own and China's material progress. Failure to do so by the Zambians was to them a trait of cultural and moral inferiority that also explained Zambians' and Zambia's underdevelopment.

For instance, at the Chambishi smelter, Zhang Bo, a midlevel human resources manager, talked to me extensively about Zambian workers' indolence. Zhang was in her early thirties, and had been sent to CCS three years earlier by the parent company in Yunnan, another subsidiary of CNMC. A double-major graduate in English and engineering from Yunnan University who had worked in the environmental safety department at the Yunnan smelter, she was about to return to Yunnan for good to get married. At lunch she told us delightedly that she had managed to schedule her marriage registration on October 1, 2009, the sixtieth anniversary of the People's Republic of China. During a five-hour road trip from Lusaka to Kitwe, we killed time by talking about her work experience in China and Zambia. The logic of her "Zambian indolence" and "Chinese eating bitterness" narratives was quite typical of Chinese expatriates I encountered on the Copperbelt:

Zambians are lazy and unmotivated to break out of poverty. They don't strive to do anything, to improve their lives like us Chinese. Back home in the fields of Yunnan, the edges in the field are only one foot wide, because farmers want to maximize the area of planting. Even in such narrow walkways, they still want to squeeze in some crops: nuts or peas of some kind. . . . Zambians don't take initiative, and you have to give them the most detailed step-by-step instruction for the simplest tasks because they are incapable of thinking. . . . It's in their blood and mind, you cannot change it. Maybe the country is too rich [in natural resources]: they can pick a mango from the tree and that's their meal. They seem to be so easily satisfied and content, even though they are very poor.<sup>4</sup>

But then as we went on to talk about her experience working at CCS, she described not only how hard she worked but also how this culture of work depended on organizational design. She had firsthand experience in her state-owned work unit back in China that Chinese workers under that system were laid back, too.

At the beginning, there was nothing but bush. CCS was still under construction, and we worked and lived in very basic conditions. We worked from 7:00 a.m. every morning until lunch, got an hour's sleep, and then worked until dinner, and worked more until we were tired, unplugged our notebook, took it with us to our bedroom and slept. It's only a two-minute walk from "the office" to my bed. The amount of work I did here every year is easily three times what I did back home. Even though we get twice the salary by coming here, I still feel we are underpaid because the amount of work is three times more. . . . [W]hat a contrast with my old *danwei* [work unit]! It was really laid back and light work at the Yunnan copper smelter. Especially because I was in the safety department. Usually there is no big incident, and we just went around occasionally to inspect our subsidiaries, do some environmental education. I could make tea and read newspapers all morning, go to lunch and then go shopping until 3:30 p.m., do one hour of work, and get off at 4:30 p.m. to go home. My boss was very permissive, and he never complained. I got bored at work sometimes.

A deputy CEO at NFCA likewise observed that Chinese workers during the planned economy period were indolent and unmotivated, and it was market reform that had incentivized everyone to work hard. Connecting the personal and the national experience of development, he attributed China's economic success today to a system that released and capitalized on the culture of eating bitterness among ordinary Chinese. His frustration with the Zambian workforce in the mines was their rejection of the principle of "efficiency wage." "Zambian workers do not want to work more even if we give them higher wages for more production. In China, reform meant giving more money to those who work harder and produce more. Here, from day one, we wanted to peg wages to productivity, but the unions fought us tooth and nail to reject it,

and the government said the efficiency wage system was illegal. You tell me, how can this country ever develop?"<sup>5</sup>

Even though Indian, South African, and Peruvian expatriates in other mines also contrasted their hard-working culture with Zambian "indolence," "tribalism," "lack of leadership and initiative," and a "lack of drive, lack of self confidence, lack of commitment," there was normally little trace of the moralistic and nationalistic subtext characteristics of the Chinese. When other expatriate managers complained about workers being lazy and inefficient, they also used their home country as the yardstick—Indians for KCM, Peruvians and South Africans for MCM. But they did not generally claim diligence as a national character trait as the Chinese did. An Indian smelter engineer with thirty-five years' work experience in Zambia attributed diligence among Indians to their childhood experience in a populous and poor country, not to their Indian-ness: "I still remember growing up in my home village, I fought every day with many other kids to get on an overloaded cow-drawn cart to go to school. If you do not get out of bed earlier than others, you would not be able to get on the cart. If you are not strong and competitive enough, you would fall off the cart. We learn at an early age that, to survive, you have to compete and work hard."<sup>6</sup>

Discourse about African indolence was not only an integral part of the colonial encounter; it had been used in the postindependence era by the Zambian political elite, from Kaunda to Chiluba, to exhort citizens to contribute to national development. Robert Bates documented how, under the slogans of "discipline" and "productivity," the Zambian state had called on workers to work hard, be disciplined and obedient to supervisors at work, and limit workers' share of corporate revenues in order to protect the share of the government (via taxation).<sup>7</sup> Burawoy marshaled data on rates of absenteeism and strikes to refute these claims of indolence, arguing that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Zambian workers actually worked harder than many of their counterparts elsewhere in the world.<sup>8</sup> Zambian workers today did not contest that absenteeism and lack of commitment to work were indeed problems among some workers. But to them, the cause resided not in Zambian culture or national character but rather in the precarious nature of their jobs. A unionist at NFCA explained, "For the Chinese who have no families here or other things to do, they are here only to work. The sooner they finish their project, they get to go home. For Zambians, as soon as they finish their work, they think they will be out of work. The other reason is Zambians are not paid well. With minimum income, you are not taking good care of your family. You have to worry every day whether there is food on the table for your kids and wife, so you clock off early, or you take leave to look after them, or take on extra jobs. It's not that Zambians are lazy by nature."<sup>9</sup>

### "China House": Collective Rhythm of Everyday Life

The collective ethos of eating bitterness found its institutional expression in the "China House," the generic name given by locals to the residential compound where Chinese employees of a particular Chinese company lived together. NFCA, its affiliated companies, and its subcontractor company all ran their own China Houses on rental or purchased properties. Construction companies likewise either rented or bought local residences to provide dormitory-style housing for their employees in the head offices. Construction site managers and employees lived in temporary housing on site. Like most local residences, the China House was fenced and gated, with security guards and dogs on duty around the clock. A typical dormitory room was unadorned, compact but with an en suite bathroom, and equipped with a small refrigerator, a desk, one or two beds with mosquito nets, and a television set that seemed to be universally and eternally tuned to CCTV channel 4 (the worldwide Chinese cable channel broadcast from Beijing). In most Chinese companies, shared occupancy among two or three people was the norm.

The rhythm of everyday life inside the China House resembled that of a total institution. A collective timetable built into the organizational design of the China House coordinated the activities of anywhere between fifty and one hundred people; this was rare among other expatriate communities. Typically, a canteen with an industrial-style kitchen run by a team of Zambian workers under a chef from China provided three meals a day at nominal cost to the employees. With striking uniformity across many Chinese companies, breakfast was served at 6:00 a.m., lunch at noon, and dinner at 6:00 p.m. People waited in line to get their food with their personal enamel bowls and chopsticks, which they washed after each meal and placed back in a large cabinet with built-in slots and nametags of the employees. After breakfast, a company bus took the employees to the mine, smelter, or office and would bus them back to the China House after work. At NFCA, food was transported by a van from the kitchen in the China House in Kitwe to the canteen in Chambishi. After lunch, the Chinese would nap in their offices and usually resumed work an hour later, fully recharged. This was an oddity that bemused Zambians, who were not used to such collective bodily discipline.

Except for senior managers who had personal vehicles allocated by the company, the company buses were the only means of transportation for Chinese expatriates, and they were used not just for work but also for weekend supermarket trips. On Saturday mornings, the company bus would take employees to and from the local Shoprite. On many remote construction sites, there were no official days off for Chinese employees. NFCA was the only

Chinese company that had a two-day weekend; its smelter and its subcontractor operated a six-day work week for Chinese employees, leaving Sunday the only rest day for staff to catch up on sleep, do laundry, and talk to family and friends via the Internet. There were usually basic recreational facilities—a basketball court and facilities for table tennis and badminton. Joggers ran in circles inside the compound, as they did not feel safe running on the streets outside. Some companies had formal curfew at 8:00 p.m., and most had an informal rule that employees should notify their superiors if they planned on staying out beyond that time.

The one aspect of Chinese work life that drew the most suspicion and lent credence to the rumor of convict labor was the absence of family life. Only an insignificant minority of Chinese expatriates brought their spouses and children to Zambia, whereas most Indian, South African, and Peruvian expatriates came with their families. People wondered why and how the Chinese could endure like machines the prolonged absence of emotional support and intimate company of spouses. Until recently, most Chinese companies had an active policy against bringing spouses to stay long-term in Zambia. When the negative impacts on emotional stability and work performance became obvious, companies either relaxed the restriction to allow senior managers to bring their spouses or provided subsidies to encourage short-term parental or spousal visits. To the Chinese themselves, eating bitterness demanded sacrifices, and separation from loved ones was just one of them. They cited the competitive job market and education system in China as the reasons preventing them from uprooting the entire family. The main compensation for these sacrifices was their salary, which was on average two to three times more than what they could earn in China. To Africans and non-Chinese expatriates, the disconnection from family represented yet another example of the Chinese way of extreme asceticism, with a curious taint of inhumanity.

Chinese expatriates found consolation in the improvement in telecommunication technology, which made a significant difference to their connection with families. Veterans in the mines recalled the pricey cell phone calls they made every Saturday afternoon in the early years of NFCA. It was costly enough that the company had to provide a monthly telephone subsidy for each employee. These days, with the Internet, it is much easier for expatriates to maintain constant contact with their families back home. A couple in NFCA checked in with their toddler in China via Skype every day after lunch. They left her in the care of her grandparent soon after she was born. Most employees could send and receive text messages from friends and families at home anytime, making their absence from home more bearable.

People did not openly complain about what outsiders would consider extreme confinement. They had come to accept it as a necessary price to pay to stay safe in Africa, and saw in it only a more extreme version of *danwei* (socialist work unit) life in China. They relished the convenience and the time and money saved by this company-managed system of collective consumption. In some China Houses, the company continued the tradition of distributing (i.e., rationing) fruits, juices, milk, shampoo, and toothpaste. The Communist Party had an inconspicuous presence in state-owned companies in Zambia, with party cell meetings for members to learn about major policy documents and directions from the party leadership in China. Party discipline was also enforced by periodic but regular visits from Beijing. For instance, in the summer of 2013, the Communist Party secretary of CNMC led a delegation to implement the campaign on “frugality and mass line” proposed by the new Chinese leadership under Xi Jinping. Senior managers were interviewed one by one and middle managers in small groups. In these meetings, they were expected to talk about how their work style dovetailed with the current party line. When I ran into a senior mine manager just as he was coming out of his “interview,” he explained to me what he told the party. “I reflected on this idea of ‘relying on the masses’ and I realized it is applicable to production. It means we should communicate more with our workers and motivate them to initiate suggestions to solve problems in production. Actually these slogans can be useful. The party just wants us to be mindful.”

Among the younger generation of expatriates, the loss of freedom and loneliness was more deeply felt. Describing the morning commute to work as “going from a small prison to a large prison,” a female auditing clerk in her thirties told me how much she missed her toddler and her husband in China. A young graduate technician working in the chemical laboratory of the smelter told me she cried a lot when she could not handle the claustrophobic, monotonous and “meaningless” work-only life in Zambia. “Life after work is still work,” she said, deploring the total lack of contact with the outside world. A common refuge from the erasure of personal life took the form of “illegal” cooking inside the dormitory, to which companies usually turned a blind eye. With an electric rice cooker and an electric stove, cooking their own food on weekends was a popular pastime and a rare opportunity to savor some personal space, style, and taste in an otherwise controlled environment. Senior management knew it was only humane to allow their employees a modicum of freedom and a break from month after month and, for many, year after year of mess hall food. Spices and dry goods brought from China and cooked according to hometown recipes, no matter how simple, brought disproportionate comfort. Making dumplings from scratch, for instance, was a treat Chinese

offered friends who would visit on Sundays, even though it was logistically laborious and messy without a real kitchen.

### Other Expatriates

The frugal, monastic, and reclusive Chinese lifestyle stood apart from that of other expatriates. Until 2009, Indian expatriates working for KCM in Chingola looked for rental homes on their own. But when the company found the rental market too unregulated to provide protection and stability for their employees, it built a residential compound—Nchanga Flats, nicknamed the “Bombay Village” by the locals. Housing about seventy-two families (sixty-two Indian, and ten Zambian), these flats were three-bedroom units with full kitchens and living rooms. Unlike the Chinese, most Indians brought their families. Expatriate wives could not work locally due to their visa status, but they formed a “ladies’ club,” chaired by the wife of the CEO, to do charity work for local communities. Children went to local schools and found playmates among their neighbors in the compound. These Indian women had to give up their professional careers, as teachers and nurses for instance, so that the family could remain together despite the loss of income. With the hired help of a Zambian maid, each family prepared their own meals. They purchased their own private cars and went in and out of the compound according to their individual and family schedules. Once their children reached the critical secondary-school stage, the whole family would move back to India or to another country where they would find high-quality education.

One afternoon, I visited the home of Nadia, an Indian expatriate wife, in the compound. Her six-year-old son was playing in the living room after school. This child was born in India and came to Zambia with his parents when he was one-and-a-half years old. The entire conversation revolved around his education. “Most wives supplement the Zambian school curriculum by home schooling, teaching them more advanced mathematics and English, so that they can reintegrate into Indian secondary schools or into international schools elsewhere. His education is the most important factor in our family’s decision to move around.” When I explained to her that Chinese expatriates leave their wives and children behind when they come to Zambia, because they are keen on keeping the wives’ income in order to improve the life chances of the next generation, she was horrified. “If you really care about your family, you will not leave them behind. A few of the men here have their wives stay in India with their children, but it’s unusual.”<sup>10</sup>

When Nadia’s son got bored, he went to find children in the neighboring units to bike with, and the mother of a nine-year-old girl came to join our con-

versation. Like Nadia, this woman had also given up her previous job as a teacher. “I am used to shifting with my husband’s job posting every several years. My daughter started her education in Bombay and she was good in classical dancing and painting. But here, there is nothing like these for her. We have decided that next year, when my husband’s contract is up for renewal, if he gets posted to a country good for her education, we will move. If not, he will ask Vedanta to bring him back to India and we will all move back to India, because of her education.”<sup>11</sup>

During the two months I stayed with these Indian expatriates, the compound was usually quiet, with individual families carrying on their daily routines on their own schedule. Rather than taking a company bus, I walked to the mine or asked people randomly to give me a ride. On weekend afternoons, a group of men played cricket in the yard while young children in small groups biked or played games. I stayed at the singles’ quarters, which consisted of several low-rise buildings. The one-bedroom unit came with a kitchenette, a bathroom, and a small living room. A canteen, patronized mostly by expatriates who were young, single, or on short assignment, was conveniently located nearby, serving curry dishes three times a day, with a communal TV beaming Indian movies around the clock.

Strikingly different from the collective ethos of NFCA, KCM had a more discernably hierarchical living arrangement for its senior staff—its CEO lived in a palatial mansion surrounded by several acres of lush gardens next to the manicured grounds of the Nchanga Golf Club where there were reserved parking slots for senior KCM personnel. Other senior staff rented single-family homes in Chingola.

At MCM, I found an even more diverse pool of expatriates who hailed from South Africa, Britain, the United States, and Peru. They had to find their own accommodations in different parts of Kitwe. There was no collective or company housing. The need to maintain their individual family lives (hiring Zambian maids at home or knowing Zambian teachers through their children’s school) compelled them to interact more with local Zambians than the Chinese did, whose personal lives were organized collectively by the company. Scattered in different residential neighborhoods in town, expatriate managers at KCM and MCM were also more involved in local communities through their religious affiliations. A Peruvian senior manager at MCM who had worked in Zambia for ten years described the various ways Peruvian expatriates engaged Zambians: “The [Peruvian] wives who came with their husbands volunteer for orphanages. Just last week, they held a *braai* [Afrikaans for “barbecue”] and donated the proceeds to help local kids. I sit on the board of a Catholic congregation that runs classes for girls, teaching them sewing, French, computer skills. Some younger Peruvian guys even meet their local girlfriends there.”<sup>12</sup>

Finally, expatriates from global private firms tended to harbor more individualistic and entrepreneurial ambitions in Zambia than Chinese managers. For one thing, their career aspirations were global: when they were approached by mining multinationals, they could consider jumping ship, something I did not find among senior Chinese expatriates—at least, not yet. A forty-something Peruvian manager at MCM was bemused by KCM's interest in him as a candidate for a senior post. He declined after learning that the production department played second fiddle to finance. But he was open to other international or local opportunities, ruminating, "KCM has tried recruiting me in 2008, and Glencore has enticed me to go to Congo with an irresistible salary [smiling]. I could retire after several years with that salary. But because of my family, and because I like it here in Zambia, I declined the relocation."<sup>13</sup> Having obtained his Zambian resident status, he talked to me with excitement his plan to invest in a \$120,000, four-bedroom home on a large lot in Kitwe.

#### African Rumor and Chinese Ideology

Despite its resemblance to the Protestant ethic that Weber considered the quintessential spirit of capitalism, Chinese collective asceticism was considered an oddity, an unnatural ethos. Since the late 2000s, a global rumor circulating in Africa and beyond asserted that Chinese employees in Africa were convict laborers sent by the Chinese government. Appearing in think-tank writings, foreign government reports and officials' statements, commentaries on popular websites in Africa and elsewhere, and even election campaign speeches of African politicians, this rumor has gone viral on the Internet and in popular perception despite Chinese government denial and the absence of evidence. Yan and Sautman traced the rumor to both its elite and grassroots origins. On the elite side, it began with a former U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for human rights in a *New York Times* report in 1991, accusing China of using convict labor in Benin. Then it was picked up by a report in the British *Daily Mail* in 2008, and later in an Indian scholar's article, and then transmitted through the print media and Internet. Rumors of Chinese convicts soon appeared in at least half of Africa's states, in South Asia, Central Asia, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. These reports and articles found resonance among ordinary Africans, who, without direct knowledge of the Chinese, could find putative characteristics of prisons from common sightings of Chinese workers in construction sites. "A rigorous work pace, discipline and collective living style among Chinese employees cause people to imagine they are prisoners. . . . Many Chinese share rooms and do their own housework. Local people often cannot imagine foreign professionals living that way."<sup>14</sup>

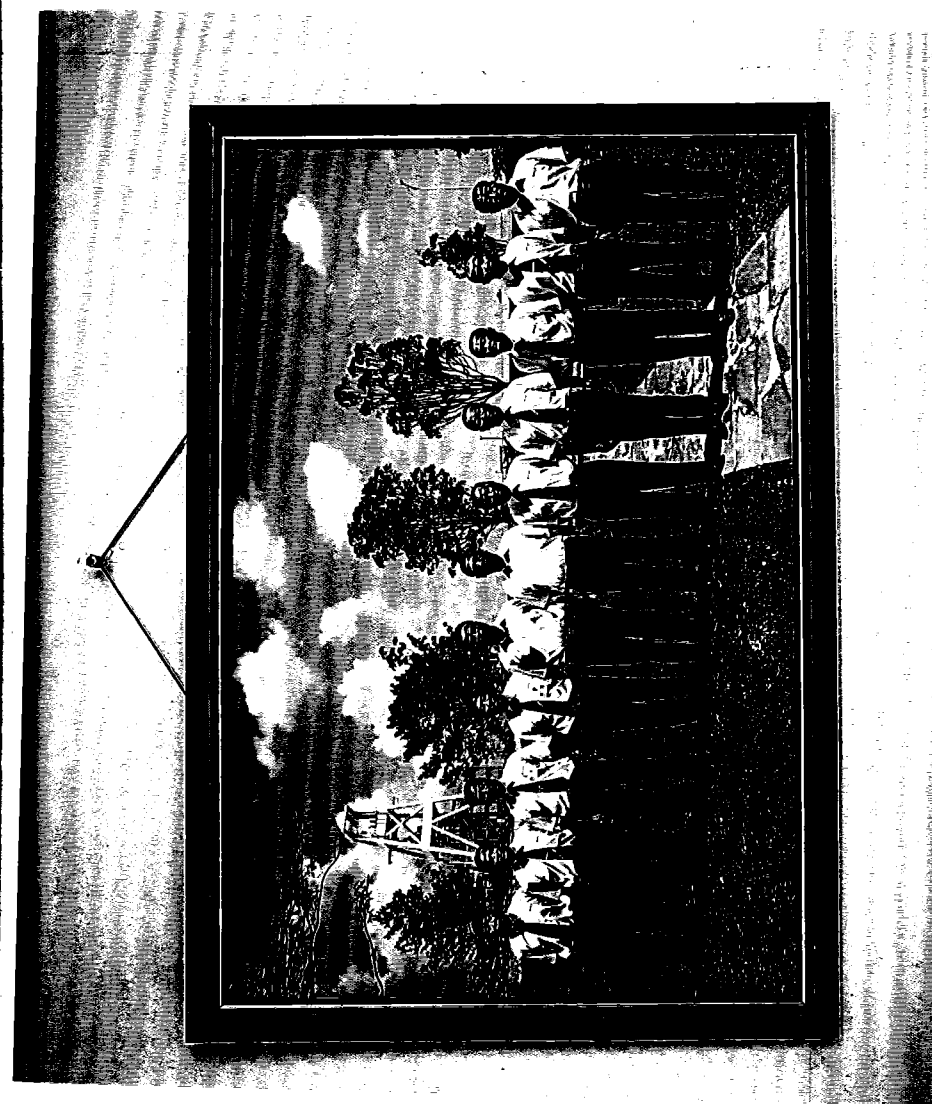


FIGURE 1. Esprit de corps: Chinese state mine and managers at Chambishi (photo by Sven Torfinn)





FIGURE 2. Entering West Ore Body in Chambishi copper mine (photo by Sven Torfinn)



FIGURE 3. Chinese mining engineers one kilometer underground (photo by Sven Torfinn)



FIGURE 4. Managing the concentrator of Chambishi (photo by Sven Torfinn)





FIGURE 5. Copper woman: Extracting copper concentrates (photo by Sven Torfinn)



FIGURE 7. Lunch line at the mine: CEO and employees eating together (photo by Sven Torfinn)

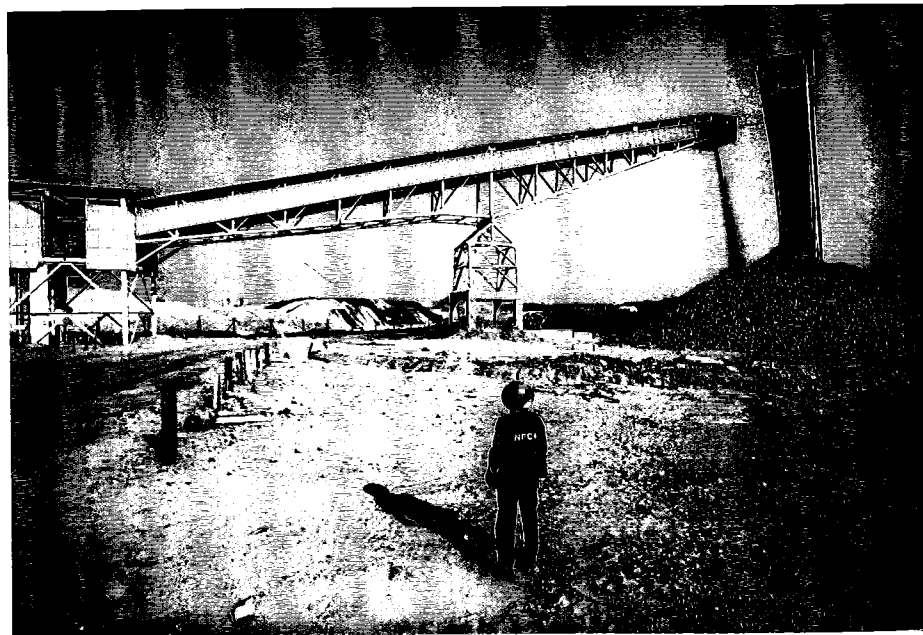


FIGURE 6. Crushing ore (photo by Sven Torfinn)



FIGURE 8. Zambian miners lining up for the man cage (photo by Sven Torfinn)

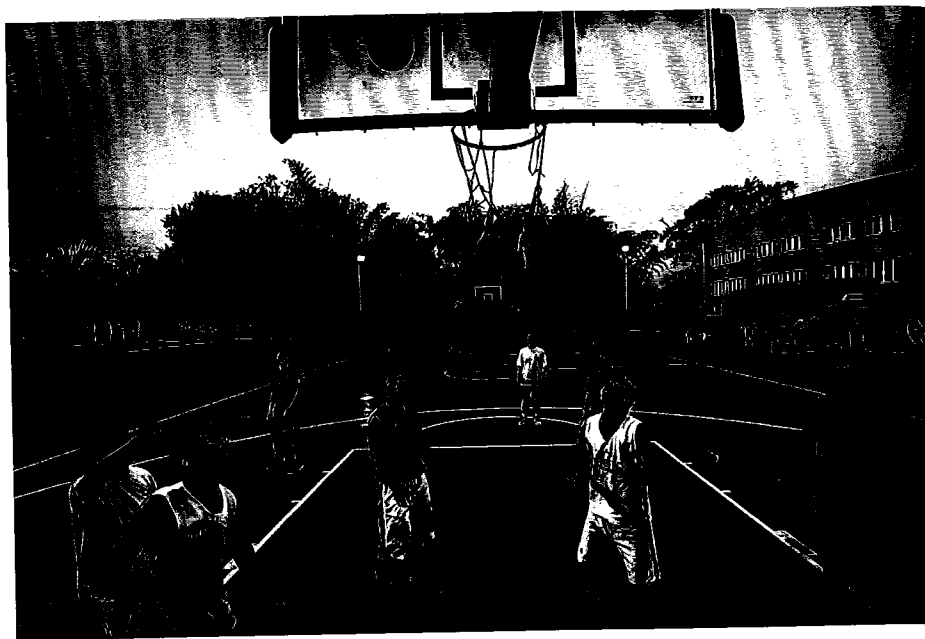


FIGURE 9. After hours in the China House (photo by Sven Torfinn)



FIGURE 10. A young miner's home in the township. The window and electricity are luxuries. (Photo by Sven Torfinn.)

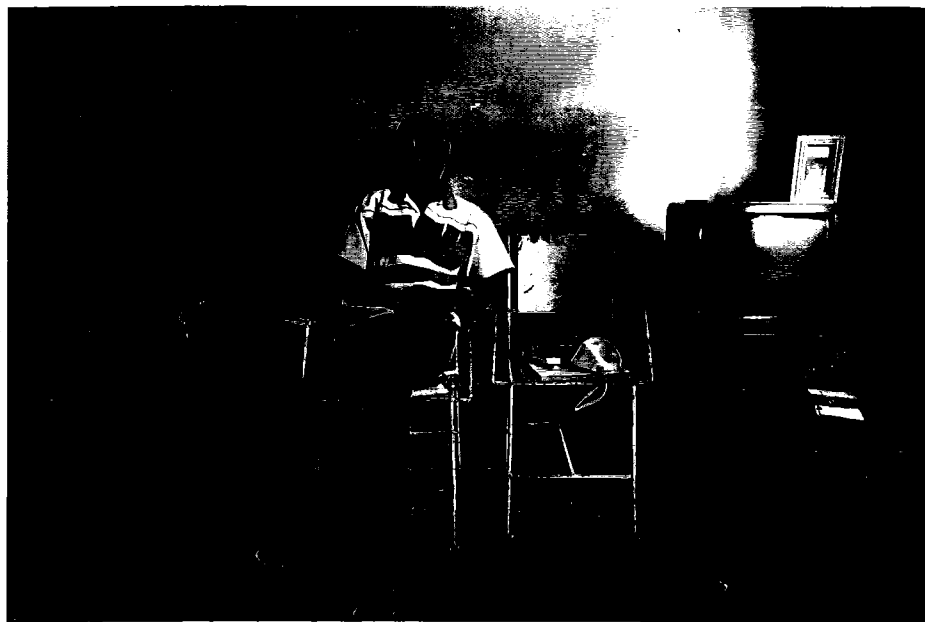


FIGURE 11. A retired miner at home in Chambishi. He purchased his house at a subsidized price when the government privatized the mines. (Photo by Sven Torfinn.)



FIGURE 12. Township bar, Zambia compound, Chambishi (photo by Sven Torfinn)



FIGURE 13. Dinnertime on a Chinese-run construction site in Southern Province (photo by China Geo)



FIGURE 14. Chinese foreman and African workers on a Chinese-run construction site in Southern Province (photo by China Geo)



FIGURE 15. Site manager of a road project on the Copperbelt (photo by China Geo)

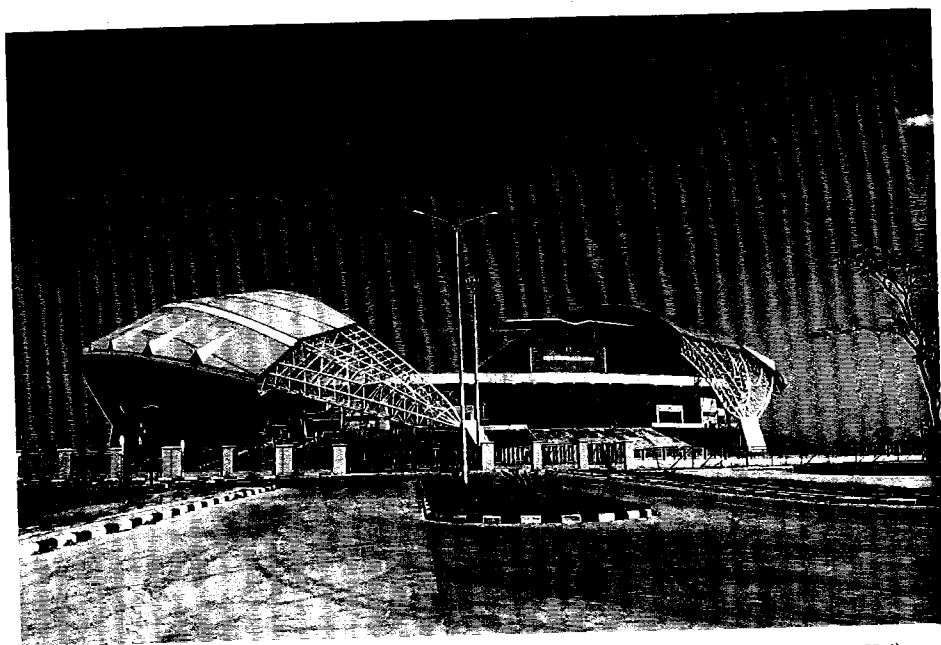


FIGURE 16. "Stadium diplomacy": A Chinese concessional loan project in Ndola (photo by Justin Hui)



FIGURE 17. Heroes National Stadium in Lusaka, built with a Chinese concessional loan (photo by Justin Hui)

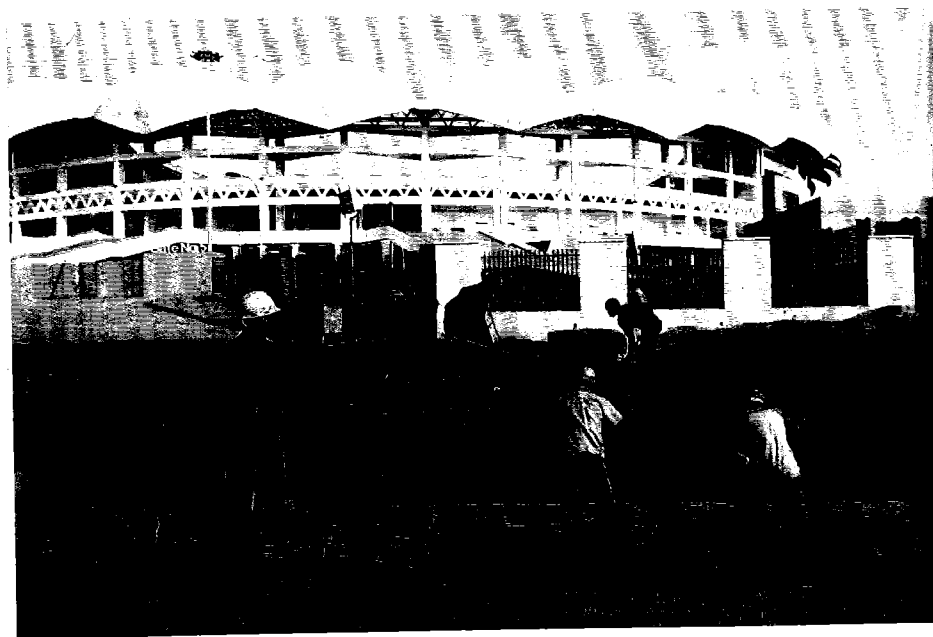


FIGURE 18. Concessional loan project in Lusaka (photo by Justin Hui)

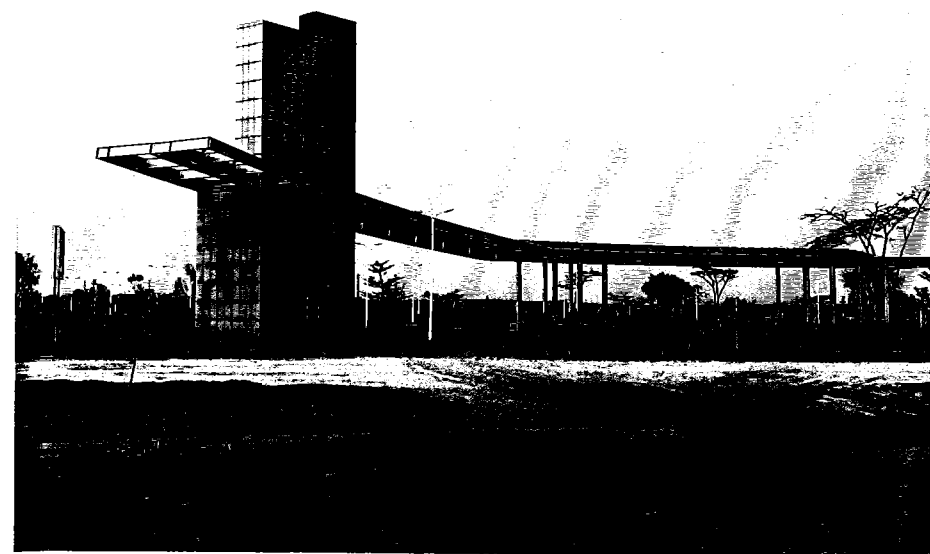


FIGURE 19. Zambia-China Cooperation Zone on the Copperbelt, China's first special economic zone in Africa (photo by Justin Hui)



Figure 1. Michael Sata's rally in Kitwe, Copperbelt Province, 2010 (photo by the author)

In Zambia, politicians and civil society activists alike invoked this rumor to criticize the incumbent government. Michael Sata's populist campaigns had leveraged this rumor to make the claim that "Zambia has become a labor camp. Most of the Chinese are prisoners of conscience."<sup>15</sup> A prominent critic of the Zambian government, the Roman Catholic priest Frank Bwalya made a similar charge that "Zambia has become a foreign prison for China. Prisoners from China are being brought to work in Zambia. The government should provide jobs for Zambians."<sup>16</sup>

In the face of this and other similarly negative publicity (e.g., a condemnatory report published by Human Rights Watch in 2012), the Chinese managers helplessly retreated in silence, seeing such cultural assault as confirmation of China's victimization by the West, an interpretation of history long nurtured by the Chinese government. Commonly articulated under the rubric "a century of humiliation," the official memory of China's relations with the West emphasized the latter's deliberate plundering of Chinese wealth, territory, sovereignty, and national pride as a center of civilization in world history, since the Opium War in the mid-nineteenth century. This narrative, trumpeted first as the founding mythology of the Chinese Communist Party, maintained that Mao and his party's victory over the Japanese and the Nationalists ushered in a New China that stood up as an independent country after incessant wars and humiliation lasting more than a century. More recently, during the reform era, and especially after the 1989 Tiananmen debacle, the party leveraged and systematically institutionalized this historical account of "a century of humiliation" into official media rhetoric, textbooks, patriotic education campaigns, museums, and official commemorations of historic events, in a bid to graft it onto Chinese nationalism as its main legitimating ideology.<sup>17</sup> Chinese official and popular subscription to this victim narrative was on prominent—at times even violent—display, particularly in diplomatic clashes with Japan and the United States (e.g., Diaoyu/Senkaku territorial disputes, Japanese history textbook controversy, and the NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade).<sup>18</sup> Scholars of Chinese nationalism have noted that ordinary Chinese, rather than being passive recipients of a state-imposed ideology, shared a deep sense of injustice at the hands of foreign powers, and nationalistic protests in recent years were as much mass-initiated as state-sponsored.<sup>19</sup>

In Zambia, although I did not see any deliberate policy or campaign to promote the narrative of China's victimization by the West, senior Chinese managers, Chinese officials at the embassy, and many expatriates seemed to have internalized it and used it to understand why Africans and the Western media targeted their work in Africa. I heard it on our company bus to the mines, and in casual conversation with Chinese businessmen who reported hearing it in



gatherings at the Chinese embassy. But it was put to me most pointedly by the party secretary of the Chinese smelter in Chambishi. Knowing that I was a U.S.-based sociologist interested in Chinese state investment in Zambia, he assumed that I shared a similar critical perspective on Chinese labor practices, and began lecturing me about persistent victimization of China by the West:

China has missed out on all previous historical opportunities to develop as quickly as the West since the Qing Dynasty, when the West had their chance to go get resources from the rest of the world. . . . Then we had socialism, and the planned economy which built a good base for today's economic growth. Look at India. I see a headache. So poor, so little education, bad roads. . . . China is better because of state investment during the planned economy era. But the copper in China is of low quality [1% at most], so we need to go overseas. The media in the West then speaks of exploitation. . . . Because our mine [Chambishi] had been abandoned for a long time, we had to invest more than others, and we cannot pay wages as high as MCM and KCM. But they call this exploitation—a terrible word.<sup>20</sup>

Yet, it would be a gross mischaracterization to say that Chinese managers in Zambia were motivated by nationalism and that their practice of collective asceticism reflected a collective political project. In fact, their main motivation was economic. The higher salaries they earned in Zambia allowed them to save for purchasing a home in China, to support a college-bound child to go abroad, to maximize income as mandatory retirement (at sixty) approaches, or to escape a blocked career in the SOE where they had worked for a long time. For the top officials who were permanent employees of the CNMC, at least two admitted to me that they were enticed to come to Zambia by the parent company's offer of a Beijing *hukou* (household registration), which they wanted for their offspring's future. During my fieldwork, there was an announcement in the mine about one deputy CEO being considered for *hukou* transfer to Beijing, and the company asked for comments or objections from his colleagues. Elsewhere, when the first CEO of the Chinese smelter held a motivational meeting for his employees, his emphasis was entirely economic and personal rather than collective and political. A smelter employee recalled vividly:

Our chief at CCS is a really brilliant young guy, only forty years old. When he first came, he was already the vice president of Yunnan Copper, a company with assets of six hundred billion yuan. For me, one of the most memorable things at CCS was how he instructed us to overcome the initial difficulties working here. Many of us found the conditions and life here too harsh, and there was instability in our morale. He called us together one day and said, "You young people should think about only two things: money and the future [which in Mandarin have the same pronunciation]. And then we pay well, and with the experience

you accumulate here, your career will go even further." He appealed to our personal interest only. After that, we all were moved and staff morale improved.<sup>21</sup>

Underlying Chinese expatriates' reclusiveness was a palpable sense of insecurity and fear.<sup>22</sup> "The outside is chaotic and unsafe" was a refrain I heard a lot while staying in the China House in Kitwe. Many remembered that in the days when Sata was campaigning for president in 2008, the Patriotic Front crowds would roam around town from their usual gathering spot in the Freedom Park, raising their fists in the air and shouting, "Chinese Go!" Chinese expatriates still recalled seeing the slogans through the windows of the company bus when they returned to the China House in Kitwe from Chambishi. On some weekends, when a few of us managed to convince one of the Zambian drivers to take us to the newly opened mall an hour's drive away in Ndola, my colleagues were both excited and concerned. They would make sure that I carried my passport and permit with me, because "the local police intentionally target us Chinese." Some of them had the unpleasant experience of being pulled over and fined on the spot for not carrying their work permits. The fine they paid of course went directly to the policeman's pocket. Even when making a short trip to the company-run Sino-Zam Friendship Hospital or to the local market on Sunday, female colleagues always asked male colleagues to escort them. News of occasional burglaries or murders that befell Chinese nationals in Zambia reinforced this perception of anti-Chinese sentiments.

Another ubiquitous source of anxiety and suspicion was the frequency of thefts, which were interpreted as racially motivated. At the Chambishi Copper Smelter, coordinated thefts by security officers, Zambian workers, and local residents had happened several times. The director at the smelter complained angrily about this when I went there with a Zambian senior bureaucrat conducting his quarterly inspection of the enterprises inside the Chambishi MFEZ. The director was beside himself when he recounted the latest "hostile incident":

It's so unfair that our [Zambian] newspapers made big stories that Chinese are killing Zambian workers. . . . Last year, teenagers thirteen or fourteen years old from the nearby squatters came to steal. They came again to attack our expensive machines. Our security guard fired and killed one of them, but he himself was arrested. So now people just watch the thieves steal and do nothing. These squatters were not here before we came; but after we arrived, they claimed this place as theirs, saying they don't want foreigners on their ancestral lands. They started farming and complained that we caused pollution. We were forced to compensate them so the media won't blow up their accusations. Farming cannot sustain them, and they steal. Local politicians support them because they want their votes.<sup>23</sup>

Suspicion of theft was widespread and generated a lot of everyday distrust between Chinese managers and Zambian workers. When I traveled with a CCS human resources staff member from Lusaka to Kitwe, we stopped for lunch and the driver went off for his own break. When he did not show up at the end of our lunch break, my CCS friend murmured, "I hope he is not somewhere emptying the tank and selling our gasoline to some illegal companies." The driver eventually returned to pick us up more than a half hour later, and the first thing he did was to pull up to a gas station to fill up the tank. My friend became even more suspicious. When he asked for K300,000 for gas, she immediately checked the tank gauge and exploded in disbelief, asking, "How come we need that much? It's too much. Just get K200,000." She turned to me and said in Mandarin: "I cannot trust him. . . . Theft is very common at CCS. In the warehouse department, workers usually gang up with security guards or the transportation department. At night, they can easily send in trucks to ship away copper cathodes or concentrates. Therefore, CCS has to hire two security companies, so they can check on each other. Sort of check and balance; you cannot just have one company."<sup>24</sup>

In sum, among expatriates in Zambia, only the Chinese became the subject of a continentwide rumor that they were convict labor sent by the Chinese state. And only the Chinese state, among other origins of foreign investors, offered a counternarrative of China's continuous victimization by the West. For the Chinese managers bearing the brunt of popular criticisms about China's going out as a nation, subscribing to this state-sanctioned subaltern episteme and embracing the ethos of eating bitterness as the essence of being Chinese brought cultural empowerment and solace in a hostile and foreign world. The cultural boundaries drawn by this ethos had the effect of obfuscating the exploitative relationship between the Chinese state company and themselves as employees, and between Chinese management and Zambian labor. This reality on the ground contrasts sharply with the popular image of Chinese colonial domination circulating in the media. Rather than the Chinese propagating any hegemonic discourses or universalizing mission that have historically accompanied and armored colonialism, they had been put on the defensive in the cultural politics surrounding Chinese investment in Africa. Chinese state managers' collective experience in Zambia was not one of power and domination but insecurity, vulnerability, and anxiety. Even though they were mainly motivated by personal economic interests, being agents of Chinese state interests subjected them to added pressure and discipline enforced from afar. As we shall see in the next section, such corporate control and collective discipline were more relaxed in the construction sector, due to the latter's lesser strategic importance and the physical remoteness and mobile nature

of construction sites. There was also more variation in terms of the degree of social seclusion, even as I found the same eating bitterness moral and nationalistic discourse, the same inner compulsion to save and work hard, and the ubiquitous collective living arrangement.

### Collective Asceticism on Construction Sites

Even before I had a chance to visit any construction site run by Chinese state or private investors, the director of the Zambian National Council for Construction, Dr. Sylvester Mashamba, offered his comparative observations on why the Chinese were so competitive and successful in winning Zambian contracts. It had everything to do with their work ethic:

If you go to any of the Chinese sites, you will see they have this communal spirit. For instance, they all sit and eat together. Managers and engineers are all together. When you go to other Zambian, South African, or British sites, they will have posh offices and accommodations in town, air conditioning, satellite, four-by-four vehicles for all the top people and site managers. The Chinese will only have a truck; everyone goes in that truck. When you go to Chinese sites, they sleep on site, get up at 6:00 a.m., but they do not knock off at 6:00 p.m. like everyone else. They work through the night. Long hours, and their site managers also live there. You go to Chinese sites, it is hard to find out who is the site manager because he dresses and eats the same as everyone else. He will not wear a suit like the Brits and South Africans. The only difference will be that he has an office. . . . It's also a commitment issue. I went to site inspection several times and once we went to a student hostel construction site after sixteen hours when most Zambians have knocked off but the Chinese workers still continued plastering or the like. I cannot tell if they were forced or told to work after hours. South African and British companies knock off according to official hours, but the Chinese set their own time standards, just like when they first came here to build the Tazara. They finished, what, four years ahead of time? I was just a student then but there were all these documentaries on television showing how they worked through the night. They just work all the time. [How do you or other Zambians explain why the Chinese work so hard?] Something I have never found out, but I think [it] may be their patriotism?<sup>25</sup>

Compared to the China Houses in Kitwe and Lusaka, the seclusion and asceticism of Chinese expatriates in the construction sector were exacerbated by the remoteness of most construction sites. After all, they were building roads and schools where none existed. In my visits to twenty sites around the country, South African expatriates reported living in apartments in town, complete with maid service and four-wheel-drive personal vehicles, whereas

most Chinese employees lived in spartan, makeshift housing sometimes converted from cargo containers, cooked their own meals, and even raised chickens and goats for food. Their salaries were usually not paid in full (or at all, in some cases) until the projects were completed and they returned to China at the end of the typical two-year contract. In the name of security, convenience, and forced saving, Chinese construction companies had a common practice of depositing salaries into employees' bank accounts in China rather than in Zambia. The result was that Chinese employees had little local currency to spend. The remoteness of many construction sites simply reinforced the proclivity to minimize local interactions.

Just as in the mines, Chinese managers' collective frugality amounted to significant savings at the corporate level. But the construction sector allowed for more precise computation of how much that savings added up to. Based on a comparison of the cost structures in bid documents submitted by Chinese and non-Chinese contractors, Zambian officials revealed that on average, Chinese site managers cost 20–30 percent less than other expatriate managers due to their inferior living and employment conditions. As contractors submitted documents according to a standard rubric, government procurement officials could point to each contractor's estimated cost of their managerial staff, under the item "preliminary and general expenses," or P&G. The procurement specialists at the Zambian Public Procurement Authority, which oversaw the tendering process of high-value government-funded projects of more than K50 million, observed several cost advantages enjoyed by Chinese companies. Making jokes about Chinese companies paying Chinese general workers peanuts because they were "prison labor," these officials pointed to the lower unit cost of materials (e.g., importing machinery to make bricks rather than buying) and especially Chinese companies' P&G. P&G items consisted of overhead expenditures of senior staff—accommodations, transportation, salary, subsistence, temporary offices, and security.<sup>26</sup> This assessment was by and large corroborated by a senior manager at Jiangxi International, a provincial Chinese state company with the longest history in Zambia. He estimated that the frugal managerial lifestyle of the Chinese managers translated into only a 10 percent difference in Chinese bid price, and the rest of the price difference was due to cheaper equipment imported from China. He concurred that the managerial practice of eating bitterness contributed to corporate profits and competitiveness.<sup>27</sup> In the following section, I use ethnographic depictions and personal narratives to convey what eating bitterness meant as quotidian lived experience on construction sites. There were strong parallels in tropes, practices, and worldviews among Chinese managers working in construction to those found in the mining sector, even as the level of corporate control

and discipline was much reduced, and most of the Chinese construction site managers' employment was more casualized than that of mining managers.

### On the Sesheki–Selanga Road: Three Chinese Contractors, Shared Ethos

In August 2011, I traveled to the Southern Province with my research partner from the National Council of Construction and two University of Zambia student researchers. Our destination was the two-hundred-kilometer-long Sesheki–Selanga road, under construction by three separate Chinese contractors. The Zambian government, then under MMD's Rupiah Banda, awarded a segment of the project to each of them: Jiangxi International (ninety kilometers), China Geo-Engineering Corporation International (sixty-six kilometers), and China New Era (eighty-five kilometers). With the general election around the corner (in late September), the government wanted to show off its commitment to improving local livelihoods, and construction of the road was in high gear when we arrived. Awarding the project to three separate contractors was a way of spreading risk and hastening the pace of construction. Jiangxi International (JXI) was a provincial state-owned company; the other two were subsidiaries of the same central SOE holding company, China New Era Holdings (Group) Company. The backgrounds, motivation, and living conditions of the managers in these three companies could not have been more similar. Compared to their counterparts in the mines, the time-sensitive nature of construction projects and the remoteness of construction sites compelled greater endurance of hardship by managerial labor.

Almost all of these site engineers and managers were fixed-term (one- or two-year) contract employees of their respective state companies. Their jobs were as insecure as those of the Zambian workers they supervised. On all these sites, managers emphasized the principle of "generating efficiency from management," to compensate for what they considered poor labor discipline and low labor productivity. A typical workday began at 6:30 or 7:00 a.m. until lunch at 11:30 a.m., and continued from 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. There was no official day off, but their default rest day was the day after the Zambian workers' payday. "They [Zambian workers] don't customarily come to work after getting their salary. So we also take a day off that day," the site manager at JXI said with a wry grin. Only the most senior staff on site had single-occupancy rooms; the rest shared a unit with one or two other employees. At China New Era, eighty Chinese employees shared sixteen passenger vehicles, with no designated personal vehicles. At China Geo, fifty Chinese shared eight passenger vehicles, and at JXI, there were four vehicles for forty Chinese. But earning more than twice as much as they would in China, these men understood that

their Zambia posting came with extra demands and hardship. And they were aware that their South African counterparts enjoyed better terms of service. Over lunch at JXI, the site manager sighed:

South African engineers live in town and they work eight hours a day, never any overtime. Chinese can eat bitterness. Our efficiency all comes from managers' overtime labor. We all came to make money. Here efficiency is life. When I interviewed [in China] for this job, the labor dispatch company reminded me not to mention any lofty political goals such as China's four modernizations, socialism, or national construction. They instructed me to just say, "I come here for the money, not politics," otherwise the employer will not hire you.<sup>28</sup>

At China Geo, the site manager concurred that money was the main motivation of Chinese expatriates. "I earn about \$4,000 a month inclusive of basic, overtime, and bonus. Young college graduates can get about \$2,000, whereas in China, they could only earn \$1,000. Our leaders in the headquarters in China encouraged us to think of nothing else except making money when we are here."<sup>29</sup>

The economic pressure prompting Chinese employees to work in Africa for higher salaries did not just stem from the general cost of living in China for everyday consumer goods. Many mentioned specifically the cost of housing, education, and medical care, or what sociologists would term the cost for the social reproduction of labor. In a group discussion with three managers at China New Era, one of them said:

It is not easy to survive in China as the middle class. Medical care, schooling, and housing, all are so expensive. . . . There is a lot of competition among Chinese firms here because all of them want to bid as many projects as possible. The client, usually the Zambian government, is not always on time in paying us. Companies have to bid more projects, even with little or no profit, so that no machinery, tools, or manpower stand idle, and to compensate for the erratic cash flow. We are paid our salary when we take our annual holiday to go home or at the end of the year. Some companies only pay salaries at the end of the second or third year when the project is over, so as to maintain flexibility in capital flow. We find this acceptable because when our families back home need money, we can apply for "advance payment" from the company. They will deduct that from our pay.<sup>30</sup>

One particular kind of hardship many in remote construction sites mentioned was racial harassment by local police. "The police in Zambia are very corrupt. They know very well how to find small violations, such as a broken tail light. But our materials can't wait. Cement, bricks, parts, too many things are needed urgently every day. They target Chinese, holding our vehicles for

several hours or a day, delaying our work on site, to extort money. Once we had a caravan of four vehicles; the first three went past the police post without any question. As soon as the police saw yellow-skinned people in the fourth, he stopped and found excuses to demand fees. Many Chinese contractors have had the same experience. Now, our strategy is to minimize the number of trips; whatever we need, we'd rather ask for delivery."<sup>31</sup>

#### 1. MIGRANT MANAGER AT A PROVINCIAL SOE CONTRACTOR

Hu Xin worked as an engineer and assistant site manager at Jiangxi International. He was born in a township near Nanchang, a second-tier Chinese city, and graduated from Nanchang University in 2008 with a degree in civil engineering. Having worked for one year in his professor's consulting company, and after his girlfriend of eight years left him for a wealthy real-estate businessman, he joined JXI to obtain overseas work experience. During his one month of training for this foreign posting, the company emphasized esprit de corps, loyalty to company, and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. He remembered distinctly the injunction "not to fight with Zambian workers to avoid transmission of AIDS through bleeding and injuries."<sup>32</sup>

On his work site building the first seventy kilometers of the two-hundred-kilometer-long Sesheki-Selanga road, there were five university graduates. Hu had signed a five-year contract with JXI, and his package included the employer's contribution to all the legally required types of insurance, a stipend for housing, and one month of home leave every year. In 2012, his salary was about RMB12,000 a month, plus a bonus, which could add up to RMB300,000 a year, compared to about RMB5,000 a month at home. What made him think favorably of his pay was that his college mates were making half of what he made. But there was one drawback: in Zambia, everyone's salary was paid only every six months, wired to their bank accounts in China. For less important positions such as foremen and those without educational qualifications, the company used "outside hires" (dispatched workers without a formal employment relationship with JXI), giving them one month's home leave every two years. Foremen earned about RMB2,000–3,000 a month in Jiangxi, China, but up to RMB8,000 in Zambia. He offered his comparative assessment of labor and development in China and Zambia, and the motivation of Chinese employees and the hardships they had to endure:

In China, gang bosses [subcontractors] on construction sites are very fierce and thuggish. There is no guarantee they pay you for your work. They would yell at you, "You don't want to do the job, get out of here. There are many who want to work." You see, the reason why China can develop so quickly is because we have sacrificed the well-being of an entire generation of migrant workers. Here in Zambia, in major festivals, we even

give Zambian workers bonuses. This won't happen in China with those gang bosses. It's all savage exploitation in China. Here, Chinese foremen and electricians belong to the managerial stratum; in China, they are only manual laborers. This difference in identity and status makes them very proud. In China, their work is very unstable. You work for two months and who knows what's next. Here, we have a lot of work. In China, construction workers have no medical insurance; here, we go to Friendship Hospital and just sign off for free medicine and treatment. They can save up money for children's education. Everything we need is all paid for by the company, including a monthly K100,000 telephone card! When we need to hurry up to meet deadlines, like now, we disburse \$250 bonuses as an incentive. But these Chinese men's psychology is distorted and sexually depressed by the separation from their families. That's why you can see some mixed-blood children with Chinese facial features. One of our foremen had left a mixed-race kid with Chinese skin color and eyes but African hair. Very strange. Another foreman looked after him once in a while.

When I asked if he thought the company should pay employees a monthly rather than biannual salary, he surprised me by explaining why he accepted this form of exploitation, drawing a connection between past poverty and personal and national development through acceptance of exploitation:

There is a practical consideration. The bank charges a fee of 0.5 percent for every US\$3,500 wired. It's a heavy burden for the company. The entire industry is like that. There are private companies that pay at the end of four years. This is of course exploitation. I think China is now the same as the United States and Europe in the past, exploiting workers' youth, blood, and sweat. But we are still at an early stage of development. Migrant workers are all exploited by capitalists. Communism in the past did not work, so we now have to change. My mother was a food processing worker and she experienced the days of coupons. When I was young, eating meat was an exciting and happy event. Not that our institutions are all perfect, but our standard of living is undeniably much higher than before. Now I am motivated by monetary incentives, by seeing rich people. Human beings need incentives to work hard. Inequality in China disappoints and frustrates some people, but inequality also excites and motivates other people. I think I belong to the latter group. Some of my school mates at home are only earning RMB3,000 a month, and I see I earn more than they.

I know South African engineers must have air conditioners, hot water heaters, Internet cards, television, and nice accommodations. For us, some senior people have single rooms; the rest have to share. It's already an improvement over the past when we worked on small road projects.

For those small projects, you cannot build your own dormitories. Otherwise, there will be no profits. We just rented a house in the local area and put four people into a room. You get up from bed and you will hit your head against the bunk beds. Chinese can really eat a lot of bitterness. This may be related to China's history of eating bitterness, being invaded and humiliated by foreign powers. We are really adaptive. . . . On payday and the following day every month, we all rest, and we send a bus to take our Zambian workers to town to buy oil and other daily necessities. Unlike the British, who used military force, we are so nice to them, but they still steal from us. If anything happens between Chinese and Zambians, people always blame it on the Chinese.

Profit in Zambia is 20–30 percent higher than in China because of higher project prices. The construction market in China is very unregulated and chaotic. Local gangsters asked for fees because we work on their turf. There is illegal subcontracting: they win a tender and then transfer it to another subcontractor in return for a management fee. There are too many vested interest groups fighting each other. Competitors will come sabotage your site or ruin your cement. But these Chinese gang bosses won't come to the Zambian market because they don't speak English [laughs].

By law, 20 percent of our project price has to engage Zambian subcontractors. But once these local guys get advance payment from us, they go traveling or buying cars, not to work. Many of these contractors are relatives of the Road Development Agency, just like in China, it's about *guanxi* [social relations]. We can only subcontract very easy jobs like laying pipes. Actually only 3 percent, not 20 percent, of the project work can be accomplished by Zambians. They don't have machinery and skills.

We have frequent strikes. The last one just happened one week ago. Once we discovered the organizers, we fired them. They were usually machine operators. But strikes do not last. The next day, workers will say, "Boss, I want to work."

It's like the United States going to China to take advantage of cheap labor; we come here to take advantage of cheap labor. There is no national difference; it's the logic of the market economy. It's surplus value that creates capitalists' profits. . . . In China, it is migrant workers who can tolerate hardship and bitterness. And we are just more educated, upper-class migrant workers. I grew up poor, happy with a bottle of Coke. Now, I can drink a thirty-yuan beer, so I am very content. One day, I will become my own boss. . . . Our Zimbabwe office has a high turnover rate among engineers, why? Because once they develop enough local networks, they set up their own companies.

## 2. MIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS: EATING BITTERNESS AS PRIVATE CONTRACTORS

Hu Xin's entrepreneurial dream in Africa was based on many living examples of private contractors from China. They usually had a previous professional life in Chinese SOEs, which sent them to Zambia to build foreign aid projects. They had since stayed to open their own businesses. Li Ming, the owner of a private Chinese construction company (grade 2 in the NCC registration system), had a typical profile and history among Chinese investors in this sector in Zambia. The Li family had immigrated to Zambia some twenty years ago. Their daughter went to school in Lusaka and studied veterinary science at Washington State University in the United States. Mrs. Li's sister, her son, and her daughter-in-law were also working for the company. As we made dumplings in their home, where the backyard doubled as a warehouse of construction materials such as cement, bricks, and tools, Mr. Li reminisced about his migration story, weaving together the personal and the historical conditions that made it possible and desirable. He came to Lusaka in 1994 as a provincial-level SOE engineer for a project. After the project was completed, he saw that there was a market for construction work and decided to quit his SOE job in China to return with his own savings of US\$400,000.

I saw the trend of SOE privatization in China, and I saw that this country was like a blank sheet of paper. The climate was nice and mild, not like Shenyang with extreme heat and cold. Chiluba's market reform was really brutal. Like China, Zambia reformed its socialism. But unlike Chinese reform, which was gradual, here it was overnight and chaotic. There was no taxation on any foreign investment [as long as there was no profit]. Only toward the end of his second term did he impose taxes on foreign investment.

Socialism is the ultimate joke. It is a good idea to have equal distribution, but not before society is advanced enough and people are educated enough to be self-motivated and disciplined to work. Like Sweden and Norway, they have real socialism [and] welfare but people still work hard. In China, people of my generation have seen it all. Laziness is the nature of man and the planned economy makes lazy people. No motivation or aspiration. Zambia is very boring, with very few enjoyable things, and Zambians are submissive and passive, friendly, but they are also slow, unmotivated, and unresponsive to financial incentives.

He estimated that the productivity difference between Chinese and Zambian workers was a factor of ten:

Bricklayers in China can lay two thousand red bricks a day; here Zambians can do only two hundred. They have a hard time making a wall edge straight; the line is always crooked. The biggest challenge is people: Zam-

bians have no urge to improve or make money. Every time I pay them their salaries, I know one-third of the workers will not show up for work the following day. *Lao hei* ["black brothers"] have no desire for development, unlike Chinese. This is something you cannot teach. Nothing you can do about it; you just have to factor that into your construction schedule.

Our company is open every day throughout the year except May Day, Independence Day, Easter, and Christmas. White managers and owners would not skip a holiday even if the heavens collapsed. Chinese just work hard and eat bitterness because China was poor. But the white guys are good in skills and management. So if a project requires skills and technology, they will win the bid.<sup>33</sup>

Another private contractor, Liu Jing Chun, who owned Zamchin Construction, had a background similar to Li Ming's, but had very different views of Zambian workers. He had been sent to Zambia by an SOE (Jiangxi Province Number One) to build an MMD headquarters in 1990, stayed for two years, went back to China, and returned to Zambia as a business partner in 1998. He had grown his company from one qualified for only small maintenance jobs in 1998 to a grade 1 contractor in 2014, with accumulated contract revenue of US\$20 million. The construction unionist who introduced me to Mr. Liu told me that he was known locally as a very good employer. In 2010, to deal with the lack of commitment among Zambian workers, he built dorms for loyal or core workers in order to stabilize the workforce. He actually said that the rhetoric of Zambian indolence was the cultural stigma Chinese used to justify low wages and casualization. Unlike managers at state-owned companies, whom he criticized as short-sighted and too reliant on government support, private investors like himself had to put down roots in local society if they wanted to thrive in the long run. "I think it is not just or mostly about capital, but also social relations and experience. Capital may not even be the most important."<sup>34</sup>

No government support at all, a totally private initiative: We started empty-handed—my partner had \$100,000, I myself did not have any money, only skills—but we agreed that I did not take any income, and reinvested 50 percent of our profits into the company. At first, when we got a project of US\$10,000 we were very delighted. Now, we will not even consider taking this kind of small job. We have come to know the market here pretty well. First business: a small maintenance job, repairing the office and bathrooms of the government granary. Small project obtained through personal relations. There are strict requirements for bidding big projects, like years of business, skill ranks and capital, average turnover, yearly business volumes. In construction, time is of the essence. Say you can make a 20 percent profit on a one-year project. If you finish in two years, the profit rate goes down to 10 percent; in three years, you make only 5 percent. Time



efficiency is directly linked to profit. All Indian companies are wiped out now, because they say for Indians, "time is forever" [laughs]. I am not sure if this is true. The capacity to manage and plan is also important. But we Chinese, like the Jews, have a strong sense of crisis. Money brings security. And we Chinese are fed up with being poor for so long. We are particularly motivated to make money and be efficient. South Africans have good management skills and time sensitivity, but they do not have the consciousness to save and cut costs.<sup>35</sup>

### Adaptation and Change

The Chinese managerial ethos of collective asceticism was as pervasive among Chinese expatriates as it was a subject of cultural contestation, evident in the circulation of the convict labor rumor. Even though many Chinese expatriates interpreted this moral criticism as another instance of foreign victimization of China and Chinese people, their experience in Zambia and their exposure to other ways of life did sow the seeds of change on the margins.

For instance, knowing how other expatriates lived in Zambia produced a sense of relative deprivation among Chinese mining managers at NFCA. An anecdote that several managers related to me independently suggested how change happened. The story was that when they first moved to the China House in Kitwe, they saw a wooded lot right across the street. Several houses dotted the landscape of mostly tall old trees. One day, out of curiosity, they asked for permission from the guards of that lot to stroll inside. To their amazement, they were told that only one person lived there—the CEO of MCM. "We were shocked to the core," recalled an NFCA senior manager. "How could one person take up as much space as seventy of us in the China House?"<sup>36</sup> Over the years, while continuing to invoke the same rhetoric of eating bitterness, NFCA employees have gradually pressured the parent company to improve their living conditions. By the time I started fieldwork in 2012, senior management had just moved into a newly constructed wing of the compound where each senior manager was assigned a duplex unit. All but a few people now had a single-occupancy room to themselves, and a new policy was put in place to assign jobs to spouses who wanted to join NFCA employees.

Among the younger cohorts of Chinese managers who were more likely to be fluent in English, changing jobs and moonlighting—and even establishing one's own businesses in Zambia—were not unheard of, although by no means common or overt. The manager responsible for bringing in

investors to the Zambia–China Cooperation Zone made use of the business contacts he had accumulated in Zambia to open his consulting firm after five years. As I was about to wrap up my stint at NFCA, one of the senior managers shared with me his frustration with the current CEO and the entrenched SOE culture of nepotism and authoritarianism. I asked if he would consider moving to another mining company. He admitted that his years in Zambia had made him realize that there was an international market for his knowledge and experience in mining. He was actively thinking about making a move because he had recently been approached by an international company.

Adaptation was a two-way street. Despite the pejorative caricature of the hard-working Chinese culture as slavery and prison labor, some Zambians used this as a lens to reflect on Zambian culture. Some in the government and, ironically, the unions came to appreciate aspects of the Chinese way of life and practice in all their contradictions. The director of the National Council for Construction, having obtained a doctorate in England and toured different construction sites run by foreign investors concluded:

We have this phase, *Zambian time*: when Zambians say they start at 9 hours, it means they will start at 10; when they say they clock off at 17; they are all packed by 16:30. In England, where I studied for my doctorate, if the seminar was supposed to start at 2 p.m., it would start at 2 p.m., whether there were only two or twenty students. Here, Zambians do not respect time. The culture and the way [of life] we have come from, how you are brought up. People like us who have education outside, we learn to be punctual. Here there is no discipline. In the government sector, the office is supposed to be open at 8, but civil servants don't actually show up until 9. When the big boss says he will be in at 9:30, he won't be in actually until 11. [People don't see time as money.] One excuse you can say is that we went through a socialist period. . . . Eighty percent of the economy was in the public sector, we didn't reward effort or success, everyone got paid the same. But then China was also socialist. . . . I wish I could explain [it] to you.<sup>37</sup>

A more surprising source of soul-searching was a national union leader of NUMAW, who retired in 2012. Since 2008, I had caught up with him more than a few times to discuss the latest development in his union, his negotiations with various mines, and miners' concerns. Usually he lambasted the Chinese for extremely poor conditions of service (especially for their refusal to understand why Zambian miners needed medical coverage for six dependents, not one). Yet one time, he gave a long monologue about his newfound mission to instill a new work culture among his union members, inspired by the Chinese way of working:



There are few peoples in this world who can work like the Chinese. They start at 7h sharp until 11h30, get to lunch in 5 minutes and finish eating in 10 minutes, and from 12h to 13h50, they sleep, and start work again at 14h until 17h. In contrast, our locals will only move around slowly, it takes them 30 minutes to walk up the ladder of the shaft. Supervising them becomes a problem because they take so much time to simply move around. When the Chinese sleep, Zambians hang out, talk, and wait for the boss to wake up. When the Chinese get back to work after their nap, their minds are clear but the Zambians are already quite tired in the afternoon. . . . The Chinese have a positive attitude to work that is totally absent among the Zambians. If Zambians sneeze, they take time off to go to the clinic for medicine, running away from work. . . . It is our responsibility to impart a new work culture among our workers that work is life, work is important, you should be proud of a job well done. We should have a more positive attitude toward work. We do not have the right way of doing things, that's why we are not moving fast in economic growth. It's like this is examination time in Zambia. We are not helping our nation if we let our students cheat their way through examinations. We should make them feel proud about achieving in examinations and not just cheat. Since the first Republic, we are used to thinking that since the government is around, everything will be okay, everything is ours. We have no sense of responsibility or ownership. You see children throwing stones at school buildings, breaking windows, not seeing that those are their property.<sup>38</sup>

Chinese managers' and engineers' hands-on work style was also a subject of praise from more than a few Zambian veteran miners and engineers. They commended Chinese work culture for being more egalitarian than the Boers, the Indians, and even the Zambians. Younger workers reported learning skills from Chinese masters who always worked side by side with them on construction sites or underground. A miner who had joined the mines in 1974 remarked, "Chinese engineers come to the shop floor and participate in actual work, like they would come to repair motors regardless of their ranks. We were surprised to see the CEO join the lunch queue. The whites would just ask their secretary to get food from the canteen and eat in their own offices."<sup>39</sup> Because of the Chinese hands-on work style, some Zambian construction workers credited Chinese expatriates with teaching them skills. A mechanic working for a Chinese provincial SOE contractor admitted, "I think the Chinese are okay, the only problem is with regard to the little money they give us. It just finishes within two days after pay. I should say I don't complain about these people [who] have given me a skill [mechanics] and are paying me for that. At times, my boss would take over the work I am supposed to do and finish it in good time."<sup>40</sup> This view was echoed by another construction worker at a Chinese central SOE. Weighing the pluses and minuses of working for the

Chinese, he concluded, "Though they offer bad working conditions such as poor safety standards and poor pay, they taught me many trades. Because of the Chinese, I have enhanced my skills further in bricklaying, carpentry, and steel fixing."<sup>41</sup>

Chinese mine managers, for their part, while continuing to complain about Zambian workers' lack of creativity and initiative to think outside the box, also saw the merit of their rigid commitment to following technical rules and instructions in their daily work. The female senior engineer in the NFCA concentrator told me that Zambian workers rigidly and precisely follow the engineering instructions and would not resort to short cuts like her Chinese subordinates at home. Elsewhere, a young Chinese underground manager who was initially disappointed by the low level of productivity among his Zambian workers found ways to increase Zambian workers' efficiency underground. He instructed his shift bosses to give each PIC three lists of priorities. When list A was done, the workers had to attend to list B and then list C so that they would not waste any time idling. Apparently, that has worked and productivity has improved.

Last but not least, like coworkers in any workplace, Chinese and Zambians made genuine attempts to forge friendships. A young Chinese engineer at Sino-Metal played pickup tennis every day after work in the Chambishi tennis club in the township. A Zambian miner told me he had signed up for a two-year distance learning course to become a mine safety officer because his Chinese supervisor had counseled him to invest in his education so he could advance his career. When a Zambian employee at NFCA got married, his Chinese colleagues were all excited to attend the wedding, which turned out to be quite a culture shock—they waited for four hours before the bride and groom showed up. The next day as they went to work on the company bus, Chinese employees could not decide whether to laugh or cry about their bittersweet experience: "Zambians are tardy whatever they do, even on the most important day of their lives!" they joked.

In a nutshell, comparing the managerial ethos of Chinese state capital and global private capital in Zambia, this chapter argues that the former was characterized by collective asceticism in contrast to the latter's individual careerism. The unique Chinese discourse of eating bitterness sums up a way of life and a moral compulsion that emphasizes enduring hardship, disciplined savings, and commitment to work. I found this ethos among almost all Chinese expatriates in Zambia, but it was more institutionalized in the mines than in construction, and more in state-owned than in private firms. Relative to global private capital, Chinese state capital therefore had at its disposal an arguably more controlled, disciplined, and frugal managerial workforce. Yet,

this ethos also invited disproportionate moral criticism, in the form of the widespread rumor that these Chinese personnel were convict labor sent by the Chinese state. Reinforced by the state discourse of China's victimization by the West, Chinese managers drew moral and nationalistic boundaries with the eating bitterness rhetoric and glossed over the class exploitation inflicted on them by state capital.

## Contesting Capital: Aspiration and Capacity from Below

One of the enduring insights of Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* is that the spread of the market, and the ravages and dislocations it creates, will generate society's countermovements, or attempts to subordinate market imperatives to collective decision making. Thanks to revived popularity of his work in recent decades, reflecting the challenges globalizing capital has posed, there is now a sizable literature on transnational movements against multinationals' violation of labor and land rights and the harm they do to the environment and indigenous livelihood. If "where capital goes conflict goes," as Beverly Silver's historical survey of labor unrest has convincingly shown, how effective are these struggles? What kinds of countermovement will bring tangible changes to workers, their communities, and their country? In the previous chapters, I have argued that pressures brought to bear on foreign capital by the government, itself under pressure from the electorate, the unions, and rank-and-file workers have compelled Chinese state capital—more than global private capital—to accommodate to Zambian interests and needs. In moments of economic crisis and strikes, the Chinese state mining company made more concessions than the other two foreign mining companies. In construction, however, without similar state and popular pressure, Chinese state capital was as exploitative and predatory as global private companies. This chapter takes a closer look at the aspiration, capacity, and the impact of countermovements from below, and assesses their sustainability and effectiveness. It asks: What do people want from capital? What is the basis of solidarity or fragmentation within protests and strikes? What impacts do different modes of countermovement have on the ground?

I begin by articulating the collective aspiration of mine workers whose lived experiences with different varieties of capital over the decades have in-