Chinese Studies at Stellenbosch University.

"In countries with weak governance, weak enforcement of rules and high levels of corruption, Chinese investments — as is the case with other international investments — can be jeopardised," says Anthony.

"Governments also need to be fiscally prudent, making sure they can afford to pay back projects; and they need to secure infrastructure which is a priority, as opposed to vanity projects."

Anthony maintains that in terms of infrastructure and industrialisation — two elements which are vital for long-term African economic growth — China is an important partner and should be seriously engaged with.

"Some countries, such as Mugabe’s Zimbabwe, chose to look almost exclusively to China, while snubbing the West. Other, more pragmatic countries such as Rwanda draw on Euro-American support as much as they do China, hence diversifying relations with foreign markets and donors," he says.

Overall, says Anthony, China’s presence in Africa should be seen as an opportunity, to be balanced with other international opportunities, and engaged with in line with national development policies.

**China’s relationship with SA**

Former president Nelson Mandela played a key role in ensuring closer economic and diplomatic ties with China from 2007. The relationship was further strengthened by SA’s support of the “One China” policy. China and SA are both member states of Focac, a platform that was created in 2000 to advance diplomatic relations between China and Africa.

China was instrumental in ensuring that SA joined Brics and in 2010 the government of China upgraded SA to the status of strategic comprehensive partner. Since then the two countries have signed a number of bilateral economic agreements.

Further evidence of their ever-closer ties was the fact that in 2017 China upgraded SA to PPEM (People-to-People Exchange Mechanism) status joining others with whom it has similar status including the US, the UK, the European Union, France, Russia and Indonesia.

SA is the only African state with PPEM status, reflecting perhaps the value the country has for China as its gateway into Africa. The two countries also cooperate globally on shared multilateral platforms including the UN, G20 and Brics.

SA has benefited from the pace at which the Chinese economy has expanded over the past two decades and the country’s strong demand for minerals which offer, says Viljoen, some protection against more volatile growth rates in some of the world’s other major economies. From an import perspective, SA consumers benefit from affordable manufactured goods sourced from China. "Admittedly," says Viljoen, "this has placed pressure on the local factory sector."

According to Anthony, China’s relationship with SA is somewhat different to its relations with other African countries, particularly as Chinese entities are more heavily involved in finance with regards to SA compared with other African states. Furthermore, China is not as involved in the local infrastructure sector compared with other African states. But perhaps even more noteworthy, says Anthony, is the fact that SA is the only country to have significant investments in China, such as Naspers and SAB.

"As evidenced by SA’s Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with China, SA’s Brics membership and the US$6bn earmarked for SA in the 2015 Focac meeting, China considers SA a key international partner," says Anthony.

"In terms of African engagement, SA is used as a base for its African headquarters for a number of Chinese firms and boasts one of the oldest and largest Chinese populations in Africa. Combined, these factors ensure SA’s relationship with China is unique on the continent."

This relationship is characterised by both collaboration and competition: SA competes with Chinese companies in some sectors including infrastructure delivery, construction and textiles in both SA and in the region.

**Relationship drivers**

During the years of former president Jacob Zuma’s presidency SA took a step back from the Mandela-era foreign policy which had an explicit promotion of democracy and human rights, says Anthony.

There are elements within the ANC, he adds, which view the likes of China and Russia as elements of a new global order that will challenge Western hegemony.

"SA’s voting record in the UN in recent years has tended to increasingly align with China’s position."

These kinds of moves, says Anthony, signal more a form of economic pragmatism than they do any explicit re-orientation in foreign policy.

**Trade imbalance**

China primarily imports minerals and agricultural products from SA, minimal value-added products with no beneficiation having occurred locally.

SA, on the other hand, imports primarily value-added manufactured products such as machinery, motor vehicles, appliances, textiles, leather products and electronic equipment. Imports of these value-added products has resulted in a large trade deficit with China.