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Absolved by the Telos of History: A Hermeneutic Approach to China's Revolutionary (Non-)Interventionism

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Abstract

This article confronts a puzzle regarding the People's Republic of China's foreign policy: during the Mao era, China adamantly upheld the principle of non-intervention/non-interference (*buganshe*), while at the same time actively engaged in national liberation movements in the Third World. Rather than treating it as a case of political hypocrisy, this article shows that the apparent inconsistency between China's rhetoric and behaviour can be resolved with a post-structuralist perspective. Its analysis of Chinese official, dominant discourses reveals that a moral-historical teleology is at play within the texts, which absolves China of moral responsibilities and presents its worldwide involvement as a legitimate exception. Furthermore, by presenting Chinese discourses on (non-)intervention as a potent instrument of resistance, this article seeks to decentre and remedy the Eurocentrism in the International Relations scholarship.

Keywords: *China, (non-)intervention, discourse*

1. Introduction

Paradox is a recurrent theme of the social and political life in the People's Republic of China (PRC). On the one hand, China claims to abide by the foreign policy principle of non-interference in its conduct of foreign relations; on the other hand, it does not shy away from interfering with the internal affairs of other countries, which ranged from aiding revolutionary elements in the Third World in the Mao Zedong era, to engaging in "united front work" worldwide in the Xi Jinping era (Yu, 1977; Lovell, 2018; Hamilton and Ohlberg, 2020). This article considers the root of this puzzle, which may allow us to contextualize China's active engagement in the internal affairs of other countries despite its stated principle of non-interference.

Unfortunately, existing relevant literature primarily adopts a more rationalist/positivist ontology,[1] rather than problematizing state identity and foreign policy; it also pays more attention to the post-reform era (Carlson, 2006; Qiao, 2011; Fung, 2016; Lovell, 2019; Ren, 2021). By adopting a post-structuralist approach to Chinese foreign relations, this article intends to fill a lacuna in the extant literature on China's intervention, and to add to the scholarly trove on the power of discourse in Chinese foreign policy/International Relations (IR) studies (see Noesselt, 2012; Hwang, 2021). Additionally, this article also helps expand the purview of post-positivist literature interrogating foreign intervention beyond its current focus on those led by the US and Europe (Doty, 1993, 1996; Weber, 1995a, 1995b).

To take the first step towards reconciling China's nominal commitment to non-intervention and continual practice of intervention through a post-structuralist lens, this article focuses on China's relationship with the Third World during the Mao era (1949-76), which saw China intervene in the Third World in various ways – militarily, economically, politically and culturally, including concrete support for insurgency in Third World countries (Cohen, 1973; Lovell, 2018). It is precisely because such practice was not only pursued so adamantly, but also in apparent contradiction with China's stated policies, that there exists an enormous amount of archival evidence recording the official discourses on this matter that lend itself to critical discourse analysis, a post-structuralist method spearheaded by Doty (1993, 1996). By focusing on the Mao era, which allows for leveraging of the abundance of textual data, this article hopes to shed light on how intervention was understood, condoned and normalized in the Mao era, as well as its implications for the current Xi administration.

Before any discussion of the aforementioned topic, definitions of certain important terms are in order. Although the term 'Third World' by no means implies a homogenous entity, it captures the idea that developing countries with disparate economic and political systems in Asia, Africa and Latin America are drawn together by their shared colonial memories and 'experiences of a power disparity with the global elite' (Fung, 2016: 35). Furthermore, this article adopts a working definition of intervention that entails the attempt to affect the 'internal structure and external behaviour' of another country via 'various degrees of coercion', including the use of force (Thomas and Thomas, 1956: 20; Beloff, 1968: 198). In establishing these definitions, this article wishes to clarify its assumptions, which not only allows us to project our understanding of the past policies and rhetoric of China to the current political landscape, but also helps subject the article itself to critical scrutiny of IR scholars at large.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. It first presents a historical overview of China's (non-)intervention with a focus on China's

adoption of the principle of non-interference and its assistance of revolutionary elements in the Third World. This article then introduces the post-structuralist approach, which poses 'how-possible' questions instead of 'why' questions regarding China's practices and discourses in the realm of foreign policy. Then, a detailed rationale for adopting this approach is articulated, as well as this article's methodology, which includes discourse analytical methods and the data collection process. This article then proceeds to analyze selected official Chinese discourses. This article finds that China's interventionist activities were rendered thinkable and acceptable by the naturalistic imperatives of a historical teleology, which was further substantiated and legitimized by the moral binaries associated with China, the Third World, and the First World. In fact, China was in a sense 'absolved' by the moral-historical teleology, which diminished the agency and culpability of China by framing China's intervention as just, righteous and necessary. After the discourse analysis, this article re-examines the advantages of post-structuralism over rationalist IR approaches, and proposes new avenues through which a post-structuralist approach could serve as resistance against Eurocentric, hegemonic discourses on intervention that dismiss and dehumanize the non-Western. Finally, this article discusses the implications of its finding on our understanding of Xi Jinping's foreign policy, and then summarizes the finding in the conclusion.

2. China and (Non-)Intervention: A Historical Overview

Shortly after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Mao proclaimed that China must 'lean to one side': the side of the Communist Bloc (Chen, 2001: 50). The perennial fear of *neiluan waihuan* (external chaos and internal instabilities) recurrent in Chinese dynastic history, coupled with the exigency of preserving the revolutionary momentum and resisting imperialist forces, haunted the Chinese leadership as they strove to transform the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from a revolutionary movement to a ruling party (Brown, 2018; Khan, 2018; French, 2017). History, for the CCP leadership, was more of an unwieldy burden than a glorious past (Jenner, 1992). The intervening years between the Opium War and the proclamation of the People's Republic witnessed the foreign powers' impositions of unequal treaties, reparation demands and colonial dismemberment on China (Brown, 2018). This period eventually came to be referred to as the 'Century of Humiliation' by the CCP, which attests to the significance of China's past to the party leadership. The spectre of past chaos implanted a sense of wariness in Mao and his comrades that was primarily manifested in their aversion towards foreign interference (Khan, 2018). For the party leaders, foreign domination was not 'history' as such, but the ever-present reality with which they had to struggle continuously (Cohen, 1973: 477).

In this backdrop, China adopted the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' (hereinafter referred to as the 'Five Principles') in 1954 as the cornerstone of its foreign policies. The 'Five Principles', which were later included in the Chinese Constitution, comprise of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equal and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence (Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MFA], 2014). These principles, declared at the Bandung Conference in 1955, signalled China's commitment to the principle of non-interference in its dealing with other countries, and its expectation that other countries reciprocate (Alden and Alves, 2008). Since then, bilateral treaties have also been signed on the basis of the 'Five Principles' (Cohen, 1973). In so doing, China wished to align itself with Third World countries by assuring them that despite its relative size and power, China would never violate their sovereignty. To illustrate the 'Five Principles' at Bandung, Premier Zhou Enlai invoked a Chinese adage '*jisuobuyu, wushiyuren*' (do not impose on others what one does not want imposed on oneself), meaning that China would never intervene in the internal affairs of other states, as it did not want others to meddle with its own affairs (Zhao, 1998: 49). Unlike the hegemonic US and its allies, China's shared colonial history with other Third World states made its commitment to non-interference more credible (Zhao, 1998). In the Communiqué issued by China and twenty-eight other states at Bandung, the participants called for 'abstention from intervention or interference in the internal affairs of another country', and urged 'abstention by any country from acts or threats of aggression or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any country' (Cohen, 1973: 478). However, its concurrent global promotion of Maoism seemed to contradict China's alleged adherence to the principle of non-interference. Under the banner of revolutionary camaraderie, China was actively involved in national liberation movements in Third World states, aiding revolutionary factions in these countries in their efforts to topple the existing regimes (Cohen, 1973; Kang, 2015; Lovell, 2019; Robinson, 1969). These involvements follow from China's view that world revolutions are simply its domestic revolution writ large (Kang, 2015; Lovell, 2019).

Tempting as it may be to write off those interventions as rare and limited, historical records show that China's involvement in the Third World countries' internal affairs have entailed long-term efforts that ran the gamut from issuing militant propaganda advocating for revolution against oppression, to providing military supplies and training to prospective revolutionaries in the Third World. Among China's most important involvement in the Third World was its exportation of the strategy of waging revolutionary warfare which was developed during the Chinese Civil Wars by Mao, who dubbed it the 'people's war' (Cohen, 1973: 492). China also provided sanctuary to foreign guerrilla

groups, permitted insurgent organizations in neighbouring Southeast Asian countries to operate radio stations from Chinese soil, and engaged in political assassination and bribery overseas (Yu, 1977; Cohen, 1973; Snow, 1994; Alden and Alves, 2008). In one instance, Chinese Communist instructors even participated in the guerrilla warfare launched against Uganda from Tanzania (Cohen, 1973). Granted that China had spread its already limited resources rather thin that the absolute level of its involvement worldwide remained low, its help was enough to initiate and/or sustain revolutionary movements in most cases (Cohen, 1973). In fact, from 1965 to 1967, four African states severed diplomatic ties with China on grounds of interference in their domestic affairs; by 1966, Chinese diplomats had been expelled from a number of African countries for the same reason (Robinson, 1969; Alden and Alves, 2008). It needs to be noted that China's involvement in the Third World under Mao was by no means uniform, unitary, or static. China's most active phase of 'exporting revolution' lasted from the 1960s to the mid-1970s (Heaton, 1982; Ren, 2016). China's active support of the Burmese Communist Party, for example, only took place between the late 1960s and the early 1970s (Heaton, 1982; Than, 2003). In addition, the extent to which China's support for overseas revolutionary movements in Third World countries varied widely and could drop significantly if the countries' rulers were friendly to China (Cohen, 1973; O'Leary, 1980).

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Asserting Post-Structuralism as Method

Rationalist theories usually dismiss the importance of rhetoric and focus on the behaviour of agents, often looking to the three levels of analysis – structural, domestic and individual – to explain the paradox posed by China's involvement in the Third World.[2] Simply examining the materiality of international and domestic politics, however, only reveals *why* China embarked on intervention but sheds no light on exactly *how* intervention – situated within the discursive context of the principle of non-intervention – was made *possible and thinkable* for the Chinese leadership. Indeed, China's principle of non-intervention should have made its intervention impossible and unfathomable; therefore, other discursive constructions must have been at work to make China's actions fathomable, justifiable, and even 'natural'. In their failure to take seriously how the principle of non-interference would have precluded intervention, rationalist approaches neglect to explain how or why interventionist practices materialized at all, as the possibility of practices presupposes the ability of agents to imagine certain actions (Doty, 1993).

To explore how agents were able to imagine and embark on intervention, we must turn to the discursive and examine how foreign policy and realities

as such were constructed and made real through discourse (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) – for instance, how was worldwide engagement justified for a 'revolutionary state' resisting 'imperialist powers'? By delving into 'how-possible' questions, this article interrogates how meanings are produced and attached to social subjects and objects, and the ways in which certain possibilities are produced and others excluded (Doty, 1993) with a post-structuralist lens, which supplements rather than supplants the mainstream, rationalist IR approaches. This perspective also proves to be indispensable when it comes to probing into the conditions of possibility for China's intervention, i.e., how the discrepancy between China's stated principle of non-intervention and its acts of intervention was reconciled, and what regimes of power, truth and normality were at play in rendering China's active engagement worldwide intelligible and legitimate. In anticipation of the charge that the application of post-structuralism, a 'Western' theoretical edifice, to a 'non-Western' case study constitutes an instance of ontological and epistemological violence, this article argues that this application exemplifies a post-colonial approach and is evocative of Homi Bhabha's notion of 'hybridity' – that is, an 'in-between' space, a process of constant negotiation that collapses the simple binary between the colonizer and the colonized (Bhabha, 2004: 2). Indeed, as a post-colonial society, Mao's China bore many similarities with the neoliberal European societies under the scrutiny of post-structuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault, blurring the tradition-modernity binary (Scalapino, 1999; see Foucault, 1997b). Mao's China was a bureaucratic society that saw numerous biopolitical measures for population control (Nakajima, 2015); the advent of modernity, globalization and transnational movement further connected China to the international community, rendering any claims of the uniqueness of China's approach to foreign policy vulnerable to cultural essentialism and Orientalism (cf. Keightley, 1990).

Another motivation for applying post-structuralism to Mao's China pertains to the perils of reification in China studies and area studies in general (Chow, 1998). Chinese foreign policy should only be studied, some argue, using either 'Chinese' theories or universal, trans-historical ones such as realism (see Zhao, 2005; Qin, 2006; Yan, 2013). The illusory, Eurocentric nature of realism's pretension to universality and trans-historicity aside (Foulon and Meibauer, 2020), the very gesture of avoiding 'Western' theories in China studies only reproduces the hierarchy between the 'West' and the 'rest'. The paranoia in guarding against the ideological legacies of Western imperialism implicitly acknowledges and condones the dominance of the West; to truly 'provincialize' the Western (Chakrabarty, 2000), we need to jettison our paranoia and select theoretical framework on the basis of suitability rather than genesis. In provincializing the Western, this article also

takes a small step at overcoming the perceived provinciality and particularity of non-Western case studies – that the non-Western can allegedly only reveal what is particular to a given culture rather than what is shared among cultures (Davies, 1992). In asserting post-structuralism as method, this article also asserts non-Western case studies as method.

A brief presentation of the basic premises of post-structuralist IR is in order. Refusing to take subjects, objects, and the meanings attached to subjects and objects as given, a post-structuralist approach is more critical than rationalist IR approaches (Doty, 1993). In post-structuralism, individual subjects are not the sovereign knowers in the Western tradition who are pregiven and autonomous (see, for example, Descartes, 2017), but are instead produced by power relations. Power is always relational; it operates to constitute the subject and permeates interpersonal interactions and social relations (Foucault, 1990). Just as there is no pre-existing subject prior to the dynamics of power relations, there is no social relation external to power relations. Indeed, power is productive of 'meanings, subject identities, their interrelationships, and a range of imaginable conduct' (Doty, 1993: 299).

Inextricably connected with the notion of power is the notion of discourse, as discourses are always embedded in power relations (Foucault, 1984; Fairclough, 1992, 2001). A discourse is a 'system of statements in which each individual statement makes sense', producing interpretative possibilities by making it almost impossible to think outside of the discourse (Doty, 1993: 302). The system of statements is produced in an 'ongoing discursive stream', whereby each statement builds on preceding statements to construct interpretative possibilities (Diaz-Bone et al., 2008: 11). Discourses create subjects and position them vis-à-vis one another; subjects are intelligible only within the confines of specific discourses which give rise to knowledge, meanings and practices (Doty, 1993; Weedon, 1997). The subjectivity of the self is thus relational, defined against the backdrop of the Other(s) (Campbell, 1998). As meanings and representations of subjectivity are produced via discourses, subject positions only exist insofar as they are ascribed meanings by discourses (Shapiro, 1988). Discourses therefore produce a 'perception and representation' of social reality (Diaz-Bone et al., 2008: 12; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1987). The subject positions that an entity takes on must be constantly reproduced, as the discourses that produce such representations are never complete and always vulnerable to deconstruction (Campbell, 1998; Derrida, 2016).

3.2. Literature Review: Post-Structuralist Approaches to Intervention

Existing post-structuralist literature on intervention is Eurocentric in orientation, focusing primarily on the US and Western Europe (Doty, 1993, 1996; Weber, 1995a, 1995b). Doty (1993, 1996) adopts the method of critical

discourse analysis to probe into the US intervention and counterinsurgency operations in the Philippines after the latter gained independence. Employing the analytic categories of presuppositions (background knowledge taken to be true), predicates (the attributes attached to subjects and objects), and subject positioning (the relationship subjects/objects are positions relative to others), Doty (1993) argues that the US/Western discourses on the Philippines and the Filipinos constructed self-Other relations in a way that rendered intervention imaginable and even 'natural'. The Europeans and Americans were constructed as subjects who could 'know' the Filipinos; their superiority was taken for granted, and was 'a "fact" not open to question' (Doty, 1993: 307). The Europeans and Americans were imbued with agency, whereas the Filipinos were positioned in a relation of similarity with dogs and children, those that required the supervision and tutelage of others (Doty, 1993: 308-10). Binaries such as reason/passion and good/evil were also at play in the construction of realities where the intervention into another sovereign state was rendered possible (Doty, 1993).

In similar veins, Weber (1995a, 1995b) adopts Baudrillard's notions of simulation (the proliferation of the true) and dissimulation (the proliferation of the fake) to examine the US interventions into Grenada, Panama and Haiti. Weber (1995b) contends that dissimulation is woven through the discourses of intervention, as discourses of intervention are all about false claims – denying that an intervention took place. This case is usually made by arguing that an intervention is in fact not an intervention, either because it represented the sovereign people in the target state, or because it does not fit the category of what a 'real intervention' is (Weber, 1995b). The proliferation of false claims would make it difficult to distinguish between a 'real' intervention and a 'fake' intervention. Indeed, the US-led intervention into Haiti was justified in terms of Haitian human rights abuses; this justification was able to hide the interests of the intervener 'behind a false appearance' (Weber, 1995b: 272). Proliferating the fake – false justifications and false identities – enabled the Clinton administration to deny invading Haiti (Weber, 1995b).

As Callahan (2020) observes, the purview of IR scholarship is limited to studying the West using critical approaches, or studying the non-West using conventional, mainstream approaches. Engaging the non-West using critical approaches remains a lacuna. As such, this article intends to follow the trailblazing scholarship in engaging critical IR with the non-West (see, for example, Callahan, 2020). Adopting a post-structuralist framework to discuss contemporary China also performatively decentres and remedies the absence of non-Western agency in both positivist and post-positivist ontologies. Primarily drawing their theorizations from Euro-American examples, mainstream and critical IR alike either patently or latently dismisses non-Western cases as peripheral, dispensable and unworthy of scrutiny (Callahan,

2020; cf. Mearsheimer, 2014). The imbalance in material power between the West and the non-West is then reflected in the disequilibrium in representation. Therefore, delving into Chinese discourses, worldviews and regimes of truth serves as resistance against (primarily Western) representations and theorizations – or the lack thereof – of the non-West in the discipline of IR.

4. Methodology

Discourse analysis studies discourses archaeologically and genealogically – by identifying different elements comprising the discourses and how these elements cohere, as well as by interrogating the historic formation of these discourses (Escobar, 1984). To analyze discourses is therefore to identify and analyze the imminent logic that renders the web of statements possible and intelligible. As discourses are self-contained, the intentions of individual agents are inaccessible with regard to discourse (Diaz-Bone et al., 2008); discourse is thus independent of and prior to any claim of intentionality or sovereign subjecthood (Doty, 1997). As such, when conducting discourse analysis in the subsequent sections, this article brackets the intentions of actors involved in the discourses under scrutiny. Furthermore, discourses are not analyzed using *a priori* logic, but rather in a historicized and contextualized fashion (Haraway, 1991). Following Doty (1993), this article employs the analytic categories of presuppositions, predicates and subject positioning as heuristics in approaching the discourses. With regard to the discourses on intervention, this article pays special heed to the discursive construction of China, Third World countries, the two superpowers, and the First World (the 'imperialist powers') in general.

The data examined are qualitative. This article limits the scope of the text under consideration to that produced in the Mao era (1949-1976). The texts gathered include relevant Chinese texts pertaining to China's involvement in national liberation movements in the Third Word, which come from official statements and media to explore the (re-)circulation of dominant discourses and out of sensitivity to intertextuality[3] (Kristeva, 1980). The texts include statements by CCP leaders and foreign ministers, the CCP mouthpieces *People's Daily* and Xinhua News, magazines such as *China Pictorial* and *China Reconstructs*, as well as writings by Chinese intellectuals. This article undertakes word searches of key terms in databases (such as *People's Daily* and cnki.net) and within texts to identify relevant texts, selecting the most representative cases among the texts to instantiate the analysis below. The key terms include '(non-)intervention', 'the Third World', 'the First World', 'imperialists/imperialism', 'superpowers', 'US', and 'USSR'. This author includes her own English translations where the texts originally appeared in Chinese, supplementing with transliterations where appropriate.

5. Analysis

5.1. Complicating Conventional Wisdom

The conventional wisdom on China's intervention emphasizes the socialist/capitalist categorization. It is, according to China, functionally and conceptually impossible for socialist states such as China to engage in intervention. Chen Yi, a Chinese Communist military commander who served as the Foreign Minister of China from 1958-72, asserted that a socialist country would not 'engage in subversive activities, … try to impose its will on other countries, … [or] use economic aid to disguise intervention' (Cohen, 1973: 487). Therefore, intervention could only be embarked on by capitalist and developed states, whereas socialist states were the ones that defended the oppressed peoples by supporting national liberation struggles (Ren, 2021). Indeed, a quick keyword search on the Chinese academic search engine, cnki.net, shows that the term '*ganshe*' (intervention/interference) is without exception associated with the US and other 'imperialist' countries. There is thus a demarcation along ideological lines; socialist states such as China could not and would not engage in intervention (although intervention is still possible for the socialist-imperialist USSR). The apparent discrepancy between China's support of national liberation movements worldwide and its principle of non-interference could then be resolved.

In the sections below, this article aims to complicate this somewhat arbitrary categorization of interventionist activities. Indeed, a closer examination of the ways in which China's involvement in national liberation movements was portrayed in official Chinese discourses reveals that there was a more general, overarching textual mechanism at play that subsumed the aforementioned logic. As this article shows below, there was a moral-historical teleology at work in the framing of China's involvement, a teleology that left little room for the agency of Third World states, including China. The teleology underlying the construction of China's intervention thus enriches the conventional wisdom that the discrepancy at issue is resolved by China's framing that only intervention by imperialist, First World countries counts as intervention *as such*.

5.2. The Primacy of Historical Telos

Before delving into the historical teleology inherent in China's discursive construction of its support of national liberation movements, this article first presents Marx's theorization of historical progress, which will shed light on the CCP's conception of historical teleology that is a key component of the Party's Marxist-Leninist ideology (Brown, 2018). Indeed, Marxism provides a 'perceptual prism' through which CCP leaders view the world

(Levine, 1994: 30). In Marx's theorization, the history of all societies is defined by class struggles, which in the capitalist-industrial modern society take the shape of animosity between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (Marx, 1978). The transformation of human society is determined by the 'modes of production and exchange', as society evolves to the point where it can no longer sustain the expansion of markets and the growth of demand (Marx, 1978: 474). The bourgeoning production and demand, which enabled capitalism to replace feudalism, is, according to Marx, about to bring forth the demise of capitalism, since overproduction would give rise to commercial crises and endanger capitalism. Therefore, Marx predicts that the time is ripe for the proletariat to revolt against the bourgeoisie, as the fall of the latter is inevitable (Marx, 1978). Historical progress is thus teleological, as the evolving relations of production inherent in each historical stage serve as the driving force of human society; history is constantly moving towards a given direction, and humans are mere vehicles for the unfolding of history (Cohen, 1986).

Convinced of the existence of objective laws and historical inevitability, the CCP takes on the mission of discovering objective laws and following these laws in foreign policy (Wang, 1994). The CCP's conception of history is ineluctably Marxian (Alden and Alves, 2008): recovering from China's semi-colonial experience, the Chinese people have finally 'stood up' under the CCP's guidance. History is moving in a positive direction, as evidenced in the ending line of the Chinese anthem – 'Onward! Onward! On, onward!' (*qianjin qianjin qianjinjin*). In this narrative, the Chinese people successfully shattered colonial chains and attained national liberation, and are on the path to national rejuvenation. As their vanguard, the CCP will continue to ensure that justice be delivered to the Chinese people, and that the capitalists, imperialists and colonialists who victimized China in the past be defeated (Brown, 2018). Indeed, echoing Marx's prediction that the proletariat would eventually triumph over the bourgeoisie, the CCP's narrative similarly propounds that the victory of socialism would precipitate the downfall of capitalism, colonialism and imperialism. With the aid from their socialist brethren, colonized countries around the world would ultimately liberate themselves from the claws of capitalistic, imperialistic colonizers. Such view of the 'inevitable historical trend' could be readily found in a CCP's mouthpiece which triumphantly declares that:

> Under the auspices of the Bandung spirit, the struggles for national liberation of the Afro-Asian peoples have coalesced into an irresistible flood. The ferocious momentum of this flood has begun to cause the imperialist colonial regime to decay. Loyal to the Bandung principles, the Chinese people are always empathetic and supportive towards the revolutionary struggle of the Afro-Asian peoples (*People's Daily*, 1960a).

The flood analogy adds a naturalistic valence to national liberation struggles given that the 'ferocious momentum' of the flood is not something artificial or contingent, but natural and necessary. The impending collapse of the imperialist, colonial regime would therefore not be induced by any particular agent, but by natural phenomena. By supporting the struggle of the colonized peoples, China was merely conforming to the momentum of the 'irresistible flood' of history. It may even be the case that China's support of revolutionary struggles was not voluntaristic or agential *per se*, but instead necessarily prompted by the 'irresistible flood', which expresses the view that:

> Corrupt and reactionary forces always wish to resist the progress of history, albeit often in vain. Post-war liberation movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America are akin to a mighty torrent, shattering and destructing the imperialistic colonial system (*People's Daily*, 1973).

The 'corrupt and reactionary forces' cannot defy the momentum of the 'mighty torrent', as 'whoever wishes to resist and reverse the [irresistible historical trend] is doomed to tragic failure' (*People's Daily*, 1955). Indeed, the endeavours of the reactionary forces, including the capitalist-imperialist countries led by the US and later the socialist-imperialist USSR, were often characterized by a well-known line in a Chinese poem '*wukenaihe hualuoqu*' (flowers fall off, do what one may) (*People's Daily*, 1974d). Thus, the conspiracies of imperialist countries were futile and self-defeating: 'for every place the US invades, the US puts one more layer of noose on its neck' (*People's Daily*, 1965). The imperialists' invasion and interference in the Third World was compared to 'moths flying towards the fire', and the 'fire will only burn brighter', which further emphasized the futility of the imperialists' reaction against the historical telos (Pa, 1966: 35). This sense of fatalism and imageries of decay or death are juxtaposed with imageries of life that characterize the Third World revolutionary forces, which are a lively 'new-born force', akin to 'trees in springtime' and burning 'forest fires' (*People's Daily*, 1965, 1973). The flourishing of the Third World and the defeat of the imperialists were thus the 'rules of historical development, unaffected by human will' (*People's Daily*, 1973). The triumph of national liberation struggles was in a sense prescribed by the laws of nature, as reflected in the prevailing trend of international life – 'east wind over west wind' (*People's Daily*, 1959). Indeed, evocative of Marxian insights, 'the decaying social regime is doomed to be overturned by new and progressive ones' (*People's Daily*, 1960b).

Within these discursive contexts, it becomes obvious that if the rise of the Third World and the victory of national liberation struggles are necessary and preordained by laws of nature, in a sense there was no alternative for China other than supporting its socialist comrades; acting otherwise would be

a waste of effort and a recipe for failure. China therefore acted with bounded agency; it was constrained by the laws of history.[4] One that has limited agency cannot be held accountable for her actions; hence, China should not be held responsible for its activities, in a similar way as how one should not be held responsible for being subject to the law of gravity (van Inwagen, 1983). Further, the activities of China never appeared in isolation and were always in conjunction with those of other Third World countries: 'China and the Third World peoples together engage in common struggles against imperialism, colonialism and hegemonism' (*People's Daily*, 1973). The discursive framing that China always acts in concert with other Third World states further diminishes its initiative – it never incites the Communist elements in the Third World states to revolt, but only offers 'support and sympathy' (*People's Daily*, 1958a, 1961, 1964).

At the same time, the diminished agency or responsibility of China did not hinder the accentuation of its leadership position among Third World countries. China did not initiate revolutions, but led by way of example (Levine, 1994; Snow, 1994). Indeed, China's domestic revolutionary campaigns were to serve as 'role models' for oppressed peoples around the world, who 'in the Chinese people see their tomorrow' (Lovell, 2019: 134). The Chinese people were therefore the 'tomorrow' of other oppressed peoples, and were the exemplars the latter aspired to – Mao's statement of support alone could serve as the 'strongest support' for the oppressed people of the world (*People's Daily*, 1964). China's revolutionary experience could also 'be studied as a reference' by and 'serve as a glorious banner' for other Third World states (Soong, 1966: 4; Wilson Centre, 1960; *People's Daily*, 1958b). This sense of historical stagism is also present in discourses on internationalist responsibilities: Zhou Enlai asserted that 'we who have first won have an obligation of aiding newly emerging countries' (Wilson Centre, 1964); this claim implies a temporal sequence in which China takes the lead. In these discourses, notions such as 'obligation' and 'duty' imply necessity, and are reminiscent of Kantian (Kant, 2012) categorical imperatives; being obliged means that China could barely have chosen to act otherwise. The notion of obligation therefore echoes the imagery of the 'flood' or 'torrent', highlighting the imperatives of the historical teleology.

Furthermore, what is also implied in the historical stagism is the notion of sameness. According to the laws of evolution, Third World states would eventually become like China. Indeed, Mao averred to a guerrilla leader from Southern Rhodesia that China and Africa were 'one and the same' (Snow, 1994: 285). Intervention, on the other hand, entails alterity and the intrusion of otherness; China's involvement in the Third World therefore by definition could not fall under this category. The sense of legitimacy inherent to the notion of sameness was echoed by the consent of China's beneficiaries

(Wilson Centre, 1964; *People's Daily*, 1959): as China's aid was requested by Third World countries, this element of consent made intervention 'entirely just'; the requests also coincided with the 'genuine desires of the people' (Cohen, 1973: 482, 483).

5.3. Sinicizing Teleology and the Politics of Binaries

In addition to the amoral Marxist-Leninist historicism, there is in actuality a moral valence to the historical teleology underpinning China's discourses on intervention, and is undergirded by various binaries. Albeit a hallmark of Western logocentrism, binaries have been prevalent in Chinese official discourses (Qiaoan, 2019). Within each binary (such as 'presence/absence') there is a relation of hierarchy, as the first term ('presence') is always seen as primary and superior to the second term ('absence'). The meaning of the first term is in fact derived from and dependent on the second term, as it is the very exclusion of the second term that confers meaning to the first term (Edkins, 2007).

In China's official discourses on intervention, several prominent binaries were at work: justice/injustice, good/evil, peace-lovers/warmongers, majority/minority, reason/passion, civilization/barbarism, and candour/deception. The first terms always characterized China and its Third World comrades, while the second terms were associated with imperialist, First World countries and especially the two superpowers. These binaries together constructed powerful self/Other relations. As the subjectivity of the self is defined against the backdrop of the exogenous Other(s) (Campbell, 1998), depictions of the evil, unjust, barbaric, irrational, isolated and deceptive imperialist enemies were necessary for showcasing the virtue, justice, civilization, rationality, popularity and candour of the Chinese self. China's activities then become righteous reactions to the aggression of nefarious Others.

In contradistinction from the Marxist-Leninist origin of the historical teleology, most of the binaries underpinning or embellishing the teleology owe their genesis to China's historical and cultural experience, although it is impossible to completely demarcate between the 'Chinese' and the 'non-Chinese'. Such social and cultural systems produce discourses through which agents first make sense of the world and act in it, and which inevitably influence the construction of particular realities through the (re-)circulation of discourses (Latham, 2007; Qiaoan, 2019). These binaries bolstered the legitimacy of the aforementioned historical teleology, embedded in the teleology a system of morality, and sinicized a perhaps esoteric textual structure. Although the binaries are by no means uniquely Chinese (cf. Doty, 1993, 1996), their resonance with Chinese history, culture and tradition makes them especially palatable to the Chinese people (Qiaoan, 2019).

The 'irresistible flood' became a symbol of righteousness; the Third World countries acting alongside the flood were the administrators of justice, whereas the imperialists resisting the flood were the condemned convicts. This moral teleology also echoed the CCP's narrative of national history, which is rife with 'notions of salvation, the delivery of justice, and the idea of a righteous ending' (Brown, 2018: 26). This moral valence added emotional appeal to China's discourses, lending further legitimacy to its involvement in the Third World. The depiction of US entry into the Vietnam War is especially illustrative of the binaries at work in China's discourses:

> Currently, American imperialists are engaging in murder and other acts of gangsters. They are embarking on the most shameless and barbaric colonial war in Vietnam, bombing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam like crazy… They ruthlessly suppress the revolutionary struggle of the people of Congo, interfering with and invading other countries in the region… All this shows that American imperialism is the cause of all trouble and catastrophes in Asia and Africa, and is the most ferocious enemy of the Afro-Asian peoples (*People's Daily*, 1965).

Americans were portrayed as 'gangsters', 'shameless', 'ruthless' and 'barbaric'. Their invasion of Vietnam was characterized as 'crazy', which reduced the American calculus of fighting in Vietnam to an act of passion and irrationality. American involvement in Vietnam was not out of concerns for national security or the spread of Communism (as shown in the US rhetoric; Doty, 1993, 1996), but was an uninformed and unenlightened act of barbarians. Although unstated, the barbaric, shameless and crazy Others were evidently confronted by the civilized, decent and rational Chinese self. If barbarians – who were the 'cause of all trouble' and the 'most ferocious enemy' – impinged on the sovereignty of China's comrades, it would be just and righteous for China to come to its comrades' assistance. In this logic, the other Third World countries were similarly imbued with rationality, fighting 'heroically' in their quest for freedom (*People's Daily*, 1974a). Indeed, the Third World was often characterized in Chinese official discourses as 'awakened' (*People's Daily*, 1974b, 1974c; Jin, 1960: 6). This sense of awakening captures their burgeoning national strength and contrasts with the 'barbaric' imperialists – awakening implies the possession of reason while barbarism does not (de Vitoria, 1991). The civilization/barbarism and reason/passion binaries further bolstered the validity of the overarching historical teleology in Chinese discourses, as the civilized, rational and sophisticated would be destined to prevail over the barbarous, irrational and primitive according to the laws of evolution.

Indeed, as opposed to the 'American warmongers' that attempted to uphold the 'unjust and passé' colonial order, the Third World people stood by 'world peace, prosperity and progress' (*People's Daily*, 1974d; Jin, 1960:

6). In assisting their Third World comrades, China was an 'ever-wavering champion of the right of all nations to their sovereignty, sparing no effort in support of all peoples in their struggles for social and economic progress' (Soong, 1966: 2). The rhetoric of progress harkens back to this article's earlier discussion on the historical teleology, positioning China on the 'right' side of history. Further, the civilization/barbarism and reason/passion binaries were related to prevalent animal analogies used to characterize China's enemies. In the Chinese magazine *China Reconstructs*' depiction of the Vietnam War, American leaders were described as 'snake' and 'crocodile' that devour people (Ho, 1966: 19). In writings by Chinese intellectuals, US military was framed as 'street rats' and US leaders were often characterized by the act of 'roaring', a verb often used to describe animals (Wang, 1957: 3). Such animal analogies were echoed in official Chinese discourses, which referred to the US as 'mad bull' (*fengniu*) and 'jackal' (*chailang*), and US allies as 'running dogs' (*zougou*); the imperialists were dehumanized via verbs commonly associated with animals (such as 'ejecting their venom', a phrase usually used to characterize snakes) (*People's Daily*, 1958c, 1959, 1964; Lin, 1965).

The civilization/barbarism binary is in fact one deeply rooted in Chinese history. Indeed, a sense of 'persistent conceit' has permeated Chinese thinking ancient and modern (Ford, 2010: 88). Fairbank (1969: 456) points out that the 'doctrine of China's superiority' is one of China's foreign policy traditions. Despite the potential jeopardy of essentialism, it is worth delving into the civilization/barbarism categorization throughout Chinese history to explore its contemporary relevance (Callahan, 2004, 2009, 2012). Early China was considered to be the centre of the world, the 'all under heaven', and foreign peoples were to be controlled and guarded against (Yang, 2018; French, 2017). Indeed, non-Chinese peoples were regarded as subhuman and even brutes; only the Chinese people participating in a Confucian society were deemed to be cultured in *li* (etiquette), as having attained 'full humanity' (Ford, 2010: 88). There was thus an intimate connection between the possession of civilization/etiquette and humanity. This personal aspect of Confucianism permeated the sphere of statecraft: a virtuous *tianzi* (emperor) would be compelled by his virtue to expand his realm of governance, and it would be just for the *tianzi* to suppress barbaric foreigners via forceful means (Ford, 2010). Recounting the tenets of Confucianism does not indicate their direct influence on foreign policy making in Mao's China; indeed, traditional Chinese culture in general and Confucianism in particular were denounced as feudalistic legacies under Mao (Link, 2013; Lin, 2018). Nonetheless, the (re-)circulation of influential cultural legacies made possible the construction of realities via culturally inflected discourses. Mao's rule was indeed claimed to be based on virtue and goodness, in contradistinction from the imperialist powers (Levine, 1994; Link, 2013):

> The superpowers are convinced of their superiority, but actually they are in the minority on the international stage. They act in a hegemonic and lawless manner, bullying the weak, and are therefore unpopular and isolated. The Third World countries are opposed to the contestation between the two superpowers, and represent just and progressive endeavours. Most countries in the world are sympathetic and supportive of the Third World. [The Chinese people] stand on the side of Third World countries, and therefore stand on the side of just and progressive endeavours (*People's Daily*, 1972b).

The superpowers are depicted in a rather sinister light, acting in a 'hegemonic and lawless manner'. In dominant Chinese media, American leaders were also portrayed as having 'committed every imaginable evil', which explains why they were 'unpopular and isolated' (Pa, 1966: 33). The unpopularity of evil doers implied that most people in the world aspired to justice and righteousness, and were therefore judicious arbiters of good and evil. Indeed, Mao alleged in a conversation with guests from Africa that 'only ten percent of the people in developed countries are evil, and the rest are good'; the ten percent were the state leaders and capitalists in developed countries, and the rest were 'proletarians and proletarian-sympathizers' (Wilson Centre, 1960). The evil leaders and capitalists were thus encircled and isolated even within their own countries. This popular/isolated dichotomy is reminiscent of a Chinese aphorism favoured by Mao, '*dedaozhe duozhu, shidaozhe guazhu*' (those who are just attract much support, while those who are not find little) (*People's Daily*, 1958b, 1960b). It was therefore reasonable that the superpowers were 'in the minority', as the justice/injustice binary mapped onto the majority/minority and popular/isolated ones. Indeed, in Chinese political discourse there was a direct correspondence between minority status and moral inferiority (Link, 2013).

Inextricably connected to the justice/injustice binary were peace-lovers/warmongers and candour/deception. As has been briefly mentioned, the imperialists were constructed as 'warmongers': "the two superpowers engage in acts of subversion, invasion, and dismemberment of sovereign states under the banners of 'peace', 'humanitarianism', and 'non-alignment'" (*People's Daily*, 1972a). The imperialists were thirsty for wars but waged wars in the disguise of upholding peace; in contrast, Third World states were truthful in their desire for peace. The truthfulness of the Third World's claim to peace stemmed from their yearning for independence, freedom and 'taking control of their own fate' (*People's Daily*, 1955). Imperialists by definition were the archenemies of peace, as they sought 'to enslave the whole world' (*People's Daily*, 1959). The imperialists' deceptive and hypocritical nature enabled Chinese discourses to foreclose the challenges from alternative discourses (that might accuse China of interventionism), since Chinese discourses were by definition opposed to the deceptive, imperialist ones and thus always truthful.

6. The Power of Discourse

6.1. Rationalizing Intervention

The analysis in the previous section answers the 'how-possible' question posed earlier, namely how China's intervention in the Third World was made possible and thinkable given its principle of non-interference. The primacy of the historical teleology underpinning China's discourses diminished China's agency and initiative, as China's involvement in the Third World was framed as necessary and involuntary. Although China lacked agency and initiative, its leadership role in the Third World was emphasized via a sense of historical stagism – China's past revolutionary success inspired and motivated its Third World comrades to fight for liberation in the same manner. Certain binaries with roots in Chinese history served to bolster the appeal of and localize the historical teleology, which is Marxist in its origin. These binaries constructed China's enemies that meddle with the Third World as barbaric, evil, irrational and isolated; it was thus just, righteous and civilized for China to assist the Third World in order to defeat the imperialistic warmongers and to preserve peace. The somewhat naturalistic imperative conferred by the teleology was thus imbued with a moral valence. The discursive construction of history, the Third World, and the First World then shaped China's actions as it defined the boundary of the thinkable, possible and legitimate. 'Interventionist' engagement in the Third World then became possible, legitimate and necessary in the face of the 'irresistible historical trend' towards the liberation of the Third World and the collapse of imperialism, and when confronted by the nefarious and bloodthirsty imperialists. In a legitimate state of exception as such, China's involvement then became warranted (Ren, 2021).

China's discourses reproduced its subject position and the corresponding foreign policy (Campbell, 1998). Indeed, the discourses made possible a world in which supporting the Third World countries was the 'natural' and 'normal' course of action for socialist, peace-loving countries like China. As such, this post-structuralist approach focusing on the interplay of discourse and subjectivity revealed the deficiency of rationalist IR theories. By interrogating the construction of the meanings attached to intervention and of the identities of different countries, a post-structuralist lens does not take China's involvement in the Third World as a 'rational' and 'natural' response to structural, domestic, or individual configurations of the (geo-) political. The rationalist approaches in fact neglect the apparent paradox between China's principle of non-intervention and interventionist practices, dismissing such paradox as a case of political hypocrisy (cf. Pye, 1988; Kim, 1994). Resultantly, they fail to discern the particular reality enabled by discourses in which the apparent contradiction is resolved, thereby committing epistemological violence. Indeed, rationalist theories overlook the ways in

which China's intervention was intelligible and legitimate for the Chinese leadership and people given the everyday discursive regime in which they dwelled. By bringing the everyday and the personal to the fore, the post-structuralist approach opens up new space for understanding and inquiry (Enloe, 2006).

6.2. Discourse as Resistance

The centrality of power in post-structuralism has been discussed in a previous section. Indeed, power permeates all social relations and constitutes the condition of possibility for actions. As such, power also serves as the condition of possibility for freedom. Freedom does not mean free from power; rather, in relations of power, it is always possible to change and even reverse the power relations (Foucault, 1990). Therefore, power relations are always vitiated by the possibility of resistance, and are as such reversible and unstable. 'Where there is power, there is resistance' (Foucault, 1990: 95).

There is likewise always room for resistance in discourses. Although there is no mention of any challenges to China's dominant, official discourses,[5] this article argues that China's discourses themselves can be seen as a form of resistance to Western discourses on the Third World. In Doty's (1993: 313) study on the role of discourse in the US occupation of the Philippines after the Second World War, she argues that discursive constructions of the Filipinos as 'child-like', unsophisticated, and consumed by passion and emotion made US intervention possible. Indeed, the derogatory characterization of non-Europeans as child-like, barbaric and uncivilized has had centuries of historical record: in Francisco de Vitoria's (1991: 250) critique of the Spanish empire, he contends that Amerindians are 'evil and barbarous', akin to 'brute animals'; in Immanuel Kant's (2006: 147) argument against European imperialism, he considers non-Europeans to be ignorant and 'undeveloped'; John Stuart Mill's (1963) distinction between civilized and barbarous societies maps onto European and non-European ones. It is therefore precisely against the background of the uncivilized and primitive non-European Others that the civilized and sophisticated European selves are defined (Lowe, 2015); regardless of whether the European thinkers argue for or against colonial conquest, the intellectual inferiority and barbarism of the non-Europeans are always taken as the *a priori*.

Given the evidence presented above, it becomes clear that the similar logic of binarism in China's discourse is a counter-narrative of and resistance to the Euro-American/Eurocentric discourse. The assertion of China and the Third World in general as civilized and rational, and the US and its allies as the reverse, bespeaks the instability of dominant (Eurocentric) discourses and their vulnerability to deconstruction. Despite the uncanny resemblance this

dynamic bears with the Nietzschean (1998) notion of *ressentiment*, studying China's discourses on intervention draws attention to post-colonial, non-Western discursive regimes, thereby undermining the discursive hegemony of the West. The post-structuralist lens is therefore able to unveil the ways in which foreign policy (discourses) serve(s) as potent instruments of resistance in ways unavailable to rationalist IR theories.

7. Discussion

While post-structuralists usually militate against any effort to extract lessons and experience from past events and apply them to current times, guarding against the perils of ahistoricization and de-contextualization (Edkins, 2007), it is nevertheless worthwhile to probe at the possibility of formulating a genealogy in which the discursive regime under Xi is contingent upon that under Mao. Have the historical teleology and moral binaries in Mao's China left any trace in Xi's approach to foreign policy? This article finds that while their basic logic still holds, their contents have become less polarized and more gradational. Indeed, China's approach to the Third World has become more pragmatic and transactional (Brown, 2020); to look into this shift, we need similarly to look to discourse, particularly how China itself, the Third World, and China's competitors such as the US have been constructed. The aim of constructing such a discursive genealogy lies not in examining Beijing's current approach to (non-)intervention which has changed significantly: China today no longer conceives of itself as a revolutionary power, and has generally upheld the principle of non-intervention except on matters it deems integral to its sovereignty and territorial integrity (e.g., regarding the South China Sea) (Nie, 2016). Rather, contemporary Chinese discourse is helpful as it allows us to probe into the lexical universe adopted by the Chinese leadership today. The goal of this section is to interrogate how the discourses on intervention during the Mao era can be applied to a broader menu of political options today. Furthermore, the genealogy is not meant to be explanatory of Xi's political choices, but to open up more possibilities of approaching, examining and making sense of how China conceives of itself in relation to other countries today.

One noteworthy example that helps us depict the contours of Xi's discursive context can be found during his visit to France in 2014, where he stated that China was a 'peaceful, amicable and civilized lion' that only sought 'win-win' (MFA, 2014). The imagery of the lion acknowledged China's formidable relative power, while the predicates 'peaceful, amicable and civilized' were intended to diminish the sense of intimidation posed by the lion, in a way reminiscent of Deng Xiaoping's famous dictum that China should 'hide [its] capability and bide [its] time' (Brown, 2018: 46).

The notion of 'win-win' was similarly meant to alleviate the potential threat posed by China's relative power, and to demonstrate that China no longer pursues the definitive, one-sided victory as it did in the Mao era (Brown, 2020). As previous sections of this article have shown, under Mao, the defeat of the imperialists and the victory of the Third World were framed as the 'irresistible historical trend' and 'rules of historical development'; the victory of China is necessarily complemented by the defeat of its enemies. In Xi's China, in contrast, former existential enemies have been transformed into economic adversaries with whom 'win-win' is possible. The sense of teleology, however, still remains, as manifested in Xi's oft-invoked phrase of 'community of common destiny' – 'common destiny' implies a sense of pre-determined convergence and synergy. In Yang Jiechi's phone call with Antony Blinken in the beginning of 2021, Yang stated that 'no one could resist the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' (*People's Daily*, 2021a). Indeed, 'the wheels of history will never turn back', and China 'always stands on the right side of history' (*People's Daily*, 2021b). More recently, the spokesperson of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Hua Chunying, fiercely denounced the US as engaging in divisive, 'perverse' activities in Xinjiang, declaring that 'the perverse actions of the US cannot destroy the overall shape of Xinjiang's development, stop China's progress, or reverse the trend of historical development' (Al Jazeera, 2021). The 'trend of historical development' always favours China and is irresistible; any effort to stymie China's growth is doomed to failure.

Although China still seeks to identify with the position adopted by the Global South on various issues, the ideological valence of Third World camaraderie in the Mao era has been replaced by pragmatic concerns (Fung, 2016; Brown, 2020; Ren, 2021). The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to foster connectivity between China and countries primarily in the Global South, is intended to enable these countries to partake in a 'common scheme of peace and development' (MFA, 2013; Nie, 2016). Instead of actively seeking to alter the geopolitical landscape in the Third World, China now adopts a more transactional approach, advocating for 'mutual learning and mutual benefit' (Xinhua, 2017). As the primacy of socialist ideology has been gradually subsumed by that of nationalism (Brown, 2018; Link, 2013), mentions of 'imperialism' and the 'Third World' have drastically declined in state media (see, for example, *People's Daily*; cnki.net). The moral binaries of Mao's time nonetheless remain operative, although the assertion of the positive qualities of the self is no longer accompanied by the derogatory disparaging of the Other(s). In the same speech Xi gave in France in 2014, he asserted that the China dream was about 'the pursuit of peace' and 'contributing to the common good of the world' (MFA, 2014). There was no explicit denunciation of China's competitors as 'warmongers' or 'evil'; in

official discourses, they were only designated by the demure phrase, 'hostile forces' (Johnston, 2017: 36). Animal analogies similarly hardly surface in China's depiction of its competitors; the term 'running dog', for example, has only appeared less than twenty times in *People's Daily* since 2012.

As the assertion of the national self inescapably requires the negative portrayal of the Other(s) (Van Dijk, 1998), some Maoist binaries remain in CCP's rhetoric today. The 'community of common destiny', for example, is intended to draw a contrast with the power politics and exclusive alliance system of the US and its allies (Xinhua, 2017). The candour/deception binary also holds true: in MFA spokesperson Qin Gang's statement regarding China's crackdown on human rights activists in Xinjiang, Qin asserted: "the US boorishly interfered with China's sovereignty under the banner of 'human rights' and 'liberty'" (*People's Daily*, 2014). Indeed, in the Xi era, the use of the term 'interference' is always associated with the involvement of Western powers in China's internal affairs in regions such as Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet (as found through keyword search in cnki.net and *People's Daily*). The complete silence on China's engagement in the Global South (which now primarily takes the form of economic statecraft; see, for example, Norris, 2016) further confirms that the basic logic of historical teleology and moral binaries still looms large under Xi, although their contents have undergone minor shifts.

8. Conclusion

This article is animated by an interest in the tension between China's foreign policy principle and practice: how are we to make sense of China's active involvement in the Third World during the Mao era given its principle of non-interference? There are two ways of answering this question; one interrogates *why* China embarked on intervention, and the other explores *how* China's intervention was made possible, thinkable and legitimate. This article argues that the latter rather than the former provides more fruitful responses, as the former neglects to explain how intervention appeared as an imaginable option for the Chinese leadership in the first place, given the principle of non-intervention which would have precluded intervention. The latter, in contrast, refrains from taking subjects and meanings in international life as given, and is therefore able to show how particular discursive constructions of China, the Third World, and the First World made intervention imaginable, legitimate and even necessary.

An in-depth analysis of Chinese official discourses regarding intervention reveals that China's intervention was framed as necessary and righteous given the imperatives of a historical teleology and the moral binaries underpinning the teleology. Indeed, if the defeat of the imperialists and the triumph of

the Third World were destined and 'unaffected by human will', would supporting the Third World countries not be the necessary course of action? Relatedly, if the imperialists that oppressed the Third World peoples were barbaric, irrational and evil, would redressing the plight of the latter not be just, righteous and legitimate? China was thus compelled by both natural and moral imperatives. The element of external duress was key in reconciling the discrepancy between China's foreign policy principle and practice, making its involvement in the Third World a case of legitimate exception.

An examination of Chinese discourses also unveils their power and potential as resistance to Eurocentric, hegemonic discourses which dismiss and portray the non-Western in derogatory terms. The post-structuralist approach is therefore able to assert the non-Western as subjects vis-à-vis the Western, rather than as mere objects under the Western gaze. Engaging post-structuralist IR to study contemporary China also expands the critical scrutiny of existing post-structuralist/critical IR literature on intervention, which primarily focuses on the Euro-American. It needs to be noted that Chinese discourses (such as the notion 'intervention') under Mao still largely operated within Western lexical, conceptual and legal frameworks, despite their potential as resistance. Further research might examine the extent to which discourses under Xi, such as 'community of common destiny', mark a step towards the extrication of Chinese foreign policy from largely Western-constructed vocabularies and conceptualizations. Indeed, delving into the ways in which such decolonial political vocabularies and conceptualizations interact with China's foreign policy practices under the Xi administration would open up further insight.

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Notes

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1. On the rift between the positivist and post-positivist strands of IR, see, for example, Wendt, 1998; King et al., 1994.

2. For examples of rationalist approaches to China's intervention in the Third World, see Brown, 2018; Goldstein, 2003; Robinson, 1969; Yang, 1996. For an exposition of the three levels of analysis, see Waltz, 1959.
3. It needs to be noted that as official discourses permeated every facet of society and dominated all visible discursive environments under Mao, popular discourses inevitably echoed official ones (Link, 2013). People living in the Mao era had virtually no means of knowing anything about international news except through CCP mouthpieces, thus providing the CCP with a unique opportunity to completely define the discursive context. This article therefore does not explore the dynamics of popular discourses.
4. 'Bounded agency' does not mean the effort of Third World/socialist states is not required; rather, the inevitability of victory is predicated upon what these states are bound to do. On the reconcilability between teleological inevitability and human effort, see Cohen, 1986.
5. Indeed, Chinese discourses constitute a hierarchy of power and a regime of truth vis-à-vis other Third World states.

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