TELLING CHINA'S STORY: RETHINKING CHINESE POLITICS AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY THROUGH A POSTCOLONIAL LENS

By

Hanna Perényi

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Supervisor: András Bozóki

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, **Hanna Perényi**, candidate for the MA degree in Political Science declare herewith that the present thesis titled "*Telling China's Story: Rethinking Chinese Politics and Public Diplomacy Through a Postcolonial Lens*" is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright.

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Hanna Perényi

ABSTRACT

A general neglect of the enduring legacies of colonialism which shape both Chinese politics at present as well as mainstream narratives on Chinese propaganda, soft power and influence strategies result a significant gap within Western scholarship in the field of political science. This project is an attempt to fill in that gap and challenge dominant narratives by applying postcolonial theory and historiography, revealing the ways in which China's (post)colonial legacies inform its politics both and home, and abroad. The title of this thesis is a nod to the widespread Chinese slogan 'to tell China's story well' (*jianghao zhongguo gushi,* 讲好中国故事) coined by Xi Jinping, encapsulating the Communist Party's project of enhancing the country's 'discourse power' (*huayu quan,* 话语权), understood as a key symbol of 'soft power' (*ruǎn shílì,* 文化软实力). The present thesis reveals connections often absent from dominant discourses not only through historical analysis but also through by focusing on key notions within Chinese discourse itself such as 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics' (*zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi,* 中国特色社会主义）and 'Chinese Dream' (*zhongguo meng,* 中国梦). It asks how these linkages brought to the surface might change perceptions not only about Chinese soft power, propaganda and influence strategies, but also, more broadly, about power, resistance, modernity and the so-called 'West'?

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INTRODUCTION

What one may call political science tends to examine 'the Other' with the mentality and beliefs of the imperial Self. While numerous studies have been published on Chinese influence strategies, propaganda and soft power, a few have confronted with the enduring legacies of colonialism, not just in China, but in the ways in which one thinks, writes and theories about it. In the past few decades, the People's Republic of China (henceforth PRC) has emerged as the second largest power on the globe, irreversibly transforming the world order (Lams, 2018), and prompting a surge of public and scholarly interest in the topic of Chinese politics and public diplomacy. A significant portion of Western scholarly literature on Chinese politics and public affairs highlight the threat posed by the PRC on 'Western democracies' and 'democratic values', highlighting the pervasive effects of Chinese soft power initiatives, disinformation and propaganda (Schrader, 2020; Walker, 2018; Walker, 2016; Tiffert, 2020; Bradshaw and Howard, 2019; Atlantic Council, 2020, Repnikova, 2020 among others).

However, the present thesis contends that such mainstream academic texts are unable to adequately explain Chinese politics and public diplomacy due to three, interrelated reasons: (1) there is an overarching neglect of Chinese modern history and colonial encounters which inform contemporary Chinese politics and foreign policy strategies. Secondly, (2) there still seems to be a general lack of sufficient engagement with Chinese political discourse, which offers an alternative, Chinese perspective absolutely crucial for understanding Chinese politics and foreign affairs. Lastly, mainstream narratives on Chinese politics and public diplomacy tend to remain entrenched within the cultural hegemony of the Western canon within which they are constituted. Western political science scholarship often focuses on the themes of security, authoritarianism and geopolitical tensions, falling either into the 'China Rise' or

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'China Threat' narratives, with only a few examining the ways in which China understands itself, including how its semi-colonial past and the discourse of modernity itself inform its political identity today.

Consequently, this project is set out to contribute to the field of political science by offering an alternative, critical perspective done in the hope of opening up a new space for debate and more nuanced discussions on Chinese politics and public diplomacy. It is an attempt to challenge dominant discourses about China and fill in a substantial theoretical gap stemming from an absence of postcolonial critique, which inevitably leads to a vast epistemological malaise in Western political science literature. What can postcolonial analysis and histography tell us about contemporary Chinese politics and public diplomacy? What does Chinese discourse reveal about Chinese propaganda efforts and soft power strategies?

This thesis draws on postcolonial theory and historiography to analyse how China's semi-colonial past shape contemporary Chinese politics both at home and abroad. It critically engages with theories informing not only postcolonial theory but also the central ideology and strategies of the Communist Party of China (henceforth CPC). Through the analysis of Chinese discourse, this paper exposes the CPC's understanding of the technique apparatuses of dominance, revealing a level of awareness that goes well-beyond mainstream political analyses on Chinese politics and international affairs.

The structure of the thesis is as follows: Chapter 1 provides an overview of postcolonial theory and historiography, focusing on notions of power, discourse, ideology and modernity. It begins by a quick introduction to postcolonialism as an academic field, involving an overview of its main objectives and concerns. It will also situate the field within existing philosophical

traditions, offering an overview of Foucault's theory on power and discourse, which not only forms of the basis of postcolonialism's discourse theory but it will be particularly relevant in the Chinese context since his theory travelled to China, entering the rhetoric of the CPC.

The second half of the chapter examines the discourse of colonialism and lays out some of the key notions and arguments within postcolonial theory and histography. It introduces the work of who is considered to be the father of postcolonial theory – Edward Said and his analysis of the discourse of Orientalism. This will be followed by a critical examination of the idea of modernity, the ways in which modernity was constructed through the discourse of colonialism together with the notion of 'the West.' Understanding the concept of modernity as a colonial construct will set up later analysis of socialism as a marker of difference in the Chinese context, and crucially, it anticipates the analysis of the rhetoric and foreign policy strategy of the CPC.

Chapter 2 seeks to offer a glimpse into China's semi-colonial past and resistance from a postcolonial lens, challenging dominant Eurocentric accounts. It analyses the rise of nationalism and socialism as responses to imperial domination, demonstrating that socialism in China has always been much more than an economic system. It seeks to expose the injustices of imperial encounters which are frequently omitted in mainstream discourses, crucial for understanding Chinese political discourse and foreign strategies today. It begins by offering a brief account of the two opium wars and the subsequent unequal treaties signed between the Qing and imperial powers, followed by a concise discussion on how imperialism systematically undermined China's economy and sovereignty. Lastly, it provides a concise analysis of the Boxer Uprising as an anti-imperialist movement, through which it attempts to reverse the colonial gaze. The chapter applies the concept of semi-colonialism, helping to position the Chinese experience within a wider postcolonial critique in the following chapters. By framing

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China's semi-colonial history as a site of dominance and Chinese resistance –feeding into anti-imperialist nationalist movements and the emergence of socialism – the chapter sets up the ideological and political foundations for the subsequent analysis on socialism as a marker of difference in the political development of China.

The core analytical arguments of this paper take shape in the last two chapters, in which the theoretical and historical framework laid out in the previous chapters will be applied. Chapter 3 analyses socialism in China – which is the current ideology of the CPC – as a marker of difference, a postcolonial project rooted in anti-imperialist resistance. It demonstrates that socialism was often intertwined with Chinese nationalism, a pattern also seen in former colonial and semi-colonial states. The chapter traces the development of socialism in the 20th century China from Sun Yat Sen's revolutionary movement, through the period of anti-imperialist agitation and rise of Leninism during the New Cultural Movement resulting in the establishment of the CPC, to the 'Sinicization' of Marxism under Mao Zedong. Providing a historical account of these political and ideological developments from a postcolonial lens is central for situating the CPC's current political agenda, its rhetoric and soft power strategies.

The heart of the paper lies in Chapter 4, which analyses Chinese soft power and influence strategies as a politics of 'the Other.' In applying a postcolonial lens, this chapter provides a critical analysis of the CPC's soft power and discourse power efforts as mechanisms of discursive and cultural resistance against Western hegemony, also revealing a linkage between China's postcolonial past and the CPC's renewed emphasis on culture within the socialist project. It seeks to show that the CPC's ideology and Chinese discourse point to the continuity of the politics of the 'Other', with the culturally inflected 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics' serving as a marker of difference vis-á-vis 'the West' while being positioned

as an alternative to Western modernity. Lastly, the chapter will expose colonial binaries and hierarchies embedded within mainstream academic discourse on Chinese soft power and influence strategies only to reveal a deeper paradox.

CHAPTER 1: AN OVERVIEW OF POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

The current chapter lays down the theoretical and methodological foundation of the thesis, grounded in postcolonial analysis and historiography. Postcolonialism provides with key tools and a critical lens for analysing the ways in which colonial legacies continue to inform our present, and thus offers an alternative perspective for understanding contemporary Chinese politics and public diplomacy. The relevance of postcolonialism will emerge over the course of the subsequent discussions, when analysing China's semi-colonial history, the rise of Chinese nationalism and socialism as reactions to imperial domination, and ultimately, in the analysis of Chinese soft power and influence strategies as a politics of 'the Other.'

1.1   What is postcolonialism?

Postcolonialism, in Leela Gandhi's view (1998) is defined by the provocative question the leading postcolonial thinker and feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak poses in her famous essay '*Can the Subaltern Speak?'*. In this essay – which will also come up once more within the Chinese context – Spivak (1988) criticises how Western intellectuals speak for the most marginalised, who are thus unable to be heard within the dominant discourse. She asks whether the subaltern – referring to those most marginalised by the system – can truly express themselves "[o]n the other side of the international division of labor from socialized capital, inside *and* outside the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text" (Spivak, 1988, p. 25). While she concludes that there is no space where the subaltern subject can speak, which by implication suggests that the

silencing of voices and marginalisation of knowledges extend to the entire colonial world, postcolonial studies stepped in with the goal of creating space for and giving voice to those who have been silenced or side-lined by hegemonic structures (Ashcroft, 1989; Gandhi, 1998).

In the past few years, postcolonialism has emerged as a major theoretical framework, standing alongside other critical discourses in humanities, such as postmodernism/poststructuralism, feminism and psychoanalysis. The term postcolonialism remains ambiguous and diffuse, and unlike poststructuralism or materialist philosophies like Marxism, postcolonialism does not have a unified, well-defined methodology (Gandhi, 1988). While the term 'postcolonialism' may suggest that there is an end to colonialism with formal decolonialisation processes, in line with postcolonial scholars it is argued that one cannot meaningfully separate between colonialism and its aftermath. Postcolonial thinkers assert that the impact of colonialism and imperialism go well beyond economic exploitation and physical domination, recognising that the postcolonial conditions have emerged at the very onset of colonial occupation, rather than coming after independence or formal decolonisation (Gandhi, 1998; Said, 1979 & 1994; Fanon, 1990; Spivak, 1988; Césaire, 2000 and more). To quote Said (1994), while "direct colonialism has largely ended; imperialism (…) lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices (p. 9). So, what do these two notions mean?

Colonialism refers to the process of establishing settlements on a distant territory, and it can be seen as almost always resulting from imperialism. Meanwhile, imperialism is defined by Said (1994) as "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory" (p. 9). However, both colonialism and imperialism extend beyond territorial expansion and accumulation of wealth; they are tinged with ideological formations justifying

the domination of colonised and imperialised peoples and territories. Consequently, there is a need for acknowledging the hegemonic nature of the imperial ideology, the ways in which imperial ideology is deeply embedded in the cultures of former colonial powers, and recognising the resentment felt in former colonies towards the empire. The legacy of colonial and imperial domination is not a thing of the past; its impacts shape our everyday lives and continue to persist in our language, politics, culture and discourse (Said, 1994).

In acknowledging the continuity and endurance of colonial consequences, the term postcolonialism is used to cover all those cultures which have been affected by colonial and imperial processes from the onset of colonialism to our present day (Ashcroft et. al, 1989). Postcolonialism's 'post-' is to be perceived not as a conclusive temporal marker of the decolonisation process (Gandhi, 1998), but much rather as a marker of an intellectual move or conceptual shift extending beyond conventional theoretical frameworks for understanding the world (Bhambra, 2007). Postcolonialism can be viewed, in Gandhi (1998) words, as a "theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath" (p. 4).

It is an intellectual movement which seeks to reveal and analyse how colonialism continue to shape the social and political realities of today and restore the epistemological and cultural value of formerly colonised and imperialised regions (Gandhi, 1998). By deconstructing and reconstructing mainstream academic standpoints (Bhambra, 2007), it seeks to "question the objective categories of historical discourse" (Ashcroft et. al, 1989, p. 159), and challenge dominant mental models by bringing in downgraded voices and introducing the perspectives of those, whose experiences and histories have been forgotten or overlooked (Gandhi, 1998).

Hence the need for what Deleuze and Guattari (1986) termed as "reterritorialization" of "minor knowledges" (Gandhi, 1998, p. 43), to fragment the cultural hegemony of the Western canon that is taken as the objective and universal. Consequently, Gandhi (1998) concludes that postcolonial analysis is most effective when it is able to elucidate the continuities and intimacies between the colonised and the coloniser, when it focuses on more subtle, less obvious connections and goes beyond the stark violence and counter-violence of the colonial encounter. So where does postcolonialism begin?

1.2   Situating Postcolonialism

Edward Said's most prominent book titled *Orientalism* is often considered the main reference point for postcolonial analysis, marking the first stage of postcolonial theory. However, postcolonial studies are indebted both conceptually and methodologically to European and Anglo-American philosophies. In her book *Postcolonial Theory*, dedicated to defining and situating postcolonial studies within contemporary theoretical landscape, Gandhi (1998) writes that the intellectual history of postcolonial theory is underpinned by the dialectic between Marxism[2] and postmodernism/structuralism, which means that the postcolonial critic has to work together with and integrate two, often conflicting schools of thought (Gandhi, 1998).

Building upon the postmodern/poststructuralist critique of Western civilisation, postcolonialism has inherited from poststructuralism a certain understating of the various facets of Western domination, based on which it can be seen as a symptom of a close alliance between

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[2] Following Balibar (1994) and Rodney (2022), it is argued that Marxism as a homogenous philosophy does not exist, and that there is no single, unified Marxist theory. Rather, Marxism is taken as a methodology (historical materialism), a useful analytical tool which is constantly reinterpreted and (is to be) adapted to a particular society.

knowledge and power, between truth and power and between discourse and power (Gandhi, 1998). Said (1979) extends Michel Foucault's account of the relationship between knowledge and power when constructing his theoretical framework for analysing the discourse of Orientalism. Likewise, although departing from Said's analysis on several grounds, Spivak (1988) also builds on poststructuralism as she draws on Derrida and famously readapts Foucault's concept of 'subjugated knowledges' to the colonial context. Subjugated knowledges are defined by Foucault (1980, p. 82) as "knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scienticity" (also in Spivak, 1988, p. 25). Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari (1986) write about 'minor literature', embodying the various types of culture and thought that have been 'deterritorialised' by dominant systems of knowledge (Gandhi, 1998). Both of these concepts draw parallels between political resistance and the struggle over the subject of knowledge.

Self-contradictory is the fact that postcolonialism could become influential in mainstream academic circles thanks to its strong alliance with postmodernism/poststructuralism, which exemplifies the cultural hegemony of Europe (Ashcroft et. al, 1989, Gandhi, 1998). Nevertheless, the fact that theorists of poststructuralism challenged the philosophical traditions from within attracted many postcolonial thinkers, including Spivak, who writes, "I was very interested to see that he [Derrida] was actually dismantling the philosophical tradition from inside rather than from outside", that "someone was actually trying to dismantle the tradition which told us what would make us human, that seemed rather interesting too" (Spivak in Gandhi, 1998, pp. 26-27).

In addition to poststructuralism, Marxist notions such as ideology and hegemony are echoed in many postcolonial texts (Ashcroft et. al, 1989; Althusser, 1971; Gramsci 1996). However, engagement with Marxist philosophies receives limited support due to issues of universalism and the tendency toward 'grand narratives' and the Eurocentrism inherent in European Marxist theory. In going beyond the economic paradigms of Marxist philosophies, postcolonialism – influenced by poststructuralism – has become capable of identifying the "epistemological malaise" rooted in Western rationality. Postmodernist/poststructuralist thinkers reject the idea that human nature can be recognised as universal and given, arguing that the very notions of 'rationality' and 'human nature' are historical constructs and thus subject to historical limitations (Gandhi, 1998). That is, postcolonialism could explore the various implications of colonialism and imperialism, including the ways in which they have affected not only economies, but also the minds of people, the ways in which dominant knowledge systems like Western rationality have been shaped by colonialism and imperialism.

Postmodernism/poststructuralism (despite their failure to adequately explain colonial encounters and their far-reaching consequences) provide the central theoretical and analytical basis for *postcolonial theory* (Gandhi, 1998). Nonetheless, Gandhi (1998) acknowledges the importance of Marxism to *postcolonial politics*, also maintaining that it is through poststructuralism/postmodernism, and their deeply fraught relationship with Marxism that postcolonial analysis starts to crystallise its unique character.

1.2.1 Poststructuralism: Michel Foucault's Theory of Power

In the fields of Political Science and International Relations, power is mostly conceptualised as being centralised in the state apparatus and various political institutions (Newman, 2004), and is often associated with coercion and control, a top-down force. However, postcolonialism

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(as well as the CPC as later demonstrated) builds upon the Foucauldian conceptualisation of power, based on which power is decentralised and productive rather than repressive (Foucault, 1978).

Foucault (1980) goes beyond the classic, juridical theory of power – characterising both the liberal and Marxist conceptions of political power – which considers power to be a right that each individual holds, something which can be possessed like a commodity, and thus be fully or partially transferred or alienated through legal means or acts such as contracts that establish rights. As he writes, power "is not to be taken to be a phenomenon of one individual's consolidated and homogeneous domination over others, or that of one group or class over others" (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). This perception of power stands in direct opposition to that of Hobbes, for instance, who saw power as being exercised by the sovereign (Newman, 2004).

"Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere", Foucault (1978, p. 93) famously maintains. Based on his theory, power "is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation", which, therefore, "must be analysed as something which circulates" (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). Individuals are neither the points of application of power, nor passive targets. Rather they are active agents who submit to and exercise power, and who also contribute to how power functions and is expressed. Simultaneously, power does not merely apply to individuals but passes through them, it shapes and constitutes them as part of one of its main functions (Foucault, 2003).

According to Foucault, power is a productive force, a system of relations which constantly transform and evolve through struggles and conflicts that either reinforce or reverse them. It involves the various techniques and practices in which they become institutionalised, such as

laws, state apparatuses and various forms of social hegemonies (Foucault, 1978). Power relations are not external but internal to other forms of relations (such as, sexual, economic and knowledge relations), and they simultaneously constitute the condition as well as the product of the inequalities and divisions which occur in these relations (Foucault, 1978). Finally, power relations are unequal, with some individuals and groups exercising more power than others. Major dominations are the result of the interplay and accumulation of localised, smaller relations of power (Foucault, 1978). Yet, power is never unchallenged; in Foucault's words, "[w]here there is power, there is resistance" (p. 95).

To conclude, in order to grasp the ways in which power operates, Foucault (1980) argues that one should analyse power by first focusing on mechanisms and strategies where it produces its effects. From there, one can see how these mechanisms have been, and remain to be, "invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended etc., by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination" (Foucault, 1980, p. 99). In other words, the analysis of power should start from the various forms of relations, techniques and practices, including discursive practices which intersect social reality at all levels, hence critical discourse analysis (Newman, 2004; Fairclough, 1989; Wodak, 1989; Fairclough, 1992; Wodak, 2006).

1.2.2 Foucault's Discourse Theory: Knowledge, Truth and Discourse

The adaptation of postmodern/poststructuralist discourse theory by postcolonial thinkers into the postcolonial context can be seen as one of the most important contributions to postcolonial studies as it helps to expose the mechanisms of colonial and imperial domination (Ashcroft et. al, 1989).

To begin with, a discourse can be understood most simplistically as a collection of statements which offer a way of representing, a language for talking about a certain type of knowledge about a specific event or topic. It is about the production of knowledge through language, and it makes it possible to construct or represent something in a certain way when knowledge claims are made (Hall, 1992). However, discourse is made up of not just one, but numerous interrelated statements, forming what Foucault (1972) calls 'discursive formations', which he defines as "modes of utterances or systems of meaning which are both constituted by, and committed to, the perpetuation of dominant social systems" (Foucault in Said, 1979, pp. 77). While discourse produces knowledge through language, it is also produced by discursive practices which are responsible for producing meaning. Consequently, discourses or discursive formations are both embedded in and shape social practices as all social practices entail meaning (Hall, 1992). They can be described as heavily regulated systems of knowledge or cognitive structures which shape, control and limit the ways and modes of representations and interpretations in a society (Foucault in Said, 1979).

In his lecture on truth and power, Foucault (1980) distinguishes between ideology and discourse. He rejects the reduction of discourses to statements which reflect the interest of the dominant social class, claiming that ideology always appears in opposition to something else that is taken as truth. He argues that the statements about political, social or moral world are rarely ever simply true or false, while emphasising that language itself shapes the very process of deciding what we consider to be true or false (Hall, 1992). Truth, he states, "is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it" (Foucault, 1980, p. 133). In other words, it is power, rather than facts about reality, which establishes, determines and verifies truth (Hall, 1992). To quote one of the most cited lines from Foucault (1980):

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"Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true." (Foucault, 1980, p. 131)

Accordingly, while Foucault (2003, 1980) acknowledges that the main mechanisms of power are followed by ideological constructions, such as the ideology of democracy or education, he maintains that when power is exercised through subtle techniques, the knowledge apparatuses it puts into circulation are not ideological. Knowledge and power imply each other directly, and not only there is no relation without the mutual formation of knowledge apparatuses, but also there is no knowledge which does not constitute or entail relations of power (Foucault, 1980). In turn, truth should be conceived of as the outcome of the struggle for power (Ashcroft et. al, 1989), which also explains the hierarchical relationship among knowledges or systems of knowledge. Hence the dominant systems of knowledge or knowledge apparatuses and marginalised knowledges (subjugated knowledges) (Spivak, 1988; Foucault, 1980).

Since discourse produces knowledge, it constitutes one of the systems through which power circulates, and since it is power which verifies and determines truth, those who produce discourse "have the power to make it true – i.e. enforce its validity, its scientific status" (Hall, 1992, p. 295). While Foucault asserts that discourses are not ideologically neutral, the dominant status of certain discourses depend not on facts or their 'truthfulness', but power. Consequently, the genealogy of knowledge and discourses should be analysed with regard to the mechanisms,

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strategies and technique apparatuses of power rather than in the context of forms of consciousness or types of ideology (Foucault, 1980).

Foucault's theory on power and knowledge is also an argument about the "structures of value relevance" influencing historical narratives and the ways in which history itself changes when these structures change (Bhambra, 2007, p. 154). History is to be conceptualised not as a collection of events but as a major discourse which has the ability to establish what is seen as a fact and determine the method of interpretation by which, in turn, one comes to understand these facts (White in Bhambra, 2007). For Foucault (1980, p. 114), "history (…) has the form of war" rather that of meaning; it is a manifestation, outcome and reflection of relations of power and dominance both at present and in the past. Our current understanding of historical events and our interpretations of the present are inherently shaped by historical context and dominant perspectives within it, as well as our present relationship to the past (Bhambra, 2007).

Centring the attention on 'the past' as a stable and rigid entity or reality to be 'discovered' or 'known', distracts us from the injustices at present for which the foundations have been laid down by preceding generations (Trouillot in Bhambra, 2007). History comes into being by suppressing or subordinating certain elements while giving emphasis to others, which does not mean that any historical discourse is merely a fiction. It does however indicate that the standard by which historical interpretations are to be assessed is not so-called historical objectivity or a discovery of 'historical truth' or 'real knowledge', but rather their plausibility and how they relate to the conditions in which history is produced (Bhambra, 2007). In Bhambra's (2007) words, "[i]t is only our present relation to the past that we can be true or false to the pasts we acknowledge, for the meaning of history is also in its purpose" (Bhambra, 2007, p. 9).

1.3   The Discourse of Colonialism

1.3.1 Edward Said's Orientalism

Edward Said (1979) employs Foucault's notion of discourse, stressing that without it, one cannot understand the processes through which European culture produced the Orient politically, sociologically, ideologically, historically and scientifically. In his most influential book, Said (1979) analyses the discourse of 'Orientalism', defined as "a discourse of power originating in an era of colonialism" (Said in Bhambra, 2007, p. 17), and seeks to highlight how colonial discourses produce and reproduce the Orient and the Occident as epistemologically and ontologically distinct (Gandhi, 1998).

"European culture gained strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self", writes Said (1979, p. 3). By constituting the Orient in the minds of the European subject, the discourse of Orientalism simultaneously constituted the Occident. These two entities, according to Said (1979), are both ideological constructs which mutually support and, to a certain extent, mirror one other in a sense that it is for the construction of the underdeveloped, uncivilised, barbaric and cultural Orient that the developed, civilised, rational and modern Occident could come about (Said in Ashcroft et. al, 1989).

The relationship between the Occident and the Orient is "a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony", writes Said (1979, p. 5). It is within this context he applies Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony. Gramsci (1996) distinguishes between the coercive forces of the state (such as, military or police) and non-coercive power which works through the manufacture of consent. The latter operates within the civil society

through various institutions (such as, education, media and religion), which directly or indirectly shape discourses and which, in turn, influence the attitudes, norms, beliefs and values of the public (Gramsci, 1996; 1971). Hence, Said (1979) defines the concept of hegemony as the ability of dominant groups to establish and maintain cultural and intellectual leadership through these subtle mechanisms, resulting in hegemony to appear as a norm or common sense.

It is this cultural hegemony, according to Said (1979), through which European colonial and imperial powers have justified their domination and control over the Orient. Colonialism could be justified by making it appear as legitimate through the production of systems of knowledge about the Orient, their cultures, history and experience, through the shaping of the cultural and intellectual discourse. Since colonialism involves not only conquest of territory, physical coercion, economic exploitation and slavery, but the occupation of minds, cultures and selves (Nandy in Gandhi, 1998), no academic knowledge about the colonised subject can be separated from the history of colonialism due to the hierarchical relationship it established, stresses Said (1979).

These are not to suggest that Orientalism an evil 'Western' plot, or a mere European fantasy, he cautions readers. Quite the contrary: it is a larger project, a well-crafted set of practices and theories into which substantial material resources have been invested (Said, 1979). It is this ongoing material investment which institutionalised Orientalism, producing a framework through which the West came to understand the Orient, influencing its consciousness, and embedding them within the mainstream Western everyday life and culture.

> "[Orientalism] is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produces and exists in an uneven exchange with (…) power political (as

with a colonial and imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with (…) any modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas about what "we" do and what "they" cannot do or understand as "we" do)" (Said, 1979, p. 12).

Literature, scholarship, historical writings, social and political theory and entire scholarly institutions are shaped by what he refers to as 'political imperialism' to the extent, where it becomes effectively impossible to bypass it (Said, 1979). However, Orientalism is not only a project of writing, teaching and researching the Orient per se, but a vast system of rules governing everything that may be written, thought or imagined about the Orient (Gandhi, 1998). Colonial discourses like Orientalism are characterised by their assumption or claim of the *"right to speak"[3]* on behalf of the uncomprehending and silenced Orient, and while doing so, persistently representing or portraying it as the opposing, degraded image or needy 'Other' of Western rationality (Gandhi, 1998, p. 77, *emphasis added*). Therefore, Said (1979) highlights the importance of "unlearning the inherent dominative mode" of thinking (p. 27).

1.3.2 The Formation of the West and Western Modernity

The term modernity is often used to refer to the social, political, economic and cultural shifts happening in Western Europe from the mid-16th onwards. Closely tied to this concept is the Renaissance and the subsequent Enlightenment, both of which treated 'the West' as the outcome of forces largely internal to Europe's formation and history. European society became to be the most developed and advanced form of society during the Enlightenment which saw European men (sic) as the height of human development (Hall, 1992). Colonial discourse

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[3] This phrase will emerge within the Chinese context discussed later.

produced not only the 'Other' / the Orient, but also simultaneously helped to form their poral opposite: the Occident/the West (Bhambra, 2007; Hall, 1992). As Said notes (1979) colonial discourse depended more on the West, the culture which produced the Orient, than the constructed Orient itself (Said, 1979).

In *Formations of Modernity*, prominent cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1992) emphasises that the rise of 'the West', was a global story and should not be perceived as a singular phenomenon rooted in Europe. In line with Said (1979), he describes the West not as a fixed entity, but as an idea, a historical construct and simultaneously an organising concept as well as an organising factor within the existing system of global relations of power. The idea of the West', according to Hall (1992), is a tool to think with as it enables one to classify societies into different categories ('Western' and 'non-Western'). It also functions as part of a larger "system of representation" (a system since representations always stand in relations to one another: for instance, Western = urban = developed / non-Western = non-industrial = rural = underdeveloped) (p. 277). Furthermore, it serves as a model of comparison, which allows one to compare the extent to which 'non-Western' societies differ from or resemble 'the West'.

Yet, Hall (1992) emphasises that concept of the West also serves, quite crucially, as a universal measure of social progress, providing criteria of evaluation against which 'non-Western' societies are ranked (Hall, 1992). However, our current ideas about the East and West – or as he calls it, the West and the Rest – were never free of fantasy and myth, and what the West and the East stand for today, and what the words which are used for describing them mean, stem from the historical relationships established between them long ago (Hall, 1992). The emergence of the idea of the West and Western modernity was central to the Renaissance and Enlightenment humanism (Said, 1979; Hall, 1992; Gandhi, 1998; Bhambra, 2007).

1.3.3 Deconstructing the Renaissance: The Erasure of Connected Histories

In *Rethinking Modernity*, Gurminder K. Bhambra (2007) challenges the portrayal of the West as the universal model of development and historical progress by demonstrating that the Western experience has been taken as the primary model for constructing the notion of modernity. In addressing the linkages between postcolonial theory, modernity and Eurocentrism, she challenges the dominant conception of the West as the primary 'creator' of history and social progress, arguing that modernity should not be viewed through the idea of geographically bounded, separate processes, but through the lens of connected histories and global relations (Bhambra, 2007). According to Bhambra (2007), it is only by understanding how Europe became the universal model of progress, and by providing explanation for the interconnectedness will it become possible to account for global politics at present.

Renaissance literature – beginning around the 14th century with figures like Dante and Petrarch – was key to the formation of the idea of the Renaissance being a revival (Bhambra, 2007). Scholars turned away from the ancient world to the 'new age', which they framed as 'modern' and 'superior' to the periods that came before it. Renaissance humanists were credited with 'discovering' 'forgotten' ancient texts (including from Plato and Aristotle) which were already known to scholars and thinkers within the Islamic and Greek world (Bhambra, 2007).

It was the advent of the printing press – which itself originated in China and was introduced to Europe by Arabs – that played a crucial role in facilitating a persisting 'revival' by disseminating and preserving knowledge more effectively, also resulting in qualitative changes in intellectual models (Bhambra, 2007). With printing, the emphasis could shift from recording

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events to more critical analysis of information already available, which allowed cross-referencing and textual criticisms. There is, however, a difference between 'finding' texts and taking credit for 'discovering' them and making them available through printing (Eisenstein in Bhambra, 2007).

Consequently, Bhambra (2007) maintains that Renaissance should be perceived as part of a process of cross-cultural exchange and influence, encompassing interactions with the Islamic world and beyond, rather than an event setting apart the 'medieval' from the 'modern', and a unique, isolated European phenomenon. For instance, Aristotle had always been a key authority for Islamic philosophers, and Ancient Greeks were themselves influenced by Egypt and Eastern cultures (Bernal, Kraemer and Makdisi in Bhambra, 2007). Europe and places such as Persia, China and India were connected with one another through shared commercial and political interests, mutually influencing one another – which shows the interconnectedness of histories across the East/West divide. Therefore, she argues that no qualitative difference could be made between, for example, the renewal of studying Confucian teachings in China between the 17th and 18th century, and the Renaissance (Bhambra, 2007).

This division – between East/West, modern/pre-modern – was further produced and reproduced through the emergence of 'Western science'. For example, often hailed as the father of modern astronomy, Nicolaus Copernicus was heavily indebted to 13th century Persian scholars, namely Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and Mu'ayyad al-Din al-Urdi, to the extent that he could not have made his discoveries without their advances is astronomy (Poskett, 2022; Boas in Bhambra, 2007). European written history was linked to cultural memory and reason, marginalising other forms of knowledge and societies outside of Europe. Much of the arguments made for the 'modernity' of the Renaissance are based on its revival of ancient texts,

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Humanism and the growth of historical consciousness, and the ostensibly ground-breaking movements in science and arts as well as the 'discovery' of the so-called New World (Bhambra, 2007).

The notion of 'discovery' itself obscures not only the rich civilisations of regions existing long before the arrival of Europeans. It also overlooks the fact that Western Europeans were still very much isolated both physically and intellectually when Muslim merchants could already travel from Southeast Asia to Morocco, and Chinese navigators were already undertaking vast explorations in the first half of the 15ᵗʰ century (Casale, 2010). To conclude, it can be argued that the fact that such 'cross-cultural fertilization' was written out of the historical discourses of the Renaissance tells us more about such histories than the discourses about the Renaissance itself (Bhambra, 2007).

1.3.4 Enlightenment as Colonial Discourse: The Birth of Modernity and the Making of 'the West'

For Immanuel Kant – who is often considered as the high point of Enlightenment – Enlightenment provided 'mankind' an opportunity to transcend immaturity and attain the status and abilities of a rational adult human being (Gandhi, 1998). By constraining the universality of human existence to "the normative condition of adult rationality", which has become a European value in itself, the concept of 'mankind', created the idea of 'non-adult' as immature and inhuman, bringing about the imperialist hierarchy between 'the West' and its colonised, immature and childlike Other / the Orient (Gandhi, 1998, pp. 31-32; Said, 1979). Thomas Hobbes (1885) writes in *Leviathan* that "savage people in many places of America have no "industry (…) and consequently no culture of the earth, no navigation, nor use of commodities"

as well as "no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts" which is why they "live at this day in that brutish manner, as I said before" (p. 65).

Later, John Locke claimed that Indians (native Americans) are like "children, idiots and illiterates because of their inability to reason in abstract, speculative (…) terms (Hall, p. 312). The equation of the state of being colonised and childhood is a common feature in colonial discourses, portraying the colonised peoples as not having minds that could reach adult maturity (Nandy in Gandhi, 1998). The discourse of colonialism, as Gandhi (1998) notes, uses binary oppositions, such as civilisation/barbarism, maturity/immaturity, and developed/developing to rationalise itself.

The construction of the colonised peoples / the Orient / the Other as backward, barbaric and uncivilised within colonial discourse served as a justification of the conquest and rule of the coloniser (Gandhi, 1998; Hall, 1992). So too did the framing of colonialism as a 'developmental project', seeking to educate and guide the backward, underdeveloped, immature societies (Gandhi, 1998). For instance, figures like Thomas Babington Macaulay positioned the coloniser principally as an educator, writing that "we owe to a race debased by three thousand years of despotism and priestcraft. We are free, we are civilised" (cited in Gandhi, 1998, pp. 32-33). He also stated that "Western literature" was superior, and that "all the historical information (…) collected in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England" (p. 30).

The West was portrayed as the model, the universal measure of social progress in Enlightenment discourse. Notions like market economy, industry and modernity are often conflated, treating them as synonymous. Europe contribution is commonly seen as central to

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the development of these processes and their following dissemination to 'the Rest' of the world (Bhambra, 2007; Hall, 1992). It framed the Industrial Revolution and capitalism as originating in Western Europe (more specifically in England), reproducing the colonial binary, the notion that such processes are the indicators of being a 'modern' and 'civilised' society in contrast to 'barbaric' and 'backward' societies (Chakrabarty, 2000; Bhambra, 2007: Hall, 1992). Following Bhambra (2007), it is argued that such perspectives, also prevalent in liberal economics, neglect the wider global context of colonial exploitation and domination, and how colonialism and imperialism transformed economic relations globally.

For example, one of the most commonly cited advancements during the Industrial Revolution was within the textile industry, yet many ignore the fact that cotton first came to England from India – the world's five largest cotton textile industries before WWI – together with the knowledge and skills how to weave, dye and design it (Morris in Bhambra, 2007; Washbrook, 1997). Not to mention that it was through coercion and economic control in imperialised and colonised regions that European powers could extract resources and accumulate substantial wealth. The generated profits provided the backbone of technological advancements, and together with external European market expansions and control, colonial powers effectively altered global economic landscapes to their advantage, profoundly reshaping global economic relations (Bhambra, 2007).

Consequently, the idea that non-European countries should follow Europe's path to achieve modernisation and progress – as modelled by Western European nations was born out of the discourse of colonialism. As Hall (1992) writes, "Enlightenment thinkers believed that there was one path to civilisation and social development, and that all societies could be ranked or placed early or late, lower or higher, on the same scale" (p. 312). It was through the process of

Europe's self-comparison with other societies with very distinct patterns of development, histories and cultures from the European model, that 'the West' could gain its identity, its so-called uniqueness (Hall, 1992). Likewise, as Bhambra (2007) highlights, this alterity of other societies from Western Europe formed the basis for establishing criteria for defining modernity temporally and spatially (Bhambra, 2007). It follows that our understanding of a 'modern' society, stems from Western experiences, both in regard to discourses and social structures.

The discourses and representations of Enlightenment provided the general framework within which philosophy and the 'science of society' evolved (Hall, 1992). While criticising market economy, Karl Marx too regarded colonialism as a 'modern' endeavour, promoting social and economic development in "Asiatic empires" (Marx in Hall, 1992, p. 314; Marx, 1853). He characterised 'Asiatic' mode of production as stagnating, being dominated by a paternalistic state, and lacking in dynamic class struggle. In his articles for the *New-York Semi-Weekly*, Marx (1853) justified colonialism and imperialism in India, arguing that the benefits of colonialism more or less outweighed the violence and injustice. He states, "England has to fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying the material foundations of Western society in Asia" (Said, 1979, pp. 153-154). 'Capitalist colonialism' was hence perceived by Marx a regrettable, yet nevertheless *necessary* force for "Asiatic societies" which he deemed unable to enter into a "progressive historical path" on their own (Hall, 1992; Marx, 1853).

Europe, through the discourse of colonialism could emerge as the superior culture, the place of civilisation and modernity while also systematically emptying the colonial world of meaning (Gandhi, 1998; Hall, 1992). It is, therefore, argued that it is no coincidence that by the term 'Western' or 'the West', we often mean a form of society today which is industrialised,

developed, modern, urbanised and secular. No matter where they are geographically located, any society sharing these characteristics are seen as belonging to 'the West' (Hall, 1992). Nor is the deeply ingrained belief embedded in the discourse of colonialism that there is only one developmental path, or road to social progress, which is modelled on the Western experience and taken as universally applicable (Bhambra, 2007).

The chapter provided an overview of the central objectives and concerns of postcolonialism and situated it within existing philosophical traditions. It offered a brief summary of Foucault's theory on power and discourse, which will later emerge within the Chinese discourse itself. It laid down the groundwork for future analysis by introducing key arguments and notions within postcolonial theory and historiography. It has been shown that the notion of 'modernity' is deeply ingrained within colonial discourses and hegemonic explanations that systematically 'write out' the colonial as well as postcolonial moment (Bhabha, 1994). The next chapter will provide a glimpse into China's semi-colonial not for the sole purpose of 'writing in' the colonial through historical analysis but to elucidate the continuity of imperial legacies that inform China's national identity, political discourse and foreign diplomacy strategies.

CHAPTER 2: SEMI-COLONIALISM IN CHINA: A GLIMPSE INTO THE CENTURY OF HUMILIATION

Colonialism first stepped into China with the first Opium War (1839-1842), marking the beginning of modern Chinese history (Hsü, 2000; Wahed, 2016; Yan, 2017). It is also widely considered to be the starting point of the century of humiliation, an expression relating to Chinese nationalism and anti-imperialist sentiments that arose as a response to the injustices and humiliations of Western colonialism and imperialism (Yan, 2017; Wahed, 2016; Metcalf, 2020; Hsü, 2000).

1.4   The Opium Wars and Unequal Treaties

In the 18th century before the first Opium War, there existed a substantial trade imbalance between Great Britain and China in favour of the latter. The British imported large amounts of tea and silk from China, paying with gold and silver, while there was little or no interest in China for Western products (Hsü, 2000; Britannica, 2018). It goes without saying that the British were more than displeased with the situation at the time, at least until they started selling opium to China, which significantly reduced Britain's chronic trade imbalance. From the mid-18th, opium imports significantly increased as the number of private traders grew, which not only resulted in an unfavourable balance of trade for China but also gave rise to major increase in drug addictions among the Chinese population, leading to societal problems (Hsü, 2000; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). Meanwhile, opium became a public property of the British government and has become its most profitable commodity trade (Hsü, 2000; Pletcher, 2024).

Imperial Commissioner Lin Zexu introduced drastic measures to deal with opium smugglers, such as arresting a large number of Chinese dealers and, most famously, ordering the destruction of 1,400 tons of opium (Pletcher, 2024; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). Tensions grew when a Chinese person was killed by a group of British sailors, and Captain Elliot, Chief Superintendent of British Trade in China, refused to cooperate and submit the criminals to Chinese law. In response, all British subjects were expelled from the territory and left for Hong Kong (Hsü, 2000; Pletcher, 2024; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). While Captain Elliot continued to refuse the submission of criminals, two British captains signed the agreement on their own contrary to Elliot's order (Hsü, 2000).

In November, hostilities broke out between the Chinese and the British, when British warships destroyed a Chinese blockade (which served to stop opium trade) in Hong Kong, marking the start of the First Opium War (Pletcher, 2024; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018), which came to an end with the British capturing Nanjing in 1842 (Hsü, 2000; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). Noteworthy is the organised surprise attack of Cantonese civilians on retreating British forces in the city of Guangzhou, which – while causing minimal damage to British forces – is taken by some Marxist historians as the first sign of Chinese nationalism (Hsü, 2000).

What came after the war were the first set of humiliating agreements between China and foreign imperial powers (including Britain, France, the US, Japan, and Russia but also the Austro-Hungarian Empire), reducing China to a semi-colonial status (Hsü, 2000; Zeller, 2019; Wahed, 2016; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). These treaties are known as 'unequal treaties' – a term also used in Chinese – owning to the fact that such treaties severely infringed upon China's sovereign rights; rather than being negotiated by nations treating one another as equals, they were imposed on China (Hsü, 2000; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). The term is also used

more generally to refer to the unjust treaties concluded between colonial powers and African and Asian states in the late 19th and 20th century (Conde Pérez & Yaneva, 2016).

The first unequal treaty was the Treaty of Nanjing (1842) concluding the first Opium War, which was imposed by the British at gunpoint, forcing the Qing government to sign the treaty (Hsü, 2000). Under its terms, China was forced to pay a large indemnity to the British, cede Hong Kong, and accept a tariff set by Britain (Hsü, 2000; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019: Fairbank, 1953; Pletcher, 2024). Additionally, it granted the right to British merchants to trade at five more ports, including Guangzhou (Canton), and was later supplemented by another treaty providing Britain the 'most-favoured-nation' status (meaning that any right given to other foreign countries in China were to be given to the British).

It also granted British citizens in China extraterritorial rights by which they were ceased to be subject to Chinese law (which also exempted them from paying taxes). Similar privileges were granted to other imperial powers, including France and the US via the Treaty of Whampoa and the Treaty of Wanghia, respectively (Hsü, 2000; Pletcher, 2024; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018; 2019). While these treaties also allowed imperial powers to build churches and spread Christianity, none of them even mentioned opium (Hsü, 2000; Twitchett et al., 2025).

The rapid growth of imperialism, reaching its highest point in the 1850s, resulted in growing anti-imperialist and anti-colonial agitation in the country (Twitchett et al., 2025; Wahed, 2016; Hsü, 2000). While Britain's and much of Europe's power grew after the Industrial Revolution facilitated by colonial market expansion, colonialism had a devastating impact on the Qing state, whose legitimacy started to drastically weaken as it failed to protect its sovereignty and the interest of its people (Hsü, 2000; Wahed, 2016).The city of Guangzhou in southern China

became the centre of anti-imperialist resistance movements, where the conflict began to grow between the British and the local Cantonese population after 1847 (Twitchett et al., 2025). While the city was declared open under the Treaty of Nanjing, with the English version granting the British the right to reside, Fairbank (1953) highlights that the Chinese version of the treaty was more ambiguous, only implying a permission for foreigners to reside temporarily in newly opened ports. Cantonese people held demonstrations against the British entry, and in the end, the Cantonese resistance succeeded, and the British surrendered (Twitchett et al., 2025; Hsü, 2000).

The Arrow incident, which sparked the outbreak of the Arrow War – known as the second Opium War (1856-1860) – took place when a Chinese officials boarded on a Chinese owned and Chinese crewed ship called the Arrow, which was flying a British flag in Guangzhou (Pletcher, 2024). The ship was originally registered with British authorities; however, this registration had already expired by then (Hsü, 2000; Lowell, 2011). The officials boarded sought to search out one pirate who was said to be on board, and during this turmoil, the British flag was allegedly lowered while a dozen Chinese crew members were arrested (Hsü, 2000; Pletcher, 2024). The British Consul in Guangzhou named Harry Parkes demanded the release of the crew members as well as a formal apology (Pletcher, 2024; Twitchett, 2025; Hsü, 2000; Lowell, 2011).

While Ye Mingchen, the governor of Guangzhou, later released the crew members, he denied that the flag was lowered and questioned the authority of Parkes to intervene in a case concerning the arrest of Chinese nationals by Chinese officials in a Chinese ship (yet unaware that the registration had already expired) (Hsü, 2000). This gave a good excuse to start a war, which began by Parkes sending a 'military expedition' to Guangzhou and opening fire on the

city. The French took advantage of the situation and joined the war on the plea that a French missionary had been executed in Guangxi back in February. While Americans and Russians abstained from entering the war, they sent representatives to join the 'expedition' (Twitchett, 2025; Hsü, 2000; Pletcher, 2024). It later emerged that Parkes, who insisted that the lowering of the flag represented the great insult to Britain's honour, was well aware that the Arrow's registration had already expired (Hsü, 2000; Lowell, 2011).

Guangzhou was under frequent bombardment by British warships. Angered by British aggressions, Cantonese civilians, who were powerless before the British forces, burnt down foreign factories in December (Hsü, 2000). Meanwhile, opinions in Britain were divided, with some condemning the tyrannical actions of the British in China, while others were on the opposite view (Lowell, 2011). An article from *Morning Post*, for example, argued that the British brought advancement and civilisation to China– an example of the 'civilising mission' narrative of the colonial discourse. "Right or wrong", the paper concluded, there is a conflict with which one must go on with, and "[t]o yield to [such savages] were to imperil all our interests, not only in the East, but in every part of the world" (quoted in Lowell, 2011, p. 625). While there were divisions in the British Parliament, soon self-victimisation, warmongering and Sinophobia coated in patriotism and Christian values prevailed (Lowell, 2011; Hsü, 2000).

In 1858, troops reached Tianjin, and forced the Qing government into negotiation. The Treaty of Tianjin (1858) supplemented the old treaties and legalised slavery and opium import. Under its terms, the Chinese were forced to pay indemnity to the British and French, open ten new ports to foreign trade, while it also granted further rights to foreigners and provided for the permission for Christian missionaries to propagate Christianity (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019; Hsü, 2000; Pletcher, 2024; Twitchett et al., 2025). By the Treaty of Aigun (1858), Russia

was ceded much of Manchuria, while China also had to open three rivers and make a land a common territory (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019; Twitchett et al., 2025). The Chinese initially refused to ratify the agreements and did not let the British pass a fort on the way to Beijing. The allied forces pushed forward and invaded the city, destroying and looting the old summer palace full of riches (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019; Twitchett et al., 2025; Pletcher, 2024; Hsü, 2000). In 1860, the above treaties were ratified, and a new treaty was signed, ceding the rest of Hong Kong territory to the British (Pletcher, 2024).

"Beyond a doubt, by 1860 the ancient civilisation that was China had been thoroughly defeated and humiliated by the West", concluded the renowned Chinese American historian and academic Immanuel Hsü (2000, p. 219). By establishing treaty ports and expanding trade in China to their own benefits, Western states pursued resource extraction and economic exploitation, while Russia also focused on territorial gains, securing strategic positions. In the late 19th century, China was forced to sign unequal treaties with France (ceding its influence over Vietnam), as well as later with Japan after the First Sino-Japanese War, marking the beginning of Japanese colonialism. Under the terms of the Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895), China ceded Taiwan to Japan, lost its influence in Korea, and was forced to open new ports to Japan, who made further territorial gains after the Russo-Japanese war (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). Western powers, Russia and later Japan tightly closed in on the weakening Qing dynasty (Hsü, 2000).

1.5 The Impact of Imperialism on Chinese Economy

Foreign domination in China had severe, long-lasting impact on Chinese economy often dubbed 'semi-colonial' – a term which has also been applied and readapted to China by Chinese Marxists, including Mao Zedong himself – considering the degree of control and domination by foreigners in Chinese industries and enterprises (Wahed, 2016; Hsü, 2000; Zeller, 2019; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019; Osterhammel, 1986). In 1907, for example, 100% of the iron production was under the control of imperial powers (Hsü, 2000).

China suffered significant trade and budgetary deficits due to increased foreign domination of Chinese markets. Foreign goods were sold at a significantly lower price than local products, owing to tariffs set by imperial powers that were forced upon the Qing government via the unequal treaties (Hsü, 2000). Moreover, backed by vast financial resources and mass production, foreign factories further undercut local producers which had severe impact on domestic industry and agriculture. By the 1990s, China witnessed the bankruptcy of local manufacturers and the collapse of village industries, rising unemployment and general economic hardships (Hsü, 2000; Osterhammel, 1986). Disillusionment and disappointment in the Qing state also grew as the latter had to increase taxes to meet major trade deficits, the burden of which fell on its own citizens (Hsü, 2000; Wahed, 2016).

Some of the key areas of foreign domination in modern Chinese economy included banking, railways, shipping and mining (Hsü, 2000; Osterhammel, 1986). To understand the full extent and mechanisms of imperial domination, two examples from above are examined in more detail:

(1) **Banking**: foreign domination in China's banking sector had a central role in imperialist economic exploitation from late 19th until early 20th centuries. Foreign banks – including British, European and American – monopolised trade financing of imports and exports. They performed more than ordinary banking functions, acting as treasury agents for their governments, and controlling major Chinese revenues (Osterhammel, 1986). They issued their own banknotes without Chinese approval, which meant that the Chinese population was forced to provide large-scale interest-free loans (Hsü, 2000; Osterhammel, 1986). Whilst imperial powers extracted vast profits from China, when bankruptcy and financial instability took place (such as, during WWI), the banknotes became useless, and it was Chinese depositors who had to bear the losses (Hsü, 2000). In response, the Qing government established a private Chinese bank, today known as the Bank of China (Hsü, 2000).

(2) **Railways**: According to Hsü (2000), the competition among imperial powers (including Germany, Japan and Russia) to secure control over railways in China was one of the most obvious examples of economic imperialism. Several railways were in foreign property, and many Chinese lines were constructed with foreign loans, and thus they were not free from foreign influence or control.[4] In 1911, no less than 93% of railways were foreign dominated. Not to mention that imperial powers avoided Chinese taxes on the railways as they obtained them as concessions (Hsü, 2000; Osterhammel, 1986).

"Not a single phase of China's modern economy was immune to the encroachment of foreign capital, influence, and control", states Hsü (2000, p. 436), also stressing that the degree of imperial domination of Chinese economy was as wide as the modern sector of Chinese

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[4] Such practices may seem strangely familiar.

economy itself. While imperial powers laid down the foundations of capitalist mode of production in China – it was never their intention for China to become strong. Quite contrary, the interest of Western powers was to keep China politically and economically dependent and too weak to challenge their dominance to prevent any potential Chinese resistance (Hsü, 2000). For instance, in his policy statement, the British minister of China held that foreign control over certain institutions served to allow new technologies in China to be introduced "unknown to herself, and therefore, without provoking her suspicion", while also preventing "her acquisition of a fleet or her organisation of an army" (Foreign Office quoted in Hsü, 2000, p. 449).

These historical examples disrupt colonial notions embedded in modernisation theory, assuming that Western imperialism was beneficial and historically inevitable for the rise of modern China. In line with this, the award-winning German historian Jürgen Osterhammel (1986) argues that several grand theories, from modernisation to world system theory, are methodologically flawed and unable to grasp the nature and effect of imperialism as it operated in China (p. 309). Seeking to develop broader explanations for imperial impact, he adopts the Leninist notion of semi-colonialism and the concept of 'informal empire' in his proposed model (Osterhammel, 1986).

Finally, notwithstanding certain particularities in relation to historical events, such as the Japanese invasion, Zeller (2019) maintains that "semi-colonialism in China (…) shared much with the experiences of colonies and semi-colonies the world over" (p. 12). The notion of semi-colonialism, therefore, is useful to understand China's colonial past and its enduring effect in Chinese politics and society up until today. Any claim or assumption suggesting that China's rise primary had to do with the West reflects not only epistemological bias but also a methodologically flawed perspective that warrants critical re-examination.

1.6   The Boxer Uprising against Foreign Imperialism

Public anger over foreign imperialism was mounting, planting the seeds of a nation-wide movement triggering the birth of the republic (Hsü, 2000). Strong anti-imperialist sentiment was felt across the country, fuelled by half a century of humiliation, including not only wars, the subsequent unequal treaties and economic domination and hardships but also everyday discrimination and racism against the local Chinese population by foreigners, aggressive missionaries some of whom also run equational institutions, and the constant presence of imperial ministers influencing Chinese politics (Osterhammel, 1986; Hsü, 2000).

Christianity became a central source of anti-imperialism, as it was perceived as socially disruptive as well as a tool of foreign imperialism. It was in this strained atmosphere of major economic recession, widespread public anger over imperialism and resentment of Christian missionaries that the Boxer Uprising broke out in 1900. Today, the Boxer movement is considered an early, unorganised form of patriotic peasant uprising against foreign imperialism, having the right cause but the wrong approach (Hsü, 2000).

The word "boxers" was a name that foreigners gave to a Chinese secret society. In turn, the Boxers called Westerners 'hairy ones' and 'devils' (Hsü, 2000; Thoralf, 2008). In the late 19th, the strength of the Boxers increased triggered by the offence committed by German Catholic priest, who allegedly serially raped Chinese women, resulting an attempted murder by the Boxers (Driscoll, 2020). The Boxers became more daring and destroyed railways and telegraph lines representing imperial domination as they received support from the imperial government opposing foreign domination (Hsü, 2000).

Eventually, foreign imperial powers seized the Dagu forts to restore access to Beijing, and in response, the Chinese imperial government declared war on foreigners. The Eight-Nation-Alliance – a multinational military coalition consisting of soldiers from nations such as Britain, the US, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Russia and Japan – defeated China (Hsü, 2000; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025). The Boxer Uprising was concluded by the Boxer Protocol (see Appendix) signed between the Qing government and the Alliance (plus other European countries), which is regarded as yet another unequal treaty (Hsü, 2000; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019).

Several historians and sinologists highlight the violence committed by foreign imperialists and Catholic missionaries prior and during the uprising, including the raping of women and girls and the brutal execution of Chinese of various ages (Cohen, 1997; Preston, 2000; Driscoll, 2020). To conclude with the words of the British journalist George Lynch, who spoke up against the violence committed by Russian, French and German soldiers during the uprising, "there are things that I must not write, and that may not be printed in England, which would seem to show that this Western civilization of ours is merely a veneer over savagery (Lynch cited in Preston, 2000, p. 285).

CHAPTER 3: THE BIRTH OF 'THE OTHER': ANTI-IMPERIALIST NATIONALISM AND THE RISE OF CHINESE SOCIALIST MODERNITY

After the Boxer Uprising, the anti-Qing sentiment persisted as the state remained unable to protect its citizens and defend the honour of the country that diminished to a semi-colony (Hsü, 2000). Meanwhile, Western influence was rising, with nationalist movements in Europe, including the Revolutions of 1848 and the subsequent Italian and German national unification, leaving a lasting impression on Chinese people, who became inspired by the ideas of freedom, democracy, national independence and human rights (Hsü, 2000).

Given China's semicolonial history, however, nationalism in China was tied to anti-imperialism. This is in line with the arguments made by several thinkers in postcolonialism, who stress that nationalism was inherently linked to anti-colonial, anti-imperialist movements outside Europe (Said; 1994, Fanon, 1990; Chatterjee, 1993a &1993b; Gandhi, 1998).The idea that nationalism emerged in Europe and was then imitated by other countries, leaving other nations as mere consumers of a European-led modernity comes from the dominant view that places the West as the sole origin of nation-states and political modernity (Chatterjee in Bhambra, 2007). Gandhi (1998) states that nationalism in former colonised and imperialised regions should be seen as a reaction to a complex relationship between nationalism and imperialism. Therefore, it is argued that Sun Yat-Sen's revolutionary movement leading up to the establishment of the Republic in 1912, as well as the rise of the CPC should be understood within the context of China's imperial encounters.

1.7 The Three People's Principles: Nationalism, Democracy and Socialism

There were two main revolutionary movements in the early reform period: one led by Kang Youwei and another led by Sun Yat-Sen (Hsü, 2000). Sun organised a secret society called *Revive China Society*, whose headquarters was in Hong Kong (Hsü, 2000). This secret society was the origin of the Chinese Nationalist Party, the Kuomintang (KMT). Coming face to face with the realities of Western capitalism in England, and witnessing poverty, inequality and rising trend toward revolution, Sun recognised that despite their wealth and independence, European powers were plagued by the ills of capitalism (including capitalist exploitation, inequality, and labour unrest) (Hsü, 2000; Wielander, 2016).

It was his observations and his studies in social and political developments in England that led him to develop the third, social pillar of his revolution in order to prevent China encountering similar challenges (Hsü, 2000). Here was the foundation of the Three People's Principles which – carrying the imprint of his reading of European thinkers like Marx and Montesquieu – became his revolutionary philosophy: (1) People's National Consciousness (Nationalism), People's Rights (Democracy), and People's Livelihood (Socialism).

Fundamentally, the first principle, nationalism, aimed not only at overthrowing the Qing but also removing imperial oppression, similar to nationalist movements in former colonies and imperialised regions. Meanwhile, the last principle, people's livelihood, also known as socialism, emphasised the importance of equalising land and regulating capital to prevent negative impacts of capitalism and avoid the accumulation of wealth among a few (Wielander, 2016; Hsü, 2000). Accordingly, the revolution he envisioned was a three-in-one revolution: (1)

a nationalistic, anti-imperialist revolution, (2) a democratic revolution, (3) and a social revolution (Hsü, 2000; Wielander, 2016).

Consequently, while the origins of socialism are often associated with the founding of the CPC, it was already part of Sun's nationalist movement. While Scientific Socialism was still very much a product of Western intellectual tradition in the early 20th century, Chinese early reformers, including Sun, first began to contemplate socialism in the context of social reconstruction and modernisation. Additionally, while they wanted to understand and learn useful Western methods and tools, they considered not only the successes of the West, but also its failures in their attempt to find an optimal pathway for China (Hsü, 2000; Wielander, 2016). In his famous utopia called *The Book of Great Unity*, which was influenced by European notions of socialism, Kang laid out his vision of an ideal world and a comprehensive programme, central to which was the removal of nine barriers (nations, class, race, gender, family, laws, profession, species and suffering) (Wielander, 2016; Hsü, 2000). The notion of Great Unity (*datong,* 大同）itself is a traditional Chinese concept used to this day in Chinese official discourse which can be traced back to the *Book of Rites*, one of the Confucian Chinese classics.

Sun frequently drew parallels between the third principle on the one hand, and socialism and communism on the other. However, China expert Gerda Wielander (2016) stresses that Sun promoted social harmony over social struggle, as he interpreted socialism as a system that served the interest of the entire society, rather than just those of a single class. Hence, according to her, Sun's communism should be understood not in a Marxist sense, but as an interpretation of the traditional Chinese notion of *datong* (Great Unity) by Kang Yuewei – which is part of the socialist rhetoric today. Consequently, through its rejection of material profit and emphasis

on values such as social harmony, Confucianism was initially in line with socialism, in contrast to the years that followed, when it was seen as a barrier to becoming a 'modern' state – only for it to be reinstated as a central part of Chinese politics today (Wielander, 2016; Brady, 2012).

1.8 The New Cultural Movement: Chinese Anti-Imperialist Agitation

In the years that followed, China experienced a rapid increase in anti-imperialist nationalist attitudes. Chinese nationalism was not only fuelled by foreign imperialism and the drive to end unequal treaties – which created great anger and a sense of inferiority in the global landscape – but also a deep disillusionment in the West after the events of the First World War.

Western ideas of individualism, freedom and equality began to spread, shaking traditional Chinese social and cultural frameworks. Another major social change was the emergence of new social classes, one of which was a new ruling class (the bourgeois compadores) in response to China's move toward a capitalist society. They were businesspersons working closely with foreign imperialists, acting as agents of organisations engaged in political and economic exploitation.

The new Chinese intellectuals of the time sought to drastically transform Chinese society as they advocated for the critical, scientific re-examination Chinese cultural heritage through the lens of European standards. They rejected Confucianism in favour of European values, and were willing to accept Western science, democracy and culture as foundations for social reconstruction (Wang, 2009). However, the verdict of the Versailles treaty soon shattered the Chinese faith in Europe and the US into pieces, and the once appealing Western values of democracy and freedom, as well as the Wilsonian ideals of national self-determination lost

their meaning. After the First World War, Chinese industries experienced development and growth, and a new, politically conscious and educated working class emerged, which felt strongly about foreign imperialism (Hsü, 2000). This period is known as the Intellectual Revolution (1917-23), which ushered the New Cultural Movement (the 'Chinese Renaissance'), the highest point of which was the May Fourth Movement in 1919 (Hsü, 2000).

1.8.1 The Outbreak of Anti-imperialist Nationalism: The May Fourth Movement

On the 4th of May, thousands of students demonstrated against the decision of the Versailles Treaty in Beijing, which allowed the Japanese occupation of Chinese territories, despite China entering the war on the side of the Allies, declaring war on Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Hsü, 2000). Japan, also entering on the Allies' side, made several secret agreements with, among others, the UK, Russia and the US before the Conference so as to approve its Twenty-One Demands (a set of secret demands presented to China). The Versailles treaty approved the Japanese demands to secure territories in China previously occupied by Germany, as well as the most extreme demand that required the Chinese government to employ Japanese advisors in Chinese financial, military, political and policing affairs (Hsü, 2000).

The May Fourth Movement in 1919 was not only an outbreak of nationalism but also simultaneously an anti-imperialist political movement; it was an explosion of national outrage, a deep disillusionment with 'the West', and a strong disapproval of the warlord government of the time (Hsü, 2000). Mao Tse-Tung later described the New Cultural Movement as an "anti-imperialist and anti-feudal bourgeois-democratic revolution of China" driven by the joint union of working class, students, and the bourgeoisie (Hsü, 2000; p. 510).

The intellectual revolution was characterised by the inflow of Western knowledge and ideological structures, which led to two opposing views on social reconstruction: an evolutionary approach based on pragmatism (later accepted by the KMT) and a Marxist revolutionary approach (later adopted by the CPC (Hsü, 2000). The most prominent figures of the time were Chen Duxiu, Cai Yuanpei, Hu Shih and Li Dazhao, all of whom were leading participants in the May Fourth Movement and the New Culture Movement. Cai Yuanpei was the president of the National University of Beijing (Peita), where Li Dazhao, later co-founder of the CPC, served as the head of the university's library, whose assistant was none other than Mao Zedong himself (Hsü, 2000). Chen Duxiu, the other co-founder of the CPC, who founded the *New Youth*, a widely distributed journal at the time, in which he called for the destruction of old tradition and criticised Confucianism, seeing it as product of an agricultural, feudal society. While Chen and Li were the main advocates of Marxist revolutionary method, Hu Shih was a key advocate of Western-style liberalism pragmatic evolutionary method (Hsü, 2000).

Nevertheless, regardless of two opposing approaches, the central goal of the intellectual revolution was national salvation achieved by the selective acceptance of Western knowledge and ideological structures to create of a new, modern yet distinctly Chinese culture (Hsü, 2000). Additionally, it is important to note that some Chinese intellectuals identified Western materialism and cultural imperialism as central concerns and thus turned to traditional Chinese cultural and philosophical tradition as a way to counter Western cultural hegemony (Hsü, 2000). These are in line with Gandhi's (1998) observations, who writes that anti-colonial nationalist movements often seek to remain selective in their borrowing from Western ideology and intellectual tradition.

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The intellectual revolution, therefore, can be perceived as embodying the next stage of Chinese response to the Western impact ideologically and politically (Hsü, 2000). Meanwhile, its highest point on the 4th of May is regarded by the CPC and Chinese historians as a demarcation line separating the "Old Democracy" period from the "New Democracy" period, when socialism evolved into a powerful ideological tool in the political, cultural and social revolution, with the proletariat gaining consciousness and becoming an independent force (Hsü, 2000).

1.9   The Rise of Socialism in China as a Marker of Difference

1.9.1 From European Marxism to Lenin' s Theory of Imperialism

The May Fourth movement served as a major turning point in the Intellectual Revolution, representing a significant social and political shift in terms of relations to 'the West', which also lead to the expansion of the New Cultural Movement (Hsü, 2000). After the Versailles Treaty, those formerly embracing Western ideals of liberalism and democracy – without adequately concerning with the imperialist structures underpinning such ideals – now severed their ideological links with 'the West'. This included Chen Duxiu who became profoundly disillusioned and saw democracy as nothing more than a tool used by ruling class "to swindle mankind in order to maintain political power" (Meisner quoted in Hsü, 2000, p. 516). This is in line with the postcolonial critique that European ideas and notions of democracy and liberalism are embedded in the discourse of colonialism; they are presented as universally applicable and grounded in progress concealing colonial and imperial realities behind them (Gandhi, 1998; Bhambra, 2007; Said, 1979).

Ideas critical of the 'Western world' became attractive to many intellectuals, who felt betrayed by Western powers and did not wish to accept them as their oppressors and teachers at the same

time (Hsü, 2000). It was in this environment, also influenced by the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917, when socialism gained substantial recognition in China. The number of Marxist-Leninist study groups began to rise, and Li Dazhao's library came to be known as the 'Red Chamber' in Beijing. Socialism in China, therefore, "was appealing because it provided a practical philosophy with which to reject both the traditions of the Chinese past and the Western domination of the present" (Bernal and Meisner in Hsü, 2000, p. 514).

Lenin's theory of imperialism further enhanced both the psychological and intellectual appeal of socialism in China. Lenin linked capitalism with imperialism, arguing that imperialism represented the highest stage of capitalism, colonial and imperial powers had to seek overseas markets to sustain the capitalist order, which would unavoidably lead them into rivalry and conflict, resulting in their eventual downfall. Additionally, he emphasised that nationalist movements against imperialism in colonial and semi-colonial states like China are "progressive and revolutionary" and are "inevitable in the epoch of imperialism" (Lenin, 1916). Thus, the prevalence of Chinese socialism is due to the recognition of the inherent connection between capitalism and Western imperialism.

Lenin (1916) saw class struggle to be the most effective means of resistance against all forms of class oppression (bourgeois rule and imperial domination), since the struggle against imperial oppression, at the core, was class struggle. Consequently, in order to end capitalist exploitation and imperial domination, resistance had to be grounded in a wider socialist revolution led not only by the proletariat of one, single state, but as part of a global movement rooted in class solidarity. Marxism-Leninism offered comfort for and resonated with Chinese intellectuals on various levels, while it also provided China a place in world revolution as

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opposed to European Marxism that claimed that the global issues can only be solved by 'the West' (Hsü, 2000).

Li, being the first important convert to Marxism, celebrated the Bolshevik Revolution, edited an entire issue in the *New Youth* on Marxism and founded the New Tide Society followed by the Marxist Research Society (Hsü, 2000). Chen Duxiu became the second leading advocate of Marxism, also participating in demonstrations and organising two Marxist societies, which were forerunners of the CPC. In August 1921, the founding meeting of the CPC took place in Shanghai, where Chen and Li were named as co-founders of the CPC. This meeting is today referred to as the First National Congress of the CPC (Hsü, 2000).

Both Hsü (2000) and Wielander (2016) maintain that the attraction of socialism in China also lay in the fact that it represented a vision as yet unrealised, which would, in a way, not only put China ideologically ahead of 'the West', but also offered the chance to define it on its own terms. This is in line with the claims made by the Guyanese political activist and postcolonial academic Walter Rodney (2022) in *Decolonial Marxism*, who states that Scientific Socialism or Marxism gained appeal among many people in postcolonial nations because, it "offers itself to them as a weapon theory (…) a tool" which can be applied for the purposes of "dismantling the capitalist imperialist structure" (p. 131). Marxism could become prevalent among colonised and imperialised people due to their shared experience of colonialism and imperialism, and their common struggle for political self-determination and national independence (Rodney, 2022).

It was at this historical moment when socialism began to represent difference in China, or as Wielander (2016) puts it, 'Otherness' vis-á-vis 'the West'. "Socialism offered a great paradox

by being both Western and anti-Western insomuch that it derived from the Western intellectual tradition, but also provided a tool to critique the socio-economic order of the Western world and its impact on Asia" (Wielander, 2016, p. 143). It not only offered a chance to avoid the mistakes of Western capitalist societies, but it also represented an alternative to Western modernity taken as the sole standard of progress in the discourse of colonialism, thus holding the promise of building a new society that is modern, yet distinctively Chinese (Bhambra, 2007; Hall, 1992; Wielander, 2016; Lams, 2018).

However, Scientific Socialism was still very much a Western framework which was yet to be adapted to the Chinese context before it could become a marker of difference, for it is undeniable that socialism has Western European origins. European Marxism, as seen above, reinforces colonial paradigms and is loaded with hegemonic notions of development. Yet, it does not mean it is a purely European phenomenon that has no relevance outside Western Europe, stresses Rodney (2022). The adoption of socialism does not necessarily mean the adoption of an 'alien' ideology that has to be inherently paradoxical. Rather than treating it as universal framework that can be readily applied to different social, political and historical contexts, it should be conceived of as a revolutionary ideology which should be treated as an ongoing product requiring careful adaptation to a particular context.

As Rodney (2022) writes, "[i]t was the task of the Chinese to deal with that and to adapt it and to scrutinize it and see how it was applicable to their society. First and foremost, to be scientific, it meant having due regard for the specifics of Chinese historical and social development." (p. 143). This was the task – more precisely, the Sinicization of Marxism – that Mao Zedong undertook. While Chen Duxiu followed European Marxism, focusing on workers, Li Dazhao considered the distinct characteristics of Chinese historical and social development, and

highlighted the important revolutionary role of the peasantry, arguing that they constitute a substantial proportion of the population in semi-colonial China. His approach offered a more powerful alternative, and influenced the thinking of his assistant, Mao Zedong. After Li's execution by a warlord, it was Mao who put Li's ideas into practice and 'Sinicised' Marxism, that is, adapted Marxism to the Chinese context (Hsü, 2000; Wielander, 2016).

1.9.1.1   United by Anti-Imperialism: KMT-CPC Alliances

While tensions and conflicts between the CPC and the KMT were a common feature of the years that followed, the two parties also formed short-lived alliances on the basis of shared goals: anti-imperialism and anti-warlordism (Hsü, 2000). In the 1920s, Sun sought alliances with the Soviets, while Li Dazhao took the lead to enter the KMT after Sun made it possible for CPC members to enter the KMT. The National Revolutionary Army of the KMT launched the Northern Expedition (1926-28), a military campaign which – reinforced by Soviet military support and aided by workers and peasants mobilised by the CPC – managed to cast a staggering blow on foreign imperialism and successfully decreased warlordism in China (Hsü, 2000).

The CPC did not dissolve and formed a bloc within the KMT, and after Sun's death, not only did the tensions between nationalists and communists grew, but Stalin attempted to gain control in China and destroy the KMT from within. However, the CPC and the KMT eventually split against Stalin's will in 1927, having underestimated the KMT (Hsü, 2000). The struggle against imperialism once again united the country and resulted in a short-term yet successful military alliance between the Nationalists and Maoists during the Second-Sino Japanese War (1937-1945), also known as the 'Asian Holocaust', which resulted in over 3 million deaths and was marked by Japanese war crimes and crimes against humanity (Hsü, 2000).

However, the KMT-led government ignored the interest of the working class and the peasants, and thus failed to implement effective social and economic reforms. Additionally, it was significantly weakened after the Second World War, which resulted in incalculable civilian losses, economic hardships, and widespread disillusionment. Mao, taking advantage of general discontent, challenged the Nationalist government by addressing to the needs of the peasants and harnessing nationalist imperialist sentiments in rural areas. These, again, demonstrate that similarly to postcolonial nations, where nationalism and socialism converged in the pursuit of anti-imperialist resistance.

1.9.2 Mao Zedong's Rise and Road to Independence

After the 1927 KMT-CPC split, the CPC also split into two fractions: the Central Politburo under direct Soviet influence based in Shanghai, and Mao Zedong-led fraction based in the rural areas of Hunan and Jiangxi. While the Politburo followed Stalin's policies and the Soviet-style strategy in Chinese cities, Mao focused on peasant organisation in the countryside. After his first organised rural uprisings suffered defeat by the Nationalist government, Mao lost his Politburo membership and began to operate independently outside the CPC jurisdiction in rural areas, where he began to build a self-reliant base without Soviet and central CPC support (Hsü, 2000).

There were significant differences between Bolsheviks and Maoists. Bolsheviks were highly critical of Mao's focus on peasant mobilisation, deeming his peasant mentality backward. The Russian-influenced Politburo did not approve of Mao's activities, dismissing the effectiveness of his 'unorthodox' revolutionary tactic of guerrillaism (Hsü, 2000). Additionally, while the Politburo later rejected collaboration with the Nationalists to fight against Japan, Mao was

willing to form a coalition army). As Mao's revolution started to gain prominence in rural areas, the Politburo struggled due to Nationalist invasions while also facing financial challenges due to its dependence on Soviet support (Hsü, 2000).

Taking advantage of the desperation of the Politburo, Mao invited Politburo members and Bolsheviks to participate in the First All-China Congress (1931), the forerunner of the National People's Congress of the PRC. While the Bolsheviks arrived with the intention of openly criticising the Maoist approach and suppressing Mao's movement with ease – to their dismay – Maoists dominated the Congress and secured the majority of votes, electing Mao as the Chairman of the Central Executive Committee (Hsü, 2000). Later, during the Second World War, Sino-Soviet relations began to rapidly deteriorate, exacerbated by the major differences between Maoists and Bolsheviks and secret pacts between the Soviet Union and Japan (Hsü, 2000, p. 603).

Mao, however, had to fight with the Nationalist government too. During the Long March (1934-35), Chinese communists took a long journey to escape Nationalist encirclement, resulting in incalculable human losses. However, it also became a symbol of Communist resistance, and established Mao's dominance within the CPC, who soon became the de facto leader, also winning absolute control over the Red Army (Hsü, 2000).

1.9.3 The 'Sinification' of Marxism: Maoism, Sino-Soviet split and Third-Worldism

Mao's experience in Yan'an during the period of wartime resistance (1937-45) was fundamental to the development of Maoism and the success of his revolution in the civil war,

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resulting in the establishment of the PRC in 1949. It was in Yan'an, then serving as the CPC base, where Mao gave shape to his re-interpretation of Marxism, indigenously adapting the universalist Marxist-Leninist doctrines to the particular historical conditions of China and its revolutionary experience. This involved the refining of his revolutionary anti-imperialist nationalism and Mass Line methodology, which formed the two central tenets of Maoism (Hsü, 2000). In line with his Mass Line methodology, Mao prioritised the needs of the peasantry through land reforms and rent reduction, while simultaneously mobilising peasants as key participants in the economic, political, and military institutions in the revolutionary base. His placing of the peasantry at the core of his theoretical thinking can be seen as an indispensable response to the specific Chinese social experiences and conditions, the outcome of which was a significant shift away from not only the (Western) European model but also the Soviet model (Hsü, 2000; Wielander, 2016).

Mao framed the struggle of the CPC against imperialism, aligning it with socialist principles of anti-imperialism and international solidarity against colonial and imperial powers. For instance, in the book chapter *Chinese Revolution* produced in Yan'an, Mao states that "[s]ince the nature of present-day Chinese society is colonial, semi-colonial and semi-feudal, (…) the chief targets or enemies at this stage of the Chinese revolution (…) are imperialism and feudalism, the bourgeoisie of the imperialist countries and the landlord class of our country. For it is these two that are the chief oppressors, the chief obstacles to the progress of Chinese society at the present stage" (Mao, 1939). These ideas were further developed in his book *On the New Democracy*, in which he laid down the theoretical foundations of his revolutionary movement (Mao, 1940). It was, as Hsü (2000) puts it, a "creative adaptation of Marxism-Leninism to the Chinese situation during the critical transition from semicolonialism and semifeudalism to socialism" (p. 646).

However, socialist modernisation, as one of the most prominent Chinese intellectuals Wang Hui (2007) argues, was not only about a project emphasising a distinct economic developmental model, but also about practicing counter-hegemony aimed at challenging ideological and cultural dominance. The CPC seeks not only to transform "a China that is politically oppressed and economically exploited into a China that is politically free and economically prosperous" but also to build a new Chinese national culture, writes Mao (1940). While he saw the selective acceptance of Western intellectual tradition and culture once useful, he argued that the New Cultural Movement was led by the bourgeoise and the Chinese culture was part of capitalist cultural revolution (Mao, 1940; Hsü, 2000). Indeed, it is also stressed by Wielander (2016) that the reformist socialists during the New Cultural Movement were middle-class intellectuals. By contrast, Mao (1940) proclaims that the culture of New Democracy is a proletarian-led culture of the masses, which should be scientific, national and anti-imperialist. The new democratic culture "opposes imperialist oppression and upholds the dignity and independence of the Chinese nation. It belongs to our own nation and bears our own national characteristics" (Mao, 1940).

Mao sought to avoid dependence on the Soviet Union, and denied the universal applicability of the Soviet path, reducing it to a European variety of Marxism. His re-interpretation of socialism was distinct from that of the Soviet, considering China's semifeudal and semicolonial period. He set out three developmental stages for China, which first included advancing from semifeudal and semicolonial period to the stage of New Democracy (a transitional period) before entering the stage of socialism instead of advancing from the capitalist stage directly to the socialist stage in accordance with the European Marxist model of development. Mao held that only the Chinese people have objective understanding of the Chinese conditions, not the

Soviets, arguing that the Chinese revolution can only succeed if it led by a Chinese person who understands the Sinicization of Marxism (Hsü, 2000). Stalin and Molotov dismissed Mao's revolution, stating that Chinese Communists were not real Communists but "radish Communists", that is, only red on the outside but white inside (Hsü, 2000, pp. 603, 672).

Meanwhile, after the Second World War, China emerged from its semicolonial status to become one of the leading powers, securing a permanent seat at the UN Security Council alongside the Soviet Union and the US, the two superpowers, France and the UK. By the 1950s, tensions between China and the Soviet Union started to rapidly deteriorate within the new international order marked by the division between the Western blocks and the Eastern blocks, eventually giving way to the Sino-Soviet split in the second decade of the PRC. Although victors of the war, European colonial powers lost much of their prestige, with decolonial national liberation movements sweeping across former colonies in Africa and Asia, such as India, Burma (Myanmar), Indonesia and Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia) (Hsü, 2000).

The success of Mao's revolution and national liberation movements in former colonies created a rupture in the global world order dominated by the two hegemonic superpowers, which later inspired Eastern European countries' (such as Poland) assertion of distinct paths to socialism. Additionally, they led Mao to claim that the Chinese revolution has significance not only in China and Asia but for the revolutions in colonial and semi-colonial countries (Hsü, 2000; Wielander, 2016; Wang, 2009). There were deliberate attempts on the Kremlin's part to minimise Mao's contributions and undermine his authority on the subject of decolonial and world revolution, with Soviet writers denying the existence of an alternative path of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, claiming that there was only one road to be followed by Asian countries, and it was the road laid down by Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism (Hsü, 2000).

From 1949, the PRC was unwaveringly supportive of decolonial struggles and national liberation movements in the Third World countries, to the extent that it clashed with the US, the largest military power in Vietnam and Korea (Wang, 2009; Hsü, 2000). At the Trade Union Conference of Asian and Australasian Countries in Beijing (1949), Liu Shaoqi delivered a speech including the following: "The road taken by the Chinese people in defeating imperialism and in founding the Chinese People's Republic is the road that should be taken by the peoples of many colonial and semi-colonial countries their fight for national independence and people's democracy (…) *This road is the road of Mao Tse-tung"* (Brigdham et al. in Hsü, 2000, pp. 675-676). Furthermore, then Head of the CPC Central Propaganda Department Lu Dingyi stated the following in 1951 at the 30th anniversary of the founding of the CPC:

"Mao Tse-tung's theory of the Chinese revolution is a new development of Marxism-Leninism in the revolutions of the colonial and semi-colonial countries and especially in the Chinese revolution (…) The classic type of revolution in imperialist countries is the October Revolution. *The classic type* of *revolution in colonial and semi-colonial countries is the Chinese revolution"* (Brigdham et al. in Hsü, 2000, p. 676). Soon after, Chen Boda, the chief interpreter of Maoism (or Mao Zedong Thought) and Deputy Director of the Propaganda Department held that "the new Marxist conclusion arrived at in colonial and semi-colonial countries", with Chinese journals also successfully predicting that the China of that day was the following day of several Asian semi-colonies and colonies (Brigdham et al. in Hsü, 2000, p. 676).

Mao sought to make China the leader of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist nationalist movements in Africa and Asia, where decolonisation was underway. For instance, at the 1955

Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Mao – being one of the main organisers – upheld African-Asian anti-imperialist, anti-colonial nationalisms while fiercely denouncing Western (including Soviet) imperial and colonial domination. He sought to present China as a model to former Asian colonial and semi-colonial nations, by emphasising the theme of peaceful coexistence and mutual benefit – a theme featuring the rhetoric of China's foreign policy today (Hsü, 2000). Mao's "Three Worlds Theory" (Maoism-Third Worldism) which can thus be seen as a response to these developments, placed the Third World not only as a political subject challenging the two hegemonic superpowers, but it also sought to dismantle the cultural hegemony, the ideological dominance of Western powers and the Soviet Union through theoretical scrutiny and political dispute (Wang, 2009).

Needless to say, Mao's utopia of a socialist paradise stood in sharp contrast to the actual social realities at the time, largely limited to the extensively administered state-led propaganda (Wielander, 2016). Mao's policies were shaped by his utopistic visions, resulting in the substantial disasters of the Great Leap Forward. By developing the Rectification Movement (a vast ideological movement aimed at instilling a 'correct' interpretation of Scientific Socialism through thought reform and ideological indoctrination, also known as "brainwashing", and later launching the Cultural Revolution, Mao sought to avoid the enduring purge characterising the Soviet experience.

Yet, these caused even more extensive political repression and the hardening of the party-state, inevitably leading to the erosion of depoliticization and the disillusionment of Chinese people in the government (Wang, 2009; Hsü, 2000). Nonetheless, socialism under Mao has turned into something 'Other', a marker of difference vis-á-vis 'the West', representing a distinct way of

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politics and life, which allowed for the projection of dreams of social realities (Wielander, 2016).

CHAPTER 4: THE POLITICS OF THE 'OTHER': CHINESE SOFT POWER AND (POST)COLONIAL LEGACIES

The era following Mao's death, the CPC decidedly moved away from Maoism in the attempt to distance itself from Mao's politics and the violence, atrocities, and chaos of the Cultural Revolution (Brady, 2012; Wang, 2009). Deng Xiaoping's 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics' represents the CPC's deliberate departure from Maoism, while it also served as an instrument for preparing China's integration into global capitalism (Wielander, 2017). Clearly, since Deng's 'reform and opening up', the Chinese state has taken a U-turn, a completely different approach to modernisation, fully embracing capitalist methods (Brady, 2012; Wielander, 2016).

As Wang (2009) states, over the last five decades, "China has transformed itself from a planned economy to a market society, from a headquarters of world revolution to a thriving center of capitalist activity, from a Third World anti-imperialist nation to one of imperialism's "strategic partners"" (p. 5). However, despite China's transformation to the centre of capitalist production, Marxism is still the official ideology of the CPC up until today, with Deng's 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics' presented as "the newest result of the Sinification of Marxism" (Xi, 2014). What has changed since Mao is the idea that China is 'still on its way' of achieving socialism, and in this process, the use of capitalist methods is allowed (Wielander, 2016).

1.10 The Chinese Dream: An Alternative Modernity

Early in his Presidency, General Secretary Xi Jinping held a speech on the topic of enhancing China's cultural soft power at the 12th Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Politburo in 2013, which has been included in the first volume of *The Governance of China*, one of his publications. He opened his speech by stressing the importance of strengthening China's cultural soft power to realise the 'Chinese Dream of great rejuvenation' (Xi, 2014). During his speech, he stated the following:

"To strengthen our cultural soft power, we should disseminate the values of modern China. Modern Chinese values are also those of socialism with Chinese Characteristics, representing advanced Chinese culture. China has blazed a successful socialist path featuring Chinese characteristics (…) More work should be done to refine and explain our ideas, and extend the platform for overseas publicity[5], so as to make our culture known through international communication and dissemination" (Xi, 2014, p. 179).

The term Chinese Dream (*zhongguo meng*, 中国梦）was introduced by Xi back in 2012, and it was under the umbrella of this phrase that he proposed various international initiatives, such as the One Belt One Road programme (the 21st century Silk Road) based on 'win-win cooperation' (*hezuo gongying,* 合作共赢) (Zhao, 2016; Lams, 2018). Ever since, the Chinese

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[5] The term "publicity" in Chinese is *xuan chuan* (宣传), which can also be translated as "propaganda."

Dream has become a key slogan within the CPC's rhetoric (Wielander, 2016; Zhao, 2016). In a recent report of his delivered to the 20th National Congress of the CPC in 2022, Xi (2023) states that the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will be realised "through a Chinese path to modernisation", which is a "socialist modernisation". In challenging the Western model, Xi Jinping has advocated for particularistic Chinese answers to problems unique to the Chinese context (Lams, 2018).

While Chinese socialist modernisation "contains elements that are common to the modernization processes of all countries (…) it is more characterised by features that are unique to the Chinese context", written in the report to the 20th Party Congress (Xi, 2023). Accordingly, as part of the project of resisting the dominant view of modernity modelled on the Western experience, Chinese modernisation is presented as responding to the unique characteristics of Chinese historical and social conditions similar to the Mao-era, with the path of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics representing the correct path towards realising this alternative modernity now referred to as the 'Chinese Dream' (Wielander, 2016). "To realize the Chinese Dream, we must adhere to the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics", and "carry forward the Chinese spirit" by "us[ing] the national spirit of patriotism and spirit of the times centered on reform and innovation to bring forth the vigor and vitality of the whole nation", stated Xi Jinping (2014, [no pagination]).

Just like under Mao, socialism is framed as a viable alternative model to Western capitalism, especially targeting former colonial and semi-colonial Nation-States in Africa, Asia, Lain America and the Middle East, with the CPC also taking a strong stance against colonialism and imperialism. In his report delivered to the 20th Party Congress in 2022, Xi (2023) held that Chinese modernization "is the modernization of peaceful development" and "harmony between

humanity and nature" , adding that in pursuing modernisation, "China will not tread the old path of war, colonization, and plunder taken by some countries. That brutal and blood-stained path of enrichment at the expense of others caused great suffering for the people of developing countries. We will stand firmly on the right side of history and on the side of human progress" (Xi, 2023).

Additionally, in his speech to the Tanzanian community back in March 2013, Xi (2014) stresses the close ties between African nations and China, with notions like cooperation, harmony, unity and friendship frequently emerging. He also refers to similar historical experiences, while maintaining that Africa's independence, dignity and is unique developmental path should be respected by all countries. At the end of the speech, the notion of the 'Chinese Dream' appears alongside the 'African Dream', with the conclusion that the two countries should support one another to achieve their respective dreams and work together to realise the 'global dream' (Xi, 2014). Similarly, at the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum in June 2014, he even made a reference to the Bandung Conference, where Mao sought to represent China as the model for former colonial and semi-colonial Nation-States by voicing his support of national anti-colonial liberation movements in Africa and Asia. President Xi (2014) not only reaffirmed China's close friendship with African and Arab states, but also called for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

Consequently, in many respects, one could argue that China's public diplomacy efforts today are a continuation and development of Mao's foreign policy strategy, which sought to position China as the leader of colonial and semi-colonial countries and present the Chinese path as an alternative. Mao aimed at challenging global hegemonies by promoting mutual benefit, peaceful coexistence and support for anti-colonial and anti-imperialist national liberation

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movements through the framework of his Three World's Theory.' In similar vein, Xi's seeks to challenge the Western developmental model and unite so-called 'developing' countries as a way to counter-balance Western hegemony, also testified by several articles published by Qiushi (lit. translation 'seeking truth'), the official journal of the CPC (Lams, 2018).

This is a relationship that Western academic discourse focusing on Chinese politics and public diplomacy frequently, if not entirely, ignores. For instance, Matt Schrader's (2020) proposed 'Friends and Enemies: A Framework for Understanding Chinese Political Interference in Democratic Countries" bypasses such connection. The lack of engagement with postcolonial analysis and Chinese modern history results not only in a text that reinforces old colonial hierarchies through it discourse but also an overly simplistic analysis due to a reductionist framework which ends up failing to adequately meet its own objective.

In retrospect, Chinese media and academic discourse seems to echo the postcolonial critique of Western modernity. For instance, an article published in Qiushi maintains that "although modernization theory has its origins in the West, modernization by no means is equal to Westernisation and there has never been one-size-fits-all approach to modernization (Xinhua, 2022). Moreover, it does not shy away from making a linkage between Western modernity and capitalism on the one hand, and imperialism and colonialism on the other, similarly to scholars and thinkers in postcolonial studies who examine the ways in which the idea of modernity was constructed in a historical context (Bhambra, 2007): "Although the modernization of the West has created unprecedented material wealth, its path of aggression, colonization and expansion is not viable. This path has also led to problems including a widening wealth gap, waste of resources and environmental damage" (Xinhua, 2022).

The article describes China's encounter with foreign imperialism, and its search for the possibility of modernisation without Westernisation, making the claim that rise of China to the position of the world's second largest demonstrates just that, hence serving as an example and a powerful alternative. It makes its point by referring to a Sudanese journalist Mustafa Yahya, known for translating Chinese news into Arabic, stating that Chinese modernisation provides developing countries "a new choice for achieving modernization, based on their own conditions and (…) international cooperation, rather than plunder, war and blood" (Xinhua, 2022). Consequently, it is argued that the article challenges the colonial discourse's dominant modernity narrative, which has taken the West as the universal model of progress and development (Hall, 1992, Gandhi, 1998; Bhambra, 2007).

Similar to the early reform years is linked with Confucian notions and ideals, with socialist modernisation is once described as being about the creation of a 'harmonious' (hexie, 和谐) and 'moderately prosperous society' (*xiaokang shehui*, 小康社会). These notions derive from *The Book of Rites*, the old source that Kang Youwei once also drew on (Wielander, 2016; Brady, 2012). The Chinese term *xiaokang* was first introduced into the official discourse of the CPC by Deng Xiaoping, who used the notion to define a particular stage of development in China's path to socialism through market-oriented reforms (Wielander, 2016). It began to gain prominence during Hu Jintao's presidency, who used this term when referring to economic reforms aimed at equalising distribution of wealth (Brady, 2012).

The Confucian term 'harmony' was also integrated into the socialist ideology under Hu Jintao, with the idea of building a 'harmonious socialist society' first being raised during the 6th Session of the CPC Central Committee in 2006. The concept of a 'harmonious society' became a defining feature of Hu's ideological doctrine of Scientific Outlook on Development, aimed

at building a harmonious socialist society through sustainable growth and egalitarian wealth distribution. The phrase 'harmonious socialist society' was added into the Party Constitution at the 17th Party Congress in 2007 (Brady, 2012). As Hu Jintao's (2007) report states at the 17th Congress, "[t]o thoroughly apply the Scientific Outlook on Development, we must work energetically to build a harmonious socialist society."

Social harmony is an essential attribute of socialism with Chinese characteristics" which is "the Party's invaluable political and intellectual asset", serving as a guide for China's development and progress (Hu, 2007). Taking the developmental path of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics means focusing on economic development and proceeding with Deng's reform and opening up. While reform and opening up is taken as the only way to achieving national rejuvenation and developing China, the report maintains that "only socialism can save China" (Hu, 2007). It also sets the goal of continuing the work of building a 'moderately prosperous society' and advancing socialist modernisation through peaceful, harmonious and sustainable development (including the issue of environmental sustainability).

The CPC has been actively engaged in a careful of balancing of socialist ideas with Confucianism within its rhetoric, with the anti-imperialist Leninist character still present (Brady, 2012; Lams, 2018; Wang, 2009). Today, the central ideological underpinnings of the Chinese state today (as listed in many of Xi's own speeches and reports) are Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, 'The Three Represents' (from Jiang Zemin's legacy), 'Scientific Outlook on Development' (from Hu Jintao), and more recently, Xi Jinping Thought – elevating Xi to the ranks of Mao (Lams, 2018; Zheng, 2023; Brady, 2012; Wielander, 2016). By presenting a version of socialism that is seemingly unified and deeply embedded in culture and history, the CPC seeks to further 'Sinicise' Marxism as well as build

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social compliance by neutralising ideological conflicts (Lams, 2018). It was also at the 17th Party Congress when the notion of 'soft power' (*ruǎn shílì,* 文化软实力) first publicly appeared, with Hu Jintao mentioning the importance of strengthening China's 'cultural soft power' abroad, thus opening a new, intentional dimension of his ideology (Repnikova, 2022; Zhao, 2016; Lams, 2018):

> "In the present era, culture has become a more and more important source of national cohesion and (…) a factor of growing significance in the competition in overall national strength (…) We must keep to the orientation of advanced socialist culture, bring about a new upsurge in socialist cultural development (…) and enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country" (Hu, 2007).

The notion of soft power appeared once again at the Conclusion of the 6th Plenary Session later in 2011, which focused on China's cultural reform and development, with Hu Jintao introducing the "guideline for cultural development" to "strengthen national cultural soft power" (Lams, 2018; The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, 2011; *translation*). Since then, President Xi Jinping has regularly reaffirmed its significance in China's foreign policy and diplomacy, including during the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee held in 2013, the 19th National Congress in 2017, and a number of National Propaganda and Ideology Conferences (Repnikova, 2022).

"Chinese excellent traditional culture (…) is our most profound cultural soft power" maintained Xi during one of his speeches from 2013, adding that "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics is rooted in the soil of Chinese culture" (Creemers, 2014). More recently during the National Propaganda, Ideology and Culture Work Conference in 2023, President Xi reiterated the same ideas and even put forward a new ideology called 'Xi Jinping Thought on

Culture', the latest addition to the political doctrine of 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era' introduced in 2018 (Bandurski, 2018; Zheng, 2023; People's Daily, 2024).

However, the 17th Central Committee Paper not only emphasised the importance of deepening cultural reform and promoting the development of socialist culture, but it is the official document in which the concept of discourse power (*huayu quan*, 话语权）first appears, and it does so in the context of promoting Chinese culture globally (The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, 2011, *translation*). Within one paragraph, the paper states that the Committee set out the goal of "strengthening Chinese culture's inspiration and influence" by "[d]eveloping foreign cultural exchange through many channels", "stimulating mutual cultural learning", and "[i]nnovating foreign propaganda measures" which involves "strengthening international discourse power.". It also mentions in plain language the boosting of the establishment of Confucius Institutes and other Chinese cultural centres as part of this effort (The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, 2011, *translation*).

Accordingly, *huayu quan* is conceptualised as an extension of national cultural soft power in China (Lams, 2018). This is also evidenced by numerous articles and official documents. For example, in an article published by the Chinese Political Science Review, Zhao Kejin (2016) maintains that "[f]or President Xi and his colleagues, discourse power is regarded not only as an important part of the soft power of China, but also as a key indicator for realizing the Chinese Dream" (p. 549). Clearly, since Hu Jintao, culture has become commodified as China's export product, and the global dissemination of Chinese discourse has also intensified (Lams, 2018).

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Today, what represents a greatest shift within the approach of the CPC is a renewed emphasis on culture within the socialist project. The CPC's embrace of Chinese traditional thought and culture stand in sharp contrast to the history of the CPC and its early approach to modernisation, considering that the Party emerged out of the May Fourth Movement with the slogan of 'Smash Confucianism', when Chinese tradition was seen socialist reformers as a barrier to becoming a modern state (Brady, 2012). The Chinese socialist project of the present is heavily shaped by cultural nationalism, with socialism and socialist modernisation defined in culturally sensitive terms, be it peaceful development', 'moderately prosperous society' or 'harmonious society' (Wielander, 2016). This shift can be described as a "cultural nationalistic turn" within the Chinese socialist project (Perry in Lams, 2018, p. 402).

However, these developments can be explained by China's semi-colonial experience. As mentioned above, nationalism has been a central to anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements across the globe, which also defined Chinese modern history, including the history of the CPC. Said (1994) maintains in the context of anti-colonial nationalist movements that along with militant resistance movements in the 19th century, there was also significant investments in cultural resistance almost everywhere which were characterised by cultural particularism. According to Said (1994), in the attempt to assert civilisational difference, postcolonial nations are prone to align themselves with a pure rejection of imperial cultures. This is in line with postcolonial thinker Franz Fanon's argument in *The Wretched from the Earth*, in which he argues that national liberation movements in postcolonial nations are also cultural projects; they are means of "cultural self-differentiation", a mode of symbolic resistance against the claims of "Western civilisation" (Gandhi, 1998, p. 20).

The developmental path of 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics' and the assertion of cultural alterity within the Party's rhetoric aligns with a broader postcolonial project of symbolic and cultural resistance against the claims of Western modernity and, more broadly, Western cultural hegemony. In exploring the meanings of soft power within the Chinese context through a postcolonial lens, the following section demonstrates that the mechanisms of Chinese cultural soft power should be conceptualised as technique apparatuses – means of cultural and discursive resistance – against Western hegemonic structures.

1.11 Challenging Western Cultural Hegemony: Discourse Power/Right to Speak

While numerous papers have been written on Chinese soft power within the Western scholarship (Repnikova, 2022; Brady, 2012; Walker, 2016; Walker, 2018; Nye, 2012), there has been less attention to the notion of discourse power (*huayu quan,* 话语权*)* even though it is a highly prevalent concept within Chinese discourse. To illustrate its relevance in numbers, a single search for '话语权' in the Chinese academic database (CNKI) produces nearly 36 000 results, including around 23 500 journal articles. It will be demonstrated that the two notions are mutually interconnected and are both central to understanding Chinese politics and public diplomacy strategy. First, let us briefly look at the concept of soft power.

The notion soft power was coined by US official and academic Joseph Nye in *Bound to Lead* published in 1990 at the end of the Cold War (Nye, 1991; Repnikova, 2022). In this book, seeing the trends of the time, he claims that the nature of power has changed, the focus shifting from coercive measures and the use of military force which he associated with earlier periods before the Cold War. He makes a distinction between hard power (based on coercion) and soft

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power, which is a non-coercive means of exercising power through manipulation. Soft power is when "one country gets other countries to want what it wants", he writes, in contrast to hard power, which is about "ordering others to do what it wants" (Nye, 1990, p. 166). While hard power relies on physical force, soft power draws on attraction in comparison (Nye, 2004). He perceives soft power as deriving from a country's culture, political values and foreign policy, also associating it with knowledge, information, and more abstract ideological strategies. American culture and values, according to Nye (1990) is a key instrument of soft power of the US.

The term has since travelled to China, as seen above, first emerging in an official document under Hu Jintao in 2007. Since then, the concept has become widespread in China and has been invoked countless times by journalists, public officials, and academics. Xi's main visions on soft power and propaganda were disclosed early in 2013 at the National Propaganda and Ideological Work Conference, when he stressed the importance of having boosting national soft power in light of the struggle in international and cultural spheres."[W]e must have both hard power and soft power, we must both realistically do central work well and provide a firm material basis for ideological work well", stated Xi (2014, [no pagination]).

As part of the project of realising the Chinese Dream, he directed journalists and media organisations to boost the construction of international communications capacity" and strengthening the country's "discourse power internationally" so as to "tell China's story well" (Lams, 2018; Repnikova, 2022; Creemers, 2014; China Media Project, 2021). "Western countries see our country's development and expansion as a challenge to their value[s] (…), systems and models", also mentioning the issue of the 'China Threat Theory' (*zhōngguó wēixié*

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lùn, 中国威胁论), a common Chinese phrase which nowadays refers to dominant narratives framing China as a major threat to 'Western liberal democracies'.

In simple terms, the CPC's discourse power is designed to counter the narratives of the China Threat Theory, and it is part of the effort to advance an alternative model vis-á-vis the Western by presenting the developmental path of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics as 'peaceful', 'harmonious', and based on mutual (win-win) cooperation (Zhao, 2016). Xi also added that "Western major media control global public opinion" (Creemers, 2014), and it is in response to such observations that he mentions the notion of '*huayu quan*' (discourse power):

> "This problem must be resolved with great efforts. We must strive to move international communications capacity construction forward, innovate foreign propaganda methods, strengthen discourse system construction, strive to forge new concepts, new categories and new expressions that circulate between China and the outside world, tell China's story well, disseminate China's voice well, and strengthen our discourse power internationally" (Creemers, 2014).

The same ideas were reflected in a more recent report from February 2023, which refers to a speech delivered by Vice President of China Foreign Affairs University Professor Sun. She also highlighted the importance of improving the country's discourse power in light of the 'China Threat Theory' and the growing battle over narratives among nations, stressing that the influence of a major power is not only reflected in economic and military spheres but also in its soft power projection capabilities, with discourse serving as a central dimension of international competition.

"A great power can only become a true global power when it is able to handle both hard and soft power effectively" (Sun, 2023, *own translation*). Likewise, at the National Propaganda, Ideology and Cultural Work Conference held in October 2023, Xi held that the improvement

of national cultural soft power alongside hard power is crucial for a country's growth, once again reiterating the importance of enhancing national discourse power that matches China's national strength and status in the world (People's Daily, 2024). So, how is the term '*huayu quan* (话语权) defined in the Chinese context?

Beijing Foreign Studies University Professor Zhang (2017) explains in his journal article republished by the State Council Information Office that national discourse power relates to the country's capability to exercise power through discourse; it is a type of power such as military and economic power (Zhang, 2017). Similar ideas are expressed in an article written by Lu Wei (2010) who then served as vice-director of Xinhua News Agency and also as director of Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC). He highlights the relationship between soft power and discourse power while he defines '*huayu'* in a theoretical sense rooted in poststructuralist/postmodern discourse theory.

> "Discourse power and information security have become important symbols of economic soft power and even national soft power (…) The word "discourse" [is] originated in cultural linguistics long ago, [and] it refers to the exchange of meanings between a speaker and a recipient by means of language and other such symbols (…) Once "discourse" is formed, it communicates specific value views, there are specific norms, and specific knowledge systems are built" (Lu, 2010).

Explicit links between postmodernism/poststructuralism and the notion *huayu quan* are made in Zhang's article. In referring to Michel Foucault and his lecture 'The Order of Discourse' held in 1970, Zhang (2017) explains that *huayu quan* is a loanword translated originally from the French 'pouvoir du discours'. In the Chinese context, the two entirely different words 权力 (power) and 权利 (right) are homophones in Mandarin Chinese, that is, they are both pronounced as '*quánlì*' and can be shortened for '*quán*' (Zhang, 2017). Therefore, the word "*quán*" (权) in *huayu quán* carries a double meaning, one of 'right', as in word 'human rights'

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(*rénquán,* 人权）， and one of 'power', such as in "soft power' (软实力, *ruǎn shílì)*, corresponding to 'pouvoir du discours', the Foucauldian paradigm of knowledge, power and discourse (Zhang, 2017; Lu, 2010). Accordingly, the Chinese term *huayu quan* can be translated into 'discourse power', 'right to speak' or less commonly 'right to discourse' in English depending on the context within which they appear (Zhao, 2016; Zhang, 2017; Lams, 2018; Lu, 2016).

The notion of *huayu quán* can thus denote the issue of access to discourse when interpreted as 'right to discourse' or 'right to speak'; it can refer to idea that a country's 'voice' has the right to be heard, and for it to be heard, its 'speech' or 'discourse' has to be secured and enhanced (Lu, 2010). For Lu (2010) *huayu quán* can be described as "the influence of a country's "speech" in the world", stating that "Western developed countries rely on their economic, military, scientific, and technological superiority, to emerge (…) [as the] "speaker" at public occasions at every turn, meaning that Western discourse structures have become global "prevalent discourse" (Lu, 2010). He claims that the existing global order of discourse is not fair, as the flow of information is dominated by only a few countries. What often lies behind the dominance of Western discourse is "latent discursive hegemony, depriving other countries of the 'right to speak'"", Lu maintains (2010). In line with his arguments, Zhang (2017) claims that China has less trouble with accessing discourse than with shaping and influencing dominant discourse, which is why it urgently needs to strengthen its discourse power.

What becomes evident from these examples is that behind Chinese propaganda efforts, the CPC, Chinese academics, journalists and public officials have a more nuanced theoretical awareness and understanding on the technique apparatuses of Western domination than the vast majority of the experts and scholars in the Western academia who focus on analysing

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Chinese propaganda and soft power initiatives. The understanding of propaganda in China goes beyond its typical, everyday definitions; the CPC not only works with Foucault's notions but directly applies Foucault's discourse theory to its soft power efforts both at home and abroad, recognising the inherent relationship between knowledge and power as well as the hierarchical relationship among systems of knowledges. However, while the term *huayu quán* is rooted in poststructuralist/postmodern discourse theory, Chinese discourse echoes the arguments of postcolonial critics. For example, Xi Jinping's claim that "Western countries export their value systems and institutional models everywhere", adding that they also use propaganda, only it is more subtle and invisible resonates with the ways in which postcolonial critics perceive Western ideological domination (Creemers, 2014).

Moreover, the idea that the current hegemonic structures prevent other countries outside 'the West' from speaking echoes Spivak's (1988) postcolonial charge in '*Can the Subaltern Speak?',* in which she applies Foucault's notion of subjugated knowledges to the colonial context to argue that the colonial Subject is marginalised and left 'voiceless' and unable to 'speak' within the current hegemonic structures. Lu's claim that Western societies 'speak for' the rest of the world also resonates with the notion of epistemic violence, highlighting the ways in which colonial powers impose their own systems of knowledge resulting in simultaneously the construction and silencing of the Orient, who becomes unable to speak within the hegemonic framework (Spivak, 1988; Said, 1979; Gandhi, 1998).

"The current state of developing countries' [sic] discourse power can be described as a deficiency of discourse power: they are not able to communicate, what is communicated becomes distorted" states Lu (2010). He maintains that only when each country has equal discourse power can there be equality in global discourse order. The idea that China still lags

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behind Western powers in terms of discourse due to the cultural hegemony of the West is not restricted to the periphery of Chinese society and politics, with numerous journalists, public officials and academics openly admitting the insufficiency of China's discourse power (Repnikova, 2022).

For instance, Professor Sun maintained that "China's economic and political influence (…) has grown since reform and opening up, (…) China is still a long way from being a powerful country in terms of discourse; there is much room for improvement and hard work to be done" (Sun 2023, *translation*). Moreover, during his speech at the National Propaganda and Ideological Work Conference back in 2013, Xi described the current global discourse order as "the West is strong and I [China] am weak" (*xī qiáng wǒ ru,* 西强我弱）(Creemers, 2014), which has since become a widespread phrase. It is also raised by Zhang (2017) who maintains that strategic planning is required in order to break the current pattern of 'the West is strong and I am weak', with discourse theory constituting the foundation of China's propaganda efforts.

In addition, many Chinese intellectuals and academics – inspired by postcolonial theory – have emphasised the need to decolonise the curricula of Western universities, as they perceive western research methods to be characterised by epistemological bias (Lams, 2018). The postcolonial objective of interrupting the cultural hegemony of the Western canon is also reflected in an article titled as "*Deconstructing the hegemony of Western democratic discourse*" published in People's Daily's theory column (Zhou, 2017). In postcolonialism, the concept of democracy is perceived as a product of Western colonial/modernity discourse; scholars in the field highlight its colonial origins and challenge the idea around its universal applicability and its inherent superiority (Gandhi, 1998). Similar to the postcolonial position, Professor Zhou

(2017) highlights that the Western interpretation of democracy has been taken as universal and as a standard model of comparison.

> "In the face of the hegemony of Western democratic discourse, we must dare to speak out and confidently expose the absurdity of Western democratic discourse, and then build a socialist democratic discourse system with Chinese characteristics. We must make it clear to people that Western democracy is only local experience and knowledge constructed under a specific historical and cultural context of the West. It is not a universal truth, nor is it a universal path (…) of governance. The Western democratic model has no value "model", but only reference value" (Zhou, 2017, own translation).

Meanwhile in the US, Christopher Walker (2016), vice-president for studies and analysis at the National Endowment for Democracy, drew on Nye's soft power, highlighting the ways in which authoritarian and illiberal regimes have learnt to exert influence in a way that democracies do – through the projection of soft power. The following section provides a brief, but nevertheless critical analysis of the ways in which mainstream academic discourse 'Others' Chinese soft power and influence strategies, exposing underlying assumptions shaped by the discourse of colonialism.

1.11.1 Chinese Soft Power as a Stolen Property of Western Democracies and The Postcolonial Will-to-Difference

In his article *The Hijacking of "Soft Power"*, Walker (2016) states that leading authoritarian governments such as the one led by the CPC have seized the concept of soft power as part of their assault on democratic institutions and values. By exploiting the vulnerabilities emerging through the processes of globalisation, Walker (2016) suggests that they have started to effectively mirror "democratic soft power" (pp. 50-51). As authoritarian regimes have developed mechanisms to counter the soft power of "the democratic West" through

authoritarian learning, he calls for the urgent need for Western democracies to defend their democratic institutions and stop authoritarian regimes from invading the arenas which welcomed them (Walker, 2016, p. 49).

In Western academic discourse, when claiming that soft power originates in 'the West', authors tend to mean modern, democratic and industrialised societies (Schrader, 2020; Brady, 2012; Nye, 2012; Walker, 2016; Repnikova, 2022), thus reinforcing the discourse of colonialism. For example, as seen above, Walker (2016) not only conflates the notion of the West with the concept of democracy, but in doing so, he reinforces the discourse of colonialism by upholding the universality and superiority of Western (liberal) democracies. The article also reinforces the discourse of 'the West and the Rest', as Walker (2016) uses the concept of 'the West' without specifying the countries falling under such unified category.

While Europe, US and Australia are assumed to be part of 'the West', Russia – a European country – is positioned in direct opposition to 'the West' on the basis that it is an authoritarian regime. At the same time, it is not clear whether Hungary or Taiwan would fall under the category. Whilst 'the West' is represented as homogenous and unified by the fact of being democratic, 'non-Western powers' are automatically assumed to be autocracies. The following quote from the article sets a clear example for how the author reinforces the discourse of colonialism:

> "The democracies' central assumption has been that patient engagement with authoritarian states would yield clear mutual benefits. By embracing such regimes and encouraging their integration into the global economic system and key political institutions, Western powers hoped to coax the autocracies toward meaningful political reform" (Walker, 2016)

While Western democracies are treated as models, the notion that Western powers can 'coax' 'the non-Western' authoritarian regimes echo the colonial 'developmental project' narrative, positioning the West as the educator of colonised societies framed as inferior, immature and backward (Hall, 1992; Gandhi, 1998; Bhambra, 2007). The term 'coax' denotes a paternalistic agency, with countries outside the constructed borders of the West treated as falling behind Western democracies, while also being reduced to passivity and framed as mere objects or consumers of a European and US-led developmental project.

In his subsequent paper '*What is Sharp Power*', Walker (2018) states that considering the development of high-tech propaganda and censorship used by 'autocrats', the concept of soft power – coined when the US emerged as the "global hegemon" (p. 11) – is no longer applicable for analysing the politics and public diplomacy of countries like China. According to him, the concept of sharp power more accurately captures digital-age censorship, propaganda, and other influence strategies of authoritarian governments (Walker, 2018). The word 'sharp' is meant to denote the means in which such power can "pierce, penetrate, or perforate" the political institutions and information environments of other countries, which results in the constraint of free expression and distortion of the political environment (Walker, 2018, p. 12).

Firstly, it was demonstrated that the concept of soft power is highly relevant to the Chinese context in the above discussions, which by itself would provide a sufficient empirical and analytical basis for discrediting Walker's claim entirely. At the epistemological level, such binary distinctions made between sharp and soft power also exposes underlying colonial assumptions about political legitimacy. That is, such binary logic reinforces a dominant view in which 'Western democracies' are portrayed as legitimate users of soft power in contrast to 'non-Western' states, who are pathologized for employing the same technologies. By framing

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'non-West' as inherently deceptive and more sinister, Western modes of influence strategies and technique apparatuses become justified and naturalised.

The discourse of colonialism featuring Walker's article can also be recognised in the article written by Schrader (2020), in which he uses terms such as 'democratic societies' and 'industrialised democracies' interchangeably as he proposes his 'Friends and Enemies' framework. He identifies five main dimensions of the CPC's interference in "industrialised [sic] democracies", which are "[w]weaponizing China's economy", "[a]sserting narrative dominance", "[r]elying on elite intermediaries", "[i]nstrumentalising Chinese diaspora", and "[e]mbedding authoritarian control" which denotes "[t]he Party's way of doing business, and its efforts to demonstrate a viable alternative to liberal democracy" (Schrader, 2020, p. 2).

Many of these dimensions of 'interference' seems to overlap with the technique apparatuses of Western imperial domination. To take a more concrete example of 'weaponizing China's economy', it should be stressed that colonial powers imposed economic control in China and many imperialised and colonised regions. It was demonstrated earlier how Chinese existing trade networks and domestic industries were systematically undermined by colonial powers, replacing them with systems that ensured the flow of resources and profits to European countries, the US and Japan. This included privileging foreign goods over local ones through policies aimed at maintaining economic dominance as well as controlling prices and manipulating tariffs (Osterhammel, 1986; Hsü, 2000; Bhambra, 2007). Meanwhile, the 'assertion of narrative dominance' refers specifically to China's effort to enhance its discourse power/right to speak within – what would be rightly defined not just by the CPC but also scholars of postcolonialism as – global epistemic structures shaped by Western knowledge systems.

Schrader's and Walker's articles are illustrative of how mainstream scholarly literature is shaped by a security narrative and the binarism of discourse of colonialism (non-West – authoritarian, threatening, manipulative, in need of catching up; West – democratic, victim, innocent, measure of progress) reinforcing the idea of Western democratic exceptionalism and superiority. Additionally, echoing Walker, Brady (2012) states that "China has deliberately borrowed from Western methods of mass persuasion and models for funding a cultural economy" (p. 19), sugar-coating the technologies of economic and cultural dominance as 'cultural economy' and the hegemony of Western knowledge apparatuses and propaganda as 'mass persuasion.' Taken together, it is argued that mainstream academic discourse is shaped by the discourse of colonialism, and obscures the imperial foundations of Nye's soft power, which confronts us with a fundamental paradox.

As seen above, the CPC's soft power mechanisms are designed to resist the cultural hegemony of the West, and they are rooted in an in-depth, critical understanding of the technique apparatuses of Western imperial domination based on poststructuralist/postcolonial discourse theory and Marxist accounts. It was shown how culture has become a central element within the socialist project, representing a shift within the CPC's socialist modernisation narrative, while also underscoring its importance in shaping Chinese politics and public diplomacy strategy. Socialism is chimed with Chinese traditional values and notions to emphasise its Otherness, its difference vis-á-vis 'the West', and the more the CPC asserts its difference through emphasising cultural roots, the more it advocates for particularistic answers and rejects models and values taken as universal and objective (Lams, 2018).

It has been stipulated that this cultural nationalistic shift can be explained by China's semi-colonial past, as several anti-colonial nationalist movements across postcolonial nations were

characterised by a drive to assert civilisational alterity vis-á-vis 'the West' through the rhetoric of particularism (Gandhi, 1998; Said, 1994). It is argued that it is this postcolonial will-to-difference underlying the CPC's rhetoric what shapes Chinese politics and public diplomacy strategy today. Like in the case of postcolonial nations, it can be seen as representing a form of symbolic resistance against Western cultural hegemony, and its normative authority over the definition of modernity. So, what we can see here is this paradox: on the one hand, the CPC's rhetoric is characterised by a postcolonial will-to-difference, with China's soft power strategy shaped by resistance against Western hegemonic structures. Meanwhile, on the other hand, Western narratives construct Chinese soft power as inherently more sinister and deceptive vis-á-vis their 'democratic soft power', concealing possible similarities between Chinese soft power and influence strategies and the technologies of Western imperialism.

Indian political theorist Partha Chatterjee also highlights that anti-colonial nationalist movements frequently drew upon Orientalist affirmative stereotypes attached to the discourse of colonialism in their attempt to define a unique cultural identity in dialectical opposition to Western civilisation (Gandhi, 1998). Affirmative stereotypes, according to Gandhi (1998), were key to the framing of 'the East' vis-á-vis 'the West' as a utopian alternative to the claims of Western modernity and civilisation. Yet, Said (1994) warns that postcolonial nations' pursuit of asserting difference can easily backfire, and result in a type of "reactionary politics", where the postcolonial will-to-difference is defined by what Adorno termed as 'negative dialectics' (p. 108). For Said (1994) such postcolonial national movements, end up reproducing the very hegemonic structures they seek to resist (p. 108), as national identity is constructed vis-á-vis 'the West', reinforcing the binarism of the discourse of colonialism.

According to Chatterjee, Indian nationalism lost its meaning as it accepted the intellectual basis of the notion 'modernity'. Even if in discourse, it challenged colonial domination, Indian nationalism failed since in its language and theoretical framework, Indian nationalist discourse reflected the European post-Enlightenment rational thought (Chatterjee in Gandhi, 1998). Conversely, while the CPC does challenge the universality of Western modernity and has a more critical understanding of Western technique apparatuses of dominance, in their drive to assert civilisational difference, they still end up reinforcing the binarism of the discourse of colonialism.

This raises the critical question whether – in the words of Gandhi –"the anti-colonial will-to-difference simply become another surrender to the crippling economy of the Same—'a copy of that by which it felt itself to be oppressed'? (p. 118). The answer offered by Said is rather pessimistic, arguing that in most cases, postcolonial nations do turn into the "rabid versions of their enemies" (Gandhi, 1998, p. 118). Clearly, China's exposure to the technique apparatuses of Western imperialism – shaped by its semi-colonial past as well as its theoretical engagement with power – did not go in vain. Rather, one might conclude that they gave the CPC the perfect source of inspiration, as Chinese soft power and influence strategies appear to be mirroring the very mechanisms of domination which were once imposed on China, and which the state now claims to subvert.

CONCLUSION

This MA thesis aimed to offer an alternative, critical perspective not just on Chinese politics and public diplomacy per se, but on the very practice of 'doing' academics. That is, it demonstrated that there is another way one may endeavour to study and analyse Chinese politics within the field of political science. It might be regarded as unconventional and off the track at first, or perhaps even cause different degrees of discomfort because it fractures the traditional disciplinary boundaries from within. Yet, works which set out to challenge dominant frameworks and have the potential not only to push beyond the limits but also redefine traditional boundaries are both necessary and indispensable. This is what this slightly lengthier-than-usual thesis (which was also subject to some drastic cutting before its author dared to submit it) was all about. It does not serve as any form of defence or justification of the strategies and practices of the Chinese state, rather it is a work that set out to disrupt dominant discourses, leaving the door open for critical consideration and debate.

By applying postcolonial theory and historiography, this paper demonstrated the ways in which China's colonial encounters continue to shape its politics both at home and abroad, arguing that without accounting for the enduring legacies of China's semi-colonial history, one cannot gain sufficient understanding, and hence is unable to provide through explanation of Chinese politics and public diplomacy. As Bhambra (2007) argues, when our perception of the past is inadequate, so is our understanding of the present. However, the way we interpret the past, and hence the present, is shaped by relations of power and dominance (Said, 1994).

By drawing on poststructuralist and subsequently postcolonial theory, Chapter 1 revealed how notions of 'the West' and ideas around modernity, development and progress originate in the

discourse of colonialism. Through examples and critical analysis, it highlighted how the discourse of the Renaissance and Enlightenment justified colonialism through the narratives of the 'civilising mission', how it relied on the production of 'the Orient' to create 'the West' as its poral opposite, and how the notion of 'the West' came to represent the standard, universal model of progress. Such critical analysis not only served to deconstruct dominant narratives, but lay the groundwork for Chapters 3 and 4, which shed light on how socialism in China came to represent alterity, a possibility to define modernity on its own terms, holding a promise of building a society different from Western societies (Wielander, 2016). This is reflected today in the socialist rhetoric of the CPC, and in particular in the notion of the Chinese Dream (*zhongguo meng*, 中国梦）which can be realised through the path of 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics' *(zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi*, 中国特色社会主义）.

Meanwhile, Chapter 2 provides a critical historical view on China's semi-colonial history, allowing the positioning of China as a post-(semi)colonial nation, challenging Eurocentric accounts and going beyond mainstream narratives. It not only described the ways in which foreign imperial domination systematically undermined China's sovereignty and economy, hence challenging the narrative of the 'civilising mission' embedded in the discourse of colonialism, but simultaneously brought China's acts of resistance into focus, which set up the stage for the analysis of the meaning of socialism in China in Chapter 3. By tracing the development of socialism in China from the early reform period until Mao, the chapter demonstrated socialism's roots in anti-imperialist resistance, establishing links among Chinese anti-imperialist nationalism and socialism on the one side, and anti-imperialist nationalisms in former colonial and semi-colonial nation-states, on the other.

First, socialism was a decidedly Western framework, which then acquired a Leninist character during the period of anti-imperialist agitation and widespread disillusionment in 'the West' and values associated with it, sparked by the decisions of the Versailles Treaty. Marxism-Leninism in China came to be seen as a practical philosophy to critique the capitalist imperialist order; it offered itself as a weapon theory with which to resist imperial domination and held a promise of avoiding the mistakes of Western capitalist societies. Socialism became a marker of difference under Mao, who 'Sinicised' Marxism and presented it as an alternative to the Western model, framing China as the leader of anti-colonial movements in former colonies and semi-colonial states (Hsü, 2000; Wielander, 2016).

Another key connection this paper reveals is between postcolonial/postmodern theory on power on the one hand, and the concept of discourse power/right to speak (*huayu quan,* 话语权) in Chinese discourse, on the other. When laying out the theoretical foundations, Chapter 1 not only situates postcolonial theory within existing theoretical frameworks but familiarises the reader with Foucault's theory of power and discourse which emerges once again at the end of Chapter 4. The final analysis reveals that behind China's propaganda initiatives, Chinese academics, journalists, public officials, including Xi Jinping himself, have a much more critical, theoretical understanding of the nature and technologies of Western domination than most experts in the Western academia who study Chinese propaganda and soft power. By drawing on examples from Chinese discourse itself, it is shown that the CPC's understanding of propaganda goes well-beyond mainstream conceptualisations. Not only does the CPC draw on Foucauldian notions in its rhetoric, but there is a widespread recognition of the hegemony of Western knowledge systems that marginalises other knowledges, directly informing its policy initiatives.

With all threads weaved together, this thesis argued that the developmental path of 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics' and assertion of cultural alterity within the Party's rhetoric (through the selective adoption of notions from Chinese traditional thought) and its soft power diplomacy should be understood in light of the postcolonial will-to-difference. As a form of symbolic, cultural resistance not only against the claims of Western modernity but also cultural hegemony of 'the West' as a whole. However, the 'othering' in mainstream narratives and China's drive to assert difference – happening at the two opposite ends of the discourse of colonialism – conceal similarities between the constructed poral opposites of 'the West' and China. As the CPC seeks to assert its civilisational difference vis-á-vis 'the West' in its rhetoric, Western narratives frame Chinese soft power as inherently more menacing and sinister, both masking its resemblance to the technologies of Western imperial domination. Accordingly, one may argue that China's politics of 'the Other', with its cultural soft power efforts echoing the technique apparatuses of Western imperial domination, ends up reproducing the very structures it opposes under the guise of difference.

APPENDIX

The Boxer Protocol (1901)

The final settlement of the Boxer movement severely infringed upon Chinese sovereignty on various levels. Under its terms, the importation of arms was prohibited for two years, and it also stipulated the destruction of the Dagu and other forts. It also afforded the right for imperial powers to deploy troops at key strategic points between Beijing and the sea – restricting China's ability to exercise its sovereign rights as well as compromising its right to defend itself (Hsü, 2000; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019).

The Qing government also had to pay 67,5 million pounds with a 4% annual interest rate, the amount of which was distributed between the members of the Alliance (plus Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and Norway). The settlement did not resolve the question of Manchuria, which remained a Russian occupied territory, with Russian advancement also becoming a source of rivalry as well as anxiety among imperial powers (Hsü, 2000). Russian interests conflicted with that of Japan in particular, prompting the withdrawal of some of the Japanese troops from the area, the conflict of interest also foreshadowing the Russo-Japanese war in 1905 (Hsü, 2000).

Added to the insult of the Qing government was the requirement to pay for the costs of Russian occupation and damages to railways. Meanwhile, the British backed the Germans in checking the Russian advancement in China. Additionally, foreign ministers in Beijing effectively controlled the government, further eroding any remaining support for the Qing state. While the second Open Door Policy introduced by the US and the subsequent Anglo-German agreement both in 1900 temporarily prevented an outright break up of China, its sovereignty wasn't

restored, its global position declined drastically, and it remained a semicolonial state under

foreign imperial domination (Hsü, 2000).

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