Over the past decade, the literature on the histories of twentieth century Sino-Arab interactions has experienced something of a renaissance in terms of its size and topical-focus. With access to newly-opened or long-neglected archives (and oral histories), and armed by their proficiency in multiple languages, scholars have increasingly produced major works that go beyond the uni-dimensional state-centric narrations that prevailed hitherto in the literature. This new literature has included examinations of the discursive imaginaries that have emerged between these two cultural zones, the complex political spaces occupied by Sinophone (and Turkic) Muslim communities before and during the Cold War, and the ways in which domestic politics have informed the foreign-policy approaches of the various decision-makers involved. She Gangzheng’s monograph, which specifically investigates China’s complex relationship with the Palestinian national movement during a period roughly coinciding with the radical phase of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR, 1966-1969) and the beginnings of the Sino-American détente in the early 1970s, constitutes a welcome and important addition to this literature-in-renaissance.

Although past work has been done on the early phase(s) of the Sino-Palestinian relationship as well as China’s broader engagement with the Arab-Israeli conflict by Hashim Behbehani, Lillian Craig Harris and Yitzhak Shichor, She’s contribution on this topic is original in two discernible ways. First, his core argument highlights the interconnected

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international and domestic factors that underlined China’s short-lived support for the Palestinian national movement from the mid-1960s onwards. From an international angle, he views this development as a direct consequence of China’s deteriorating relationship with both the United States and the Soviet Union. China’s ‘intervention’ in favour of the Palestinians was unable to fundamentally challenge these two well-entrenched superpowers in the Arab world. While this was largely due to China’s own material limitations, She convincingly argues that China was nevertheless able to re-shape American and Soviet behaviour vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict, and to enhance, through competitive dynamics with the superpowers, the Palestinian Liberation Organization’s profile in the international arena. From a domestic angle, She emphasizes the influence of two factors that contributed towards China’s embrace of the Palestinians: the political capital accrued from supporting a Third World cause at the time of the country’s internal radicalization during the GPCR, and the critical role played by various diplomats such as Xu Yixin, Chen Jiakang, Huang Hua and Zeng Tao in facilitating Sino-Palestinian engagement.

Second, with reference to the article’s methodology, She draws upon a diverse array of Chinese, English Arabic and Russian documentary sources (declassified files, government almanacs, memoirs,) which are supplemented by oral interviews. By incorporating such sources, She brings to the fore the perspectives of various key actors, most notably from within the Chinese foreign policy establishment, such as Premier Zhou Enlai and the abovementioned assortment of diplomats. As a result, the article offers an illuminating and rich discussion of the previously unexamined attitudes of Chinese officials towards the Palestinians, the latter’s strategies of resistance (i.e. plane hijackings) and the ways in which Chinese officials felt the Arab-Israeli conflict should be conceptualized. More significantly, these sources bring into sharp relief the internal tensions and conflicting agendas that resided within Chinese officialdom, challenging in turn what She (rightly) observes as the tendency of scholars working on China and the Middle East "to treat the Chinese party-state as a united whole while ignoring its inner politics and mechanisms" (128). This is applicable to those who are working on both the Maoist and post-Maoist manifestations of the party-state.

In all, in terms of the arguments and methodology it deploys, She’s well-written article makes a strong contribution to the literature. It grafts a previously invisiblized China unto the story of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and sheds light upon one of the ways in which the country sought to assert its leadership over the Third World. It will be of considerable interest not only to those studying the evolution of Sino-Palestinian (and Sino-Israeli) relations in the lead-up (and aftermath) of China’s admittance into the United Nations in 1971, but also Sino-Soviet (and American) competition over the Third World during the Cold War, and the impact of domestic politics (typified by the GPCR) on Maoist foreign policy.

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