



The Distance to China

Twentieth-Century Italian Travel Narratives
of Patriotism, Commitment and Disillusion
(1898–1985)

Linetto Basilone

PETER LANG

VOL. 42 ITALIAN MODERNITIES

"As Italy tends to be studied increasingly in transnational and transcultural perspective, there is an ever-greater need for studies that explore the country's relationship with other geographical areas and cultural configurations. Linetto Basilone's work is an important contribution to research of this kind. The work provides a panoramic view of how journalists and travel writers from the late nineteenth century to the 1980s have sought to represent China, its relationship with Italy, and its growing geopolitical significance. The ideological and cultural context in which Italian observers were writing is always appropriately foregrounded; the analysis of the work of individual writers is nuanced and sophisticated; and the exploration of the inter-relation of different positionalities is intriguing throughout. The text will be of interest to anyone interested in understanding the cultural history of Italy's relationship with China."

– Charles Burdett, Director, Institute of Languages, Cultures and Societies,
University of London

Over the course of the twentieth century, China became a destination of choice for hundreds of the most prominent Italian writers, journalists, and politicians. Informed by the cultural, economic, and political relationship between Italy and China since the late 1890s, the travel narratives of these authors contributed to the creation of multiple and varied representations of the country.

This book fills a gap in the study of the development of Italian travel narratives on twentieth-century China. It classifies the major portraits of China under five chronologically and ideologically ordered types of representation and offers readers a structured understanding of the processes of "writing" China in Italy. The study sheds new light on how China was associated with the specific cultural, political, and social traits of Italy and Italian culture; how it reinforced ideological indoctrination among Italian intellectual elites; and how significant such travel narratives were for the ideological orientation of the Italian readership.

The authors discussed in the book include, among others: Luigi Barzini Sr., Mario Appelius, Arnaldo Cipolla, Franco Fortini, Carlo Cassola, Curzio Malaparte, Alberto Moravia, Goffredo Parise, Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, Gianni Rodari, Luigi Malerba, Alberto Arbasino, Edoarda Masi, and Tiziano Terzani.

Linetto Basilone holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Auckland and an MA in Comparative Literature from the University of Naples "L'Orientale". He teaches Global Studies at the University of Auckland and is affiliated with the Centro Studi Fortini-Masi. He specializes in the study of cross-cultural encounters, identity construction, and political discourse in literature.



Rich and informative, Basilone's journey through one century of Italian intellectuals' travel narratives shows how deeply their experiences and narrations of China have been entrenched in the construction of Italian national identity on the domestic and global stage. This book can't be missed by anyone who is interested in Italy's political and intellectual history from a transcultural perspective as well as in better understanding China's place in Western mind.

– Laura De Giorgi, Associate Professor in History of Modern and Contemporary China, Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Linetto Basilone's book is a compelling *tour de force* through the Italian travelogues of China during a "long century." Demonstrating a unique conceptual command of the historical and historiographical issues at stake, Basilone offers, through a systematic periodisation, a nuanced understanding of the many "Chinas" narrated and the rationale for their validity. His sophisticated transcultural analysis contributes to bridging the gap of knowledge on the relationship between Italy and China.

– Maurizio Marinelli, Professor of Global China, University of Sussex

The Distance to China provides the first comprehensive, English-language historical and critical account of twentieth-century Italian travel writings about China. Drawing from his thorough understanding of modern Chinese and Italian histories, Basilone vigorously argues for the significance of the "textuality of Chinas" for constructing a transcultural history of Italy. The author also adapts theories of travel writing, discourse analysis, textual analysis, and Orientalism to achieve a nuanced reading of a large number of primary texts across several decades. Proposing a convincing periodization of this chapter of the longstanding Chinese-Italian encounter, Basilone provides a must-read for us to gain an appreciation for the role of China in Italian intellectuals' physical and cultural mobilities.

– Zhang Gaoheng, Associate Professor of Italian Studies, University of British Columbia

The Distance to China

ITALIAN MODERNITIES

VOL. 42

Edited by
Pierpaolo Antonello and Robert Gordon,
University of Cambridge



PETER LANG

Oxford · Bern · Berlin · Bruxelles · New York · Wien

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Bibliographic information published by Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Basilone, Linetto, author.

Title: The distance to China : twentieth-century Italian travel narratives of patriotism, commitment and disillusion (1898-1985) / Linetto Basilone.

Description: Oxford ; New York : Peter Lang, [2022] | Series: Italian modernities, 1662-9108 ; vol no. 42 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022028121 (print) | LCCN 2022028122 (ebook) | ISBN 9781789975109 (paperback) | ISBN 9781789975116 (ebook) | ISBN 9781789975123 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Travelers' writings, Italian—China—History and criticism. | Italian prose literature—20th century—History and criticism. | China—Description and travel. | China—In literature. | Politics in literature. | Italy—Foreign relations—China. | China—Foreign relations—Italy. | LCGFT: Literary criticism.

Classification: LCC PQ4053.T75 B37 2022 (print) | LCC PQ4053.T75 (ebook) | DDC 850.9/3251—dc23/eng/20220805

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022028121>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022028122>

This book has been generously supported by the Australasian Centre for Italian Studies (ACIS), whose publishing grant scheme has covered the manuscript's editing costs.

Cover image: Archivio Italianliners.com, collezione Maurizio Eliseo, Trieste.

Cover design by Peter Lang Ltd.

ISSN 1662-9108

ISBN 978-1-78997-510-9 (print)

ISBN 978-1-78997-511-6 (ePDF)

ISBN 978-1-78997-512-3 (ePub)

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Published by Peter Lang Ltd, International Academic Publishers,
Oxford, United Kingdom
oxford@peterlang.com, www.peterlang.com

PETER LANG



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This publication has been peer reviewed.

A Bernadette e Hilary

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Acknowledgments

This study is a revised and expanded version of my doctoral dissertation submitted in 2019 to the School of Cultures Languages and Literatures, University of Auckland. I am indebted to my mentors Bernadette Luciano and Hilary Chung for their unwavering and passionate guidance and support, as well as to Giovanni La Guardia whose erudite advice and friendship goes back a long way. Many people offered suggestions and encouragement at various stages and I am grateful to all them for being supportive of my work: Giorgia Alù, Mark Amsler, Elisa Attanasio, Salvatore Bancheri, Stefano Benedetti, Roberto Bertoni, Claudia Bernardi, Meenakshi Bharat, Stefano Bona, Louisa Buckingham, Miriam Castorina, Daniela Cavallaro, Mark Chu, Paul Clark, Paolo De Falco, Laura De Giorgi, John Foot, Gianna Fusco, Nicola Gardini, Jamie Gillen, Chiara Giuliani, Madhu Grover, Francesco Guardiani, Donatella Guida, Geoff Hall, Margaret Higonnet, Perry Johansson, Giacomo Lichtner, Daniela Kato, Joanne Lee, Wessie Ling, Maurizio Marinelli, Edgardo Medeiros Da Silva, Toshio Miyake, Andrea Polegato, Susanna Scarparo, Mark Seymour, Paola Voci, Lin Yang, Tim Youngs, and Gaoheng Zhang. I benefited to a great degree from the work of Charles Burdett in Italian Travel Writing between the World Wars and Laura De Giorgi on Italian production of knowledge on China during the Fascist Ventennio and in the 1950s. This project owes a lot also to the contributions of Erik Hayot, Collin Mackerras, and Daniel Vukovich on the mechanics underlying heterogeneous ideas of China in twentieth-century Western thought. Special thanks go to Daniel Vukovich and Julia Kuehn, for discussing aspects of research and being so kind and helpful during my stay at the Hong Kong University in the latter months of 2017, which was funded by *Universitas21*. I am grateful to the institutions and people of the venues where this research was presented, including the Australasian Centre for Italian Studies (ACIS), Association for the Study of Modern Italy (ASMI), Centre for Travel Writing Studies, International Federation

of Modern Languages and Literatures (FILLM), and Society for Italian Studies (SIS); as well as the University of Toronto (2016), Victoria University of Wellington (2016), Flinders University (2016), University of Delhi (2017), Monash Centre in Prato (2017), Aberystwyth University (2017), University of Sussex (2018), Mahidol University (2018), Stony Brook University (2018), and Nova University of Lisbon (2019). The suggestions of the anonymous reviewer of the manuscript submitted to Peter Lang and the external examiners of my doctoral thesis, as well as the comments on conference papers and articles that I have presented and published have also been much appreciated. I wish to express my appreciation for the exceptional support provided by Laurel Plapp and Peter Lang. Many thanks also to Ellen McRae for proofreading and editing the manuscript.

Earlier versions of sections from Chapters 4 and 5 have appeared as articles and book chapters. Portions of Chapters 3 and 4 have appeared in *Italy and China: Centuries of Dialogue* edited by Francesco Guardiani, Gaoheng Zhang, and Salvatore Bancheri (Franco Cesati, Firenze 2017). Sections from Chapter 3 has been published in the special issue “Italianerie” edited by Wessie Ling and Maurizio Marinelli in *Modern Italy* (24:4 2019, 457–468). A synthesis of my work in its earlier stages has appeared in *Representing the Exotic and the Familiar* edited by Meenakshi Bharat and Madhu Grover (John Benjamins, Amsterdam/Philadelphia 2019). I am grateful to their editors and publishers. Thanks also to Il Ponte Rivista, Paola Rodari, and Silvia Ascoli, as well as the Archivio Italianliners.com and Maurizio Eliseo, for their assistance with the illustrations reproduced in this book.

This is also the place to thank Mary Anne and Adam for brightening up my days; and Giuseppa and Pietro, Antonio and Rebecca, Raffaele, brothers and sisters, *nipotine* and *mga pamankin*, friends and colleagues for being caring and supportive.

Introduction

The Distance to China is the first comprehensive comparative study of Italian travel writing on China encompassing the period from 1898 to 1985 and written in English. Its principal scope is to produce a detailed analysis of how China, its people and culture were narrated to the Italian readership in twentieth-century Italy, and the political discourses contained in such narrations. The primary literature consists of key portrayals of China published by Italian journalists, writers, and politicians who traveled in China from the late 1890s to the mid-1980s. I have divided the book into chapters dedicated to five chronological paradigms that align with specific sociopolitical relations between Italy and China and their positioning in major geopolitical events. The first paradigm, from 1898 to 1916, is centered around Italy's participation in the British and European endeavors to colonize China, and, in particular, Italy's consequential involvement in the Boxer War (1900–1901). The second, from 1925 to 1945, is shaped by the rise to power of fascism in Italy and discusses fascist Italy's interest in republican China. The third, from 1949 to 1960, is structured by the fundamental changes in the sociopolitical relationship between China and Italy, which emerged as a result of the foundation of the People's Republic of China (October 1, 1949), Italy's post-World War II social renovation as well as Cold War dynamics. The fourth, from 1966 to 1975, focuses on the reception of the Cultural Revolution in Italy and its resonance in the 1960s and early 1970s in Italian society, also in relation to the rise of mass protest movements and political terrorism. The fifth, from 1978 to 1985, revolves around the major sociocultural and political changes and economic reforms in Chinese society following the death of Mao Zedong (September 9, 1976).

I argue that the textual representations of China by the selected authors in those time periods stabilized and reinforced specific images of

Italy. The writings contributed organically to Italy's national and cultural identity formation because the authors' portrayals of China resonated with the political factors prevailing in Italian society and had a referential validity connected to the authors' political ideologies and affiliations. The first two paradigms are shaped by Italian nationalism and the construction of the myth of the great nation (1898–1916, 1925–1945), as well as fascist ideology (1925–1945). Partisan ideology and anti-fascism, as well as communism and socialism are central in the third and fourth paradigms (1949–1960, 1966–1975). The texts from the fifth paradigm (1978–1985) are permeated by both political disengagement, communist nostalgia, and anti-communism.

In the category of travel narratives discussed in this book, I include journalism, diaries, and poetry, in accordance with both the heterogeneity and the transnationality of travel writing as a form, and the multidisciplinary and international nature of the scholarly interest in travel writing.¹ I regard travel literature as “any narrative characterized by a non-fiction dominant that relates (almost always) in the first person a journey or journeys that the reader supposes to have taken place in reality while assuming or presupposing that author, narrator and principal character are but one or identical” (Born 2004, 17).

By building upon existing scholarship on the processes of identity construction in modern Italy, this book provides a comprehensive perspective on how Italian society portrayed itself when embarking on a structured understanding of the Other, in relation to a country – China – which was regarded as the most Other and peripheral in Italian society for most of the twentieth century.² This book also offers a vantage point from which to

1 See Youngs (2002) and Youngs and Forsdick (2012).

2 A few examples of such conceptualizations of China are provided by the authors discussed in this book. Raffaele Calzini, in *Agonia della Cina* (1937), defined China as a “un'altra epoca”/ “a different epoch” (16). Franco Fortini, in *Leggere e Scrivere* (1993), specified that, in 1955, China to him was an “alterità radicale”/ “radical alterity”, and “l'altra faccia della luna”/ “the other side of the moon” (76). When commenting on a conversation with a Chinese writer uninterested in Europe and its cultural productions, Alberto Moravia, in *La Rivoluzione Culturale in Cina* (1967), defined China as an “astro che gira per conto suo”/ “a celestial body spinning on its own” (73). Malerba, in *Il Viaggiatore sedentario* (1992), referred to the country

investigate Italy's ambitions in the global scene following its emergence from subalternity in the mid-1800s, in relation to China, whose subaltern role started in the same years as a consequence of the imperial agenda initially promoted by Great Britain and then pursued by the most powerful nations in the world until the 1950s – an agenda that did not exactly fit Italy, as discussed in the second chapter of this book. *The Distance to China* departs from the more traditional and consolidated academic scholarship studying the relation between travel literature and processes of transculturation, which has focused on areas that have been central to Italy's imperial ambitions, primarily the eastern Mediterranean region as well as North and East Africa, as well as to its migratory fluxes, primarily Europe, North Africa, North America, South America, and Australia. In addition, a detailed analysis of how China was written about in Italian travel literature is required for a more nuanced comprehension of the contextual, historical, political, and ideological dynamics subsumed within the sociocultural and diplomatic relationships between Italy and China, especially now that the People's Republic of China (PRC) has a predominant role in global politics. Such analysis is also fundamental to a more critical understanding of past and present processes of stereotyping and practices of Othering and marginalization of China and the Chinese in Italian society.

China is certainly not the only country or geographical area that has systematically been portrayed as the Other and as having a role in shaping contemporary Italian identity and society. In the twentieth century, Italian writers and journalists regularly visited the United States and Russia – countries that, like China at specific times, were perceived as possible models of development and as “bad examples” from which to learn. Italian writers also traveled extensively in the African and eastern Mediterranean regions. They regularly visited other South and East Asian regions, especially India and Japan – countries that have also become symbolic of Otherness. They toured the South American continent often in search of Italian communities that exemplified Italianness. Many of the authors cited in this book

that he had visited in 1984, as the “dimensione Cina”/“Chinese dimension” (15), as well as a “mondo parallelo”/“parallel world” (19). China's utter otherness was part of the shared imaginary of Italian authors, intellectuals, and politicians, as is visible throughout this book.

visited and narrated one or more of the above-mentioned countries and geographic regions in addition to China: Luigi Barzini Sr., Mario Appelius, Arnaldo Cipolla, Alberto Moravia, Alberto Arbasino, and Tiziano Terzani traveled extensively around the world as professional writers and reporters, producing travel narratives on all those areas. At the same time, my research shows that there were specific reasons why China was a special space through which to diffuse to the Italian readership ideas and values central to Italian nation-building processes and geopolitical ambitions, as well as to speculate about the authors' own engagement or disengagement with politics in Italian society. The peculiarity, if not unicity, of China as a space through which to observe processes of national identification in Italy is inextricably linked to China's distance from Italy, or more precisely in the ad hoc uses of such distance to promote the characteristics, values, and ambitions of Italy's specific sociocultural, historical, and political context throughout the twentieth century. China's cultural, spatial (not merely geographical), and temporal (not chronological) distance has served systematically as a discursive device to reinforce Italy's sense of self. As a common characteristic of the five paradigms, negative (far away and far back in time) and positive (close-by and contemporary or even futuristic) depictions of China fluctuate in the selected narratives according to the characteristics that the country was meant to represent to the Italian readership. This was possible because China was primarily written and narrated in ways that would mirror the most salient sociocultural traits of Italian society in line with the specific ideological orthodoxy of cultural and political intelligentsias engaged in narrating the East Asian country, as well as the network of diplomatic relationships and geopolitical ambitions that twentieth-century Italy was enmeshed in.³

- 3 As Marinelli and Adornino argue, "Italy's projection towards the Celestial Empire – and the Republican and Communist China – has mostly developed as a peripheral extension of a broader, fundamentally Eurocentric (and later Euro-Atlantic) game, with China's domestic dynamics featuring intervening variables, if at all" (ix-x, 2014).

In this study, I am not claiming that China had an exclusive political value in twentieth-century Italian travel writing. China was characterized as an alternative space to the Ethiopian region at the turn of the twentieth century, to Japan during

Founded in 1861, the *Regno di Italia* (Kingdom of Italy) was a relatively small, newly unified nation with almost no diplomatic or military presence in the Chinese Empire. Italy, unlike the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Portugal, did not have a cohesive imperial and colonial infrastructure in Asia. At the turn of the century, Italy's imperial ambitions were focused primarily on the Horn of Africa (La Banca 2002). Nonetheless, Italy longed to be involved in the "scramble for China" initiated by the United Kingdom with the Opium Wars (1839–1842 and 1856–1860) and culminating in the Boxer War (1900–1901) (De Angeli 2012; Di Mattia 1984). Such sudden interest from the Kingdom of Italy, as a nation, gradually developed a structured desire to know China that continued in the decades to follow (Lombardi 2006). After being perceived for centuries as a remote and quasi-inaccessible land occupying a rather peculiar space in the Italian imaginary,⁴ imperial China emerged in the Italian nation-building discourse in the

the Fascist Ventennio, and to the USSR in early Maoist China and between 1977 and 1985. As a political space, China was attributed a unique value and considered a possible model of development only in the decade from 1966 to 1976, and only by part of the leftist intelligentsia.

- 4 In the late thirteenth century, during the Pax Mongolica, the papal legate Giovanni da Pian del Carpine (1185–1252) and the merchant Marco Polo (1254–1324) provided the Western world with the first accounts of Imperial China (Lombardi 2006, 67). Marco Polo produced one of the first best-selling memoirs of his 30-year stay in Asia and the *Cathay* (China), now commonly referred to as *Il Milione*. A few decades later, the Franciscan friar Odoric of Pordenone (1286–1331) narrated in his *Itinerarium* his travels to China, which he visited from 1323 to 1328, as part of an evangelizing mission to the Mongol Khan. China was also on the mind of Christopher Columbus in 1492, when he set sail across the Atlantic Ocean in his bold search for an alternative route to the "Indies," and eventually reached the Bahama Archipelago in the American continent. In early modern times, the evangelizing missions promoted by the papal authorities brought Jesuit and Dominican missionaries, such as Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607), Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), Martino Martini (1614–1661), Matteo Ripa (1682–1746), and Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766) to the Chinese empire, where they introduced Western religion, science, and culture to the imperial court and mandarins (Mungello 1999). Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Italian dramaturges wrote 36 theatrical performances set in China, the highest number of recorded dramas in Europe (Ward A. 2010).

early 1900s as instrumental to consolidating the international prestige of the *Regno* (Del Boca 2005; La Banca 2000). The turn of the century also saw production of knowledge on China from a new generation of professionally trained foreign correspondents and globe-trotting reporters and writers sent abroad to provide eyewitness accounts of internationally relevant events, in this case, the Boxer War (French 2009; Sweeney 2015). This professional role was a result of the recent proliferation of newspapers as a means of producing knowledge for wide readerships, as well as their role in shaping the cultures and societies of their respective homelands and in diffusing often stereotypical, politically oriented depictions of foreign locations. The connection between Italian travel writing, journalism, and political discourses strengthened in the decades to follow. The consolidation of fascism as a totalitarian sociopolitical and cultural ideology, and an authoritarian system of government from the early 1920s to the mid-1940s, led to China being observed and portrayed through fascist lenses and popularized in the accounts of the most notorious fascist travel reporters (Burdett 2007; De Giorgi 2010a, 2010b; Pedio 2013). During the *Fascist Ventennio* (1922–1943), such journalists and propagandists produced knowledge on Chinese politics and culture, arguing the need for Italy to play a primary role in Asia despite the inconsistent policy-making of the fascist government (De Giorgi 2010a). The collapse of the fascist regime and the foundation of the PRC in 1949 brought Italy, or at least its “leftist” part, and China closer together. From the early 1950s to the mid-1970s, delegations of politically active Italian writers, journalists, and politicians toured the popular republic at the formal invitation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and narrated the reputedly egalitarian nature of the PRC founded by Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai in 1949 (De Giorgi 2010b; Di Nucci 1988; Lombardi 2010; Polese Remaggi 2010). The interest in the PRC culminated in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which were the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1975) in the PRC. During those years, Mao and Maoism were a key component of expressions of dissent against the Italian political system by mass movements and extra-parliamentarian political organizations (Niccolai 1998a, 1998b). In the following decade (1976–1985), the fascination with China turned into disillusion, and Maoist

society and the ideological values that Maoism symbolized became subject to fierce criticism.

The privileged relationship between travel and journalistic narratives, political discourse, and identity construction, which reflected specific power dynamics at both national and global levels, changed in the mid-1980s. In those years, visual representations of Chinese society in documentaries and newscasts played a major role in shaping the process of narrativizing China, reproducing the national discourses and diffusing often stereotypical, politically oriented depictions of foreign locations. The most evident example of such a shift is the visual representation of the protests in Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989 circulating on Italian television, and in newspapers and magazines. Those years also saw a diminishing of politically active leftist intellectual elites in Italy and in other parts of Europe. This came about as a result of the international sociopolitical dynamics of perestroika in the Soviet Union in 1985 and, in 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the protests in Tiananmen Square. The shift toward visual media, the fall of communism in eastern Europe and the subsequent international loss in importance of leftist intellectual political activism, the reshaping of the post-Tiananmen Square PRC, and the demise of the Italian “First Republic” due to the *Mani Pulite* investigation into political corruption all seem valid reasons to limit this research to a period ending in the mid-1980s. The following decades need to be addressed through analysis of a wider, heterogeneous range of mediatic sources (e.g., television, cinema, documentaries, blogs) in addition to travel writing, which requires different theoretical tools. Therefore, I have set aside for future research analysis of the main post-1985 depictions of China, and their relationship with such specific historical events and heterogeneous media of representation.

While the metaphoric validity of China in Western societies has been introduced by many academics, chiefly in the fields of Chinese studies, political science, and, more recently, Italian studies, the Italian narrativization of twentieth-century China in travel literature and its role in the consolidation of political identities in Italian society has not been previously analyzed at length by scholars. Five decades ago, Chinese studies specialist Sandra Carletti underscored that China, as a country largely unknown and mysterious to twentieth-century Italian society, served well as a mirror to

project the reputedly antithetical ideals or anxieties of the individual authors producing images of the country. Carletti pointed out that such a trend was so pronounced that the images depicted were more a vivid portrait of the world in which the authors lived than a portrait of China, its history, and its culture (Carletti 1972, 43). Over the past decades, Italian academic scholarship has underscored the correlation between the representation of China, the process of identity-making, and the political activism of individual authors, or small groups of authors, in circumscribed time frames (De Giorgi 2010a, 2010b; Lombardi 2006; Marinelli 2014; Polese Remaggi 2010; Santarone 2004; Yang 2020a; among others). Another important aspect to consider is that the scholarly literature focusing on the self-reflective functionality of images of China in Western societies (Mackerras 1987, 2015; Jones 2001; Spence 1998; Turner 2014; Zheng 2013; among others)⁵ contains a rather monolithic idea of the “West,” which does not contemplate in depth Italian society and the specific significance of portraying different images of China within it. This book addresses the topic as a systematic, comparative analysis that takes into account the theoretical, historical, sociopolitical, and cultural contexts of both Italy and China. This task feels even more pressing now that the academic and non-academic productions of knowledge on China have grown substantially as a result of the global prominence of the PRC.

The scholarship on Italian travel writing on China produced in the past 20 years has mainly followed two significant patterns.⁶ The majority has analyzed the production of travel writing in the 1950s and early 1960s China and focused on a few individual authors, principally the writers Franco Fortini, Carlo Cassola and Curzio Malaparte, Goffredo Parise, and Alberto Moravia (De Pascale 2001; Santarone 2004; Lombardi 2007, 2008;

- 5 Similarly to Carletti, a historian of China and editor of a multi-authored, case-study-focused volume on how China has been portrayed by Western and Chinese authors in the past 500 years, Zheng Yangwen has recently argued that “China is better seen as a mirror reflecting the aspirations and anxieties of those who philosophized, composed, researched, reported, painted or filmed it” (2013, 21).
- 6 See Chapter 1 for a comprehensive review of literature on the topic. Scholarship on Italian travel writing on China focusing on each chronological paradigm is also introduced and discussed in Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

Liu 2018; Yang 2020a; among others).⁷ The travel literature produced during the Fascist Ventennio has been less researched, and most of the research that does exist is by historian and political scientist Laura De Giorgi (2010a, 2010b) and a few other scholars, such as Italianist Derek Duncan (2002) and historian Alessia Pedio (2013). The situation is the same for the first paradigm: discussion on travel narratives is limited to the work of individual authors, mainly journalist Luigi Barzini Sr. (De Courten 2001; Pardini 2019; Smith 2012; among others). Very few academics have addressed the 1970s' and early 1980s' representations of post-Maoist China (De Pascale 2001; Santarone 2004; Yang 2020b).⁸ The second trend is that these academic publications focus mainly on the diplomatic and cultural relations between the two countries, although they also refer to the importance of the political commitment of the Italian authors in shaping their depictions of China to some extent (Polese Remaggi, 2010; De Giorgi 2017). With few exceptions (De Giorgi 2013; Lombardi 2007; Santarone 2004), almost no consideration is given to the interconnections among the different representations. Nor is there much consideration of the relevance of events in China and larger geopolitical events that may have influenced changes in the representation of China. My approach moves beyond the prevailing understandings on the topic, which mainly refer to Italian travel writing on China to underscore the cultural and historical relationship between the two countries or the un/reliability of some of the travel narratives. My approach also moves beyond the treatment of Italian travel narratives on China as works symbolizing the artistic and political engagement of individual authors. In addition, I introduce the perspectives of authors whose travel writing on China deserves more scholarly attention because of their contextual importance and resonance in relation to the topic, in particular

7 Santarone (2004) also analyzes Moravia's 1937 trip to China.

8 The scarcity of scholarship investigating relations between the Italian intellectuals of this period and China is also connected to the difficulty of finding an unbiased historical perspective on the sociopolitical events and intellectual activism characterizing Italy during the so-called *Anni di piombo*, in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

those of journalist Luciano Magrini, Sinologist Edoarda Masi, and feminist journalist and writer Maria Antonietta Macciocchi.⁹

This monographic study is aligned to, and develops from, the expanding multidisciplinary scholarly literature on Italy's cultural relationships with East Asia produced by a growing academic community that extends across Europe, East Asia, North America, and Oceania. Such academic production draws from heterogeneous methodologies and transcends the traditional boundaries of Italian studies as a field so that it could in fact be defined as Italian-Chinese Cultural Studies.¹⁰ The transnational distribution of such interest has converged in a series of international conferences: "Italy and China: Centuries of Dialogue" organized by Gaoheng Zhang and Francesco Guardiani in 2016 (University of Toronto, Toronto); "Italy and Asia: Past and Present" organized by Maurizio Marinelli and Wessie Ling (Mahidol University, Bangkok); and "Exchanges and Parallels Between Italy and East Asia" organized by Gaoheng Zhang and Mario Mignone in 2018 (Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY). Part of this

- 9 With a few exceptions, these three intellectuals seem to have been shunned by academia. In the case of Magrini, such attitudes may have come about because the whole period in which he figures is not well explored. In the case of Masi, there seems to be little interest in her work despite her important role as a Sinologist and an intellectual in Italy for over three decades. Certainly, Masi's sympathy for Maoism contributed to this scholarly neglect. Macciocchi, on the other hand, might have lost international prestige because of her overenthusiastic pro-Maoist stance that persisted even after Maoism started to be harshly criticized in Italy and France. The scarcity of Italian academic interest in these authors and their travel narratives on China suggests that the study of this topic still depends on the political, intellectual, and cultural milieu within which Italian Sinologists, political scientists, historians, and Italianists interested in China live and work. Such considerations also suggest that academic scholarship itself has had a transformative role in defining the topic and its study. Though I consider this aspect a valuable topic, space does not allow my research to involve a specific analysis of the reasons for such a polarization of interest in the field.

For more information on Edoarda Masi and her role in describing China to the Italian readership and intellectual elite, see Basilone and La Guardia (2016).

- 10 With special thanks to the anonymous peer reviewers of the book proposal.

research was presented at such conferences and has benefited significantly from the feedback of the attendees.¹¹

This holistic investigation into how China was represented in Italian society aspires to provide new insights into the production of popular knowledge on China and the Othering of China, as well as on the discursive uses that such knowledge had in Italian culture, politics, and society. Following the example of Marinelli and Ling (2019), I also seek to “go beyond both the scholarship of Orientalism and the *J'accuse* of the postmodern critique” (363), to emphasize the role of travel literature in the transcultural sociopolitical and cultural processes shaping and consolidating political identities in Italian society. I provide insights into the Italian attitudes on China, and how such attitudes influenced the writers, journalists, and politicians who wrote about China for the Italian readership. I demonstrate that the processes of representing China as the Other by Italian travelers, journalists, and writers maintained a political quality across the five paradigms, which resonated with both the main ideological trends and the political engagement/disengagement of the authors of the time. I also underscore the existence of ties between the different intellectual elites identified in each paradigm and how such ties affected the process of representing China to the Italian readership and constructing different national identities across time. By locating the existing academic production on the topic in such a wider historical, sociopolitical, and diplomatic framework (1890s–1980s), and relying on a more comprehensive range of primary sources in each of the historical periods under analysis, I describe the process of narration of China as a continuum of juxtaposed

11 See Basilone (2017, 2019a). Other sections were presented in other multidisciplinary conferences, such as the 27th FILLM International Congress “The Familiar and the Exotic in Language and Literature: The Politics of Perceptions and Representation,” University of Delhi, Delhi, India, March 15–17, 2017 (Basilone 2019b); ACIS 9th Biennial Conference “Incontri e Scontri: The Dynamics of Italian Transcultural Exchanges,” Monash Centre in Prato, Italy, July 4–7, 2017; “Borders and Crossings: Travel Writing Conference,” Aberystwyth University, UK, July 10–12, 2017; the 2018 SIS Conference, “Resistance in Italian Culture: Literature, Film and Politics,” University of Sussex, Brighton, UK, April 5–6, 2018; and the ACIS International Conference “Navigazioni Possibili: Italies Lost and Found,” Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand, February 7–10, 2019.

images of the country and its people, as well as a collective work of intellectual elites rather than the work of individual authors. These intellectual elites from different chronological paradigms had categorically different ways of looking at China, as well as different motivations for narrating the country to the Italian readership. In addition, I suggest that the truthfulness and factuality claimed in the quasi-totality of the depictions of China relied on dominant political discourses in each paradigm rather than on absolute quanta of truth, and therefore, that truthfulness and factuality were secondary aspects in the narrativization of China.

Such a politically and historically oriented analysis relies on two recent theoretical approaches. The first regards the representation of China by Western sources as a textual phenomenon and focuses on analyzing how such representations contribute to shaping the understanding of reality in Western societies as well as to diffusing images of the West itself (Hayot 2004, 2009; Saussy 2001; Hayot, Saussy, and Yao 2008). This approach is inspired mainly by the post-structural concept of the *faraway* as a modality of conceptualization of the Other as a non-political text and a system of signs, as proposed by Roland Barthes (1970). Alternatively, the second approach regards depictions of China as a quintessentially political phenomenon and regards all knowledge produced on China as a result of the power dynamics that have shaped the world order in the twentieth century (Dirlík 1996; Mackerras 1987, 2015; Vukovich 2012). This approach relies upon the theorization of regimes of truth and discursive orders by Michael Foucault (1975) as well as Edward Said's orientalism as a discursive practice (1978).¹² Whereas in US academia, the two approaches have been regarded as sitting in opposition to each other, I propose that their interdependence is necessary to fully understand the processes of representing China in twentieth-century Italian societies. Therefore, I interpret the narrative depictions of China by Italian intellectuals as a series of interconnected, widespread textual and discursive practices connected to power, implying

12 I acknowledge the relevance of textual and literary approaches to the subject and hope that more scholarly works relying primarily on literary and textual theoretical frameworks will be produced in the future. I also acknowledge the necessity of developing an intercultural approach, as argued by David M. Jones (2001), Zhang Longxi (1998, 2005), Donatello Santarone (2004), and Roberto Bertoni (2016).

the theorization of China as the Other through its difference and distance from the Self. I analyze such narrative depictions in relation to the specific context in which they were produced and received to explore their textual nature, and at the same time, focus on their discursive and political function.

Since 1949, access to China by Western intellectuals has been primarily through standardized tours operated directly by the CCP's China Travel Agency and subject to strict information control. Moreover, in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, leftist intellectuals affiliated with the Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party, PCI) were also influenced by the party's guidelines, as well as by the relationship between Italy and the PRC, and by the PCI and the CCP. Therefore, I draw a distinction between the political interference and information control by members internal to the Italian political and cultural elites, and the techniques of information control used by the CCP – defined as techniques of hospitality by Paul Hollander (1986) – in order to raise the respective roles of the two phenomena in the construction of representations of China by Italian intellectuals.¹³ I also evaluate the implications of narratives that were in discord with the dominant rhetoric on China in Italy, underscoring the political motivations that resulted in their authors' marginalization from the national political discourse: practices to be regarded as evidence of internal conflicts within the Italian intellectual elite, which took place throughout the twentieth century. In doing so, I take into account the active role of Italian intellectuals in the selection or production and omission of knowledge on China in all five paradigms, also in relation to their – often limited – linguistic, historical, cultural, and political knowledge of both ancient and contemporary China.

I would like to provide for some final considerations regarding the methodology chosen for this book. I have decided to make a significant use of narrative texts, most of which I translated into English from Italian. Except for the narratives of Barzini (1972), Moravia (1973b), and Macciocchi (1972), the texts that I have analyzed in this book are not

13 Regarding the political and discursive use of China, my research is also shaped by the works of historians and political scientists Pierre Ryckmans (Simon Leys) (1971, 1978, 1981), Jonathan Spence (1998), François Hourmant (1997, 2000), and Anne-Marie Brady (2003).

readily available to the English-speaking readership, and some of them are quite difficult to access even for Italian readers and in Italy. I therefore aim to give the readers of the *Distance to China* direct access to the texts themselves and encourage them to complement my findings with their own evaluations when reading the excerpts. I find the chosen narrative texts exemplary of precise discursive strategies and processes of identification. However, I do not regard the narrative texts unequivocal or self-evident. They are open to manyfold interpretations, and it is my most sincere wish that other academics will investigate them from different perspectives and by means of other methodological approaches.

This book emphasizes the political background and affiliations of the Italian authors and events analyzed as primary factors that consciously or unconsciously impacted the authors' perspective and narrative. The scope of the work is that of providing a framework for understanding how larger contextual, politico-historical factors influenced the processes of representation of China to the Italian readership and reinforced Italian national identities. By doing this, my analytical approach does not aim at reducing the complexity of the artistic experiences of traveling in China by Italian authors and their act of constructing and narrating China through travel writing to exclusively political discursive mechanisms. I therefore invite other academics to complement my work with their understanding of the processes of representation of China through travel writing in Italian society, which could also focus on individual authors and make more use of biographical or micro-historical approaches.

While it might seem superfluous to specific disciplinary approaches, my effort to situate the research in Anglo-French paradigms of orientalist and postcolonial theory opens scenarios that have not been investigated at length in the fields of Italian and Chinese Studies (in Italian and English). The topics discussed in this book, hence, unveil not only what constitutes interest in, and what is left out of, the academic paradigms that I have just mentioned but also the possible theoretical and discursive trends subsumed to, and shaping those academic paradigms.

The Chapters

In the first chapter, I set out the theoretical and methodological underpinnings for a comparative and multidisciplinary analysis of the processes of narrativizing China in Italian travel literature. Academic scholarship from the disciplines of comparative literature, travel writing, Italian studies, Chinese studies, history, and political and social sciences introduced in this chapter sheds light upon the referential nature of the representations of China produced in the chosen travel narratives, as well as on the influence of the political in the narrativization process. I, therefore, propose a methodological framework that considers both the textuality of the representations and the political context and discursive function subsumed within the Italian travel literature on China written in the twentieth century.

Individual chapters are dedicated to the different representations produced in the five chronological paradigms. The second chapter focuses on the first chronological paradigm, 1898–1916. I analyze the travel narratives of Italian journalists, naval officers, and diplomats, such as Luigi Barzini Sr., who traveled to China as a war reporter for the *Corriere della Sera*, first to report on the Boxer War (1900–1901) and then to narrate the first Peking to Paris automobile race (1907) – which was won by the Italian team led by Prince Scipione Borghese – and journalist, opera writer, and literary critique Renato Simoni, who also traveled to China as a reporter for the *Corriere della Sera*. In addition to the travelogues by Barzini and Simoni, this chapter refers to the travel narratives on China produced by diplomats and Sinologists Amedeo Vitale and Ludovico Nocentini, and naval officers Vannutelli Lamberto, Eugenio Chiminelli, and Mario Valli, among others who were dispatched to China during and after the Boxer Uprising with the aim of contributing to the geographical and economic exploration of the country. The travel narratives by these authors portrayed China as a backward, agonizing civilization and justified the Italian military – and minimal – commercial presence in the country. In this chapter, I suggest that the travel narratives produced during this period reflected the colonial, economic, and political ambition of the Kingdom of Italy as well as

the desire of the Italian nation to gain international relevance among the other Western nations. Furthermore, I suggest that the narrativization of late imperial and early republican China as an agonizing civilization primarily reinforced the national identity of post-independence Italy, as a new, modern, and progressive Western nation.

The third chapter examines the narrativization of China during the Fascist Ventennio. In these decades, prominent Italian writers and journalists, such as Mario Appelius, Roberto Suster, Arnaldo Cipolla, Arnaldo Fraccaroli, Cesco Tomaselli, and Raffaele Calzini, reported from China for *Il Popolo d'Italia*, the *Corriere della Sera*, and *La Stampa*. Their travel narratives were crucial for the creation and diffusion in Italy of the dominant representation of China as a remote, decadent, and xenophobic society facing civil mutiny and foreign interference. The narrativization of China in Italian travelogues from the Fascist Ventennio was part of a widespread discursive practice by Italian intellectuals willing to subscribe to, and actively disseminate, the guiding principles of fascism. When emphasizing China's irreconcilable differences with fascist Italy, these intellectuals extolled the Italian race and culture, praised Mussolini, justified Italy's position in the geopolitical dynamics of the day, and propagandized the exceptionality of the fascist ideology to the Italian readership. In this chapter, I provide a comparative analysis of the most representative travelogues on China written during the Fascist Ventennio to show how the fascist representation of the country resulted from a dichotomic process of self-identification, implying the theorization of China as Other through its difference from the fascist Self.

The fourth chapter analyzes the depiction of China in the 1950s. In the decades following the proclamation of the PRC in 1949, an increasing number of prominent politicians, writers, academics, and journalists from the Italian leftist intelligentsia traveled to the country. With the aim of narrating Maoist China to the Italian readership, Velio Spano, Piero Calamandrei, Franco Fortini, Carlo Cassola, Carlo Bernari, and Giancarlo Vigorelli, among others, published their travel impressions in journals, essays, reportage, and diaries. As part of the generation of leftist intellectuals who experienced fascist life in their youth and actively opposed the fascist regime afterward, they sought not only to obliterate the fascist ideology

but to produce a counterrevolutionary culture for Italy's post-World War II social renovation. Their narratives of Maoist China reflected both their political and social engagement and the geopolitical dynamics of the time, along with their experience of the Italian Resistance, which they regarded as akin to the Chinese Communist Revolution. This chapter revolves around a comparative analysis of the travel narratives on the PRC written by Italian intellectuals in the 1950s, and the contextual circumstances that produced, directed, and motivated their travels. It also shows the significance of the political message as the basis of such cultural productions, articulated in terms of self-identification, and of the construction of a new and multifaceted, anti-fascist sense of national identity.

The fifth chapter analyzes the portrayal of China between 1966 and 1975, the time of the Cultural Revolution. In this period, a number of well-known leftist Italian writers, journalists, and politicians, such as Goffredo Parise, Alberto Moravia, Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, Alberto Iacoviello, Luca Pavolini, Gianni Rodari, and Giorgio Manganelli, toured the PRC. By portraying China as a utopian society, spatially and culturally proximate, these travel narratives introduced to the Italian readership the significance of the Cultural Revolution and the supposedly unique nature of Maoist society. Thanks to these travel narratives, the PRC rapidly became a particular space in the imaginary of 1960s and 1970s Italian society, a space where conflicting political ideas among the Italian left were juxtaposed. More importantly, these travel narratives on China written in the 1960s and 1970s became symbolic of the ongoing heterogeneous political debate in Italy among the Italian intelligentsia of the time. This was inflected by the geopolitical dynamics of the Cold War and the international debate on communism that raged among the European communist parties, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and the CCP. These sociopolitical factors all contributed to the multiplication of divergent interpretations of Maoist China, the Chinese revolution, Mao Zedong's thought, and their validity for Italian society.

The sixth chapter describes the portrayal of China in the period from 1978 to 1985. After the death of Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong in 1976, the PRC faced political and social resettlement involving years of harsh political controversies internal to the leadership of the CCP, as well as massive

changes in contemporary Chinese society and in China's geopolitical collocation. During this period, a conspicuous number of Italian writers, journalists, and politicians, such as Aldo De Jaco, Alberto Arbasino, Luigi Malerba, Mario Luzi, Vittorio Sereni, Edoarda Masi, and Tiziano Terzani, traveled to China both in formal delegations and individually. This chapter suggests that, whether nostalgic or disillusioned, enraged or pessimistic, the travel narratives from the Italian authors reporting from China between the late 1970s and the mid-1980s, in effect, expressed resentment at the political violence in Italian society, in particular, that of the "Long 1968" and during the year 1977.

The Politics of Textuality: A Theoretical Framework

This chapter situates the study of twentieth-century Italian travel literature on China within the scholarly interest in travel writing and the sociohistorical and cultural academic production regarding China and its civilization as the Other.

In the first section, I point out the specificity of twentieth-century Italian travel literature on China with regard to the international academic trends and interests in travel writing and refer to the scholarly interest in the topic produced in the fields of Italian, Chinese, and cultural studies. The selected scholarly literature introduced in the second section sheds light upon the correlation between textuality and referentiality in the process of narrativizing China and contextualizes the use of orientalism as a theoretical tool for producing and analyzing knowledge on China in relation to the Italian scenario. I also underscore the importance of historical and geopolitical dynamics in the process of producing knowledge about and representation of China, as well as the influence of the academic authors' positionality in investigating such processes.

The interdisciplinary approach outlined in this chapter contributes to reframing the theoretical and methodological lenses of analysis of Italian twentieth-century travel writing on China. It also suggests new possible interpretations of, and directions toward, the study of travel writing on China that depart from the more consolidated trends and interests in the fields of Italian studies, comparative literature, history, and political and social sciences.

China, Italy, and Travel Literature

The academic production regarding travel writing has focused principally on the specific dynamics of a certain typology of imperialist interference, primarily British, French, and American; on their specific areas of interest, primarily Africa, South America, and the Middle East and India; and on the specific dynamics of power relations between those imperial centers and their peripheries, and the consequent response of those peripheries to the above-mentioned imperialist nations (Clark and Smethurst 2008). Therefore, over roughly four decades, much of the academic interest has focused on the eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century European involvement in the northern African region; later, the academic interest shifted to other areas of Western colonialism, encompassing narratives from South Asia, the Caribbean, Africa, and South America, thus focusing on other European and non-European (United States, Russia, and China) imperial/colonial power structures in the modern world (Hulme and Youngs 2002).¹ During these four decades, much of the academic production on travel literature studies has been the result of postcolonial and feminist studies and focused primarily on the “distorted self-serving views of other lands” (Youngs and Forsdick

- 1 Among the major monographic and anthological scholarly works on travel literature, see Charles Burdett and Duncan Derek, eds. *Cultural Encounters. European Travel Writing in the 1930s* (2002); Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs, eds. *Perspectives on Travel Writing* (2004); Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492–1797* (1986); Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (2002); Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst, eds. *New Directions in Travel Writing Studies* (2015); Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst, *Travel Form and Empire: The Poetics and Politics of Mobility* (2009); Kristi Siegel, *Issues in Travel Writing: Empire, Spectacle and Displacement* (2002); Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women’s Travel Writing and Colonialism* (1991); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992); George Robertson et al., eds. *Travellers’ Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (1994); Tim Youngs, *Travellers in Africa: British Travelogues, 1850–1900* (1994); and Tim Youngs and Charles Forsdick, eds. *Travel Writing: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies* (2012).

2012, vol. I, 5). Such an interest in travel literature has been prompted mainly by the seminal works of Edward Said (1978), Peter Hulme (1986), Mary Louise Pratt (1992), and Sara Mills (1991), the first three of which contributed substantially to both the theoretical and the methodological approaches to travel literature as a form. In particular, Said's analysis of the British, French, and American imperial presence in the Middle East paved the way for the increasing reinterpretation of canonical literary works, and rapidly became the most "prominent paradigm of studies of travel writing and indeed of colonial cross-cultural exchanges" (Hulme and Youngs 2002, 107).

The scholarly contributions to travel literature on twentieth-century China have increased over the past decades, partially because of the leading political and economic role of the People's Republic of China in contemporary geopolitical, economic, and cultural dynamics.² The works of academics Nicholas Clifford (1999), Timothy Kendall (2005), and Susan Thurin (2001) are all concerned with the discursive practices of narrating China and the consequential orientaling strategies embedded in travel narratives that essentialize the process of self-identification in the dichotomy of Westernness and Chineseness (Kendal 2005, 110; Thurin 1999, 19). The authors have also worked on the functionality of travel narratives as profoundly derivative, imaginative geographies (Kendal 2005, 223), as well as on the imperialist and colonialist discourses embedded in them, and on the connection between travel narratives and the attention of Western countries on the commercial and cultural opening of China in the late

2 Among the major monographic works on travel literature and China, see Susan S. Thurin's *Victorian Travellers and the Opening of China, 1842–1907* (1999); Nicholas Clifford's *A Truthful Impression of the Country: British and American Travel Writing in China* (2001); Jeffrey N. Dupée's *British Travel Writers in China 1890–1914* (2004); Timothy Kendall's *Ways of Seeing China: From Yellow Peril to Shangrila* (2005); Paul French's *Through the Looking Glass: China's Foreign Journalists from Opium Wars to Mao* (2009); and Leilei Chen's *Re-Orienting China: Travel Writing and Cross Cultural Understanding* (2016). Collections of individual contributions on travel writings about China include Douglas Kerr and Julia Kuehn's *A Century of Travels in China: Critical Essays on Travel Writing from the 1840s to the 1940s* (2007); and Steve Clark and Paul Smethurst's *Asian Crossings: Travel Writing in China, Japan and Southeast Asia* (2008).

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Thurin 1999, 201). At the same time, academic interest has also focused on the portrayal of the Self of the travel writers in narrating China (Kerr and Kuehn 2007, 5). In addition, scholarly interest has emphasized the theoretical resistance that travel narratives focusing on China, Japan, and other Asian regions and civilizations exert against the academic study of travel writing in the Anglo-American context, questioning the applicability of the postcolonial models characterized by the dynamics of power relations between center and periphery and, consequently, exhorting academic interest in the topic to “move away from an Atlanticist emphasis in narratives of world history” (Clark and Smethurst 2008, 1–4).³

The representations of China in twentieth-century Italian travel writing partially share the theoretical tenets of the academic production of travel studies focusing on such a topic. As Italianist Derek Duncan has argued, the idealization of the nation in the Italian travel narratives from the Fascist Ventennio – and from the whole chronological framework of this study – “reflects the more general tendency of travel writing to create a sense of place through projecting pre-existing values onto specific sites, and a sense of identity for the writer/traveler through consolidating a particular relationship with a place” (2002, 50).⁴ At the same time, the narrativization of China during the early 1900s and the Fascist Ventennio, and the narrativization of the PRC after 1949 by Italian leftist intellectuals are not structured according to the long-debated mutual relations between discourse, empire, and travel narrative; nor do they serve primarily as a tool to reinforce colonial rule and expansion in East Asia.⁵ The gaze on China

3 See also Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst, eds. *New Directions in Travel Writing Studies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

4 See Derek Duncan, “Travel and Autobiography. Giovanni Comisso’s Memories of the War,” in Charles Burdett and Derek Duncan, eds. *Cultural Encounters. European Travel Writing in the 1930s*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002, 49–63.

5 On the relationships between discourse, empire, and travel narrative, see Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988; Mary Louse Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (2004); and Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst, eds. *Travel Form and Empire: The Poetics and Politics of Mobility* (2009).

by twentieth-century Italian intellectuals was not clear of a colonialist attitude of positional superiority toward the Chinese, even in the absence of an extensive colonial territory, since the Italian concession in Tianjin was a marginal character in liberal Italy as well as in Mussolini's imperialist ambitions. The representation of China by writers and journalists from the early 1900s and the Fascist Ventennio was primarily aimed at consolidating the rhetoric on Italy as a great and advanced Western nation, and later of a fascist sense of national identity, as well as to diffuse the fascist ideology to the Italian readership, although the imperialist ambitions of both liberal and fascist Italy were part of such rhetoric. Concerning the two periods – 1898–1916 and 1925–1945 – it is worth noticing that while the imperialist agenda had started right after the Italian Unification (1961), there is a substantial difference in the pro-imperialist perspective of the intellectuals who narrate China in the liberal and fascist periods. I define the authors of the liberal period as “patriotic” as the authors from this period are primarily concerned with the national and international recognition Italy as a great nation. While the cult of the nation is a fundamental component also of the fascist period (Gentile 2009), the imperialist perspective of the authors from the Fascist Ventennio is a direct expression of fascist ideology and discursive frameworks.

The discursive and propagandist aspects of the narrativization of China implied the construction of particular identities through a process of Othering,⁶ operating through the demarcations of identity and difference, and familiarity and unfamiliarity/exoticness – a process in which the difference/sameness of China as the Other structures the self-perceptions of the Italian writers discussed here, and therefore, the difference/sameness constitutes their own identities: nationalist, fascist, anti-fascist, communist, socialist, anti-communist, and so on.⁷ At the same time, an autobiographical perspective emerges in the travel narratives whereby the

6 See Trinh T. Minh-ha, “Other than Myself/My Other Self,” in George Robertson et al., eds, *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*. London: Routledge, 1994, 9–26.

7 See James Duncan, “Dis-Orientation: On the Shock of the Familiar in a Far-away Place,” in James Duncan and Derek Gregory, eds., *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*. London: Routledge, 1999, 151–163.

author describing China as the Other negotiates specific identities at personal, social, and national levels.⁸ As outlined in the introduction, the process of self-identification in the Otherness of the locations narrated by the Italian authors also implies the mediation of proximity and distance, which are perceived by the authors as relative and relational coordinates – in other words, as discursive conceptualizations – constituting the definition of the Self in relation to the Other, rather than as fixed, spatial coordinates reducible to absolute terms or values.⁹ The demarcations of identity and difference, familiarity and unfamiliarity, and distance and proximity all vary according to the specific ideological beliefs of the narrators, as well as the geopolitical dynamics within which Italy and China move. When the Other is narrated as familiar and close at hand, some analogies with the Self are presumed on cultural, moral, and historical grounds, thus characterizing the Other as a radical affinity, as in the narrativization of China in the 1950s and 1960s. On the other hand, China as the Other is narrated as distant and unfamiliar, or even as utterly unintelligible, when some differences from the Self are presumed on the same grounds, thus characterizing the Other as radically different, as in the narrativizations of China during the early twentieth century, the Fascist Ventennio, and the 1980s.

In accordance with Burdett's (2007) study of Italian travel writing during the Fascist Ventennio, I show how the travel narratives produced by Italian fascist writers and journalists in China all rely on fascist discursive frameworks, and therefore, all convey specific nationalist, racist, and fascist elements to the Italian readership. I also argue that the selected fascist travel narratives evidence their authors' own approaches to, interpretations

- 8 See Derek Duncan, "Travel and Autobiography: Giovanni Comisso's Memories of the War," in Charles Burdett and Derek Duncan, eds., *Cultural Encounters: European Travel Writing in the 1930s*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002, 49–63. Concerning the fascist travel narratives, as argued by Italianist Charles Burdett, such a process of self-identification is defined on the basis of a positive Self and negative Other. On the concept of the "counter-type" elaborated by historian George Mosse (Burdett 2007, 16), see George Mosse, "Fascist Aesthetics and Society: Some Considerations" in *Journal of Contemporary History* 31 (2006): 245–252.
- 9 See Mary H. Helms, *Ulysses' Sail: An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge, and Geographical Distance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

of, and adherence to or disagreement with the fascist ideology, causing a heterogeneous, at times even contradictory, corpus of interpretations of it, which also affected the way China is portrayed. In line with Derek Duncan's argument (2002), I propose that during the Fascist Ventennio, journalist and writer Luigi Magrini used his travel narratives to implicitly criticize the fascist regime. The major elements of the fascist ideology that Burdett (2007) outlines in his research also recur in the narrativization of China by the fascist Italian intellectuals included in this research, such as the use of the imperial rhetoric and racial hierarchism justifying fascist Italy's geopolitical collocation; the authors' references to the cults of militarism, violence, and masculinity, reputedly central to fascist ideology; the fascist reinterpretation of the history of Italy and of Italian people, with emphasis on the memory of imperial Rome, the sacrifice of World War I, and the regeneration of Italy under fascism; and the presence of anti-communist propaganda, directly connected to promotion of the fascist regime as a model of human development that differs from American capitalism and Soviet communism.¹⁰

Similarly, the post-World War II Italian travel narratives on China chiefly represent the intentions of the Italian leftist intellectuals to shape new Italian national identities in contrast to the fascist and Christian democratic identities. Concerning the specific typology of travels by Western intellectuals in the PRC after it was founded in 1949, and the discursive and ideological nature of their travel accounts, contemporary academics

10 In his study on Italian travel literature during the Fascist Ventennio, Charles Burdett (2007) analyzed the travel literature produced by Italian fascist writers and journalists in the Italian colonies in Africa (Eritrea, Libya, and Ethiopia), as well as in pre-Francoist Spain, Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and the United States. Among the Italian writers and reporters included in Burdett's research are Mario Appellius, Luigi Barzini Sr., Arnaldo Cipolla, Raffaele Calzini, Emilio Cecchi, Margherita Sarfatti, Giovanni Comisso, Corrado Alvaro, Carlo Emilio Gadda, Ugo Oietti, Arnaldo Fraccaroli, Virgilio Lilli, and Cesco Tomaselli. Many of these authors are also discussed in the present research. Charles Burdett suggested a study of the representation of China by fascist writers and journalists as one of the possible coordinates to expand his study. Other coordinates are the fascist perception of democratic European nations, and the narrativization of Japan and South America by fascist writers and journalists (Burdett 2007, 249).

have analyzed such a typology mainly in relation to the interest of Western intellectuals in other socialist societies established in the twentieth century.¹¹ In particular, political sociologists Paul Hollander (1981, 2006) and François Hourmant (1997, 2000) have investigated the causes of distinguished Western intellectuals' fascination and consequent disillusionment with the PRC, the Soviet Union, and Castro's Cuba.¹² In accordance with Hollander and Hourmant, I focus on the predisposition of Italian intellectuals to uncritically exalt or selectively represent the PRC (Hollander 1981), as well their participation in diffusing artifact portraits of the socialist hosting countries and their respective ideologies (Hourmant 2000). I also regard the influence of the techniques of information control and hospitality by the Chinese government as a major influence on the narrativization of Maoist China by the intellectuals, as emphasized by both Hollander and Hourmant. Most importantly, in accordance with the two political sociologists, I consider the Western intellectuals' fascination with socialist societies the direct consequence of the intellectuals' troubled relationships with their own societies as well as their reaction to sociocultural issues specific to their own societies.

- 11 Among the major works on Western intellectuals, their fascination and disillusionment with socialist countries, and their political travels, see Paul Hollander's *Political Pilgrims: Western Intellectuals in Search of the Good Society* (1981) and *The End of Commitment: Intellectuals, Revolutionaries and the Political Morality in the Twentieth Century* (2006); François Hourmant's *Le désenchantement des clercs. Figures de l'intellectuel dans l'après-Mai 68* (1997) and *Au pays de l'avenir radieux. Voyages des intellectuels français en URSS, à Cuba et en Chine populaire* (2000); and Richard Wolin's *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* (2010). See also Raymond Aron's *L'opium des intellectuels* (1956) and Jean-François Ravel's *La tentation totalitaire* (1976).
- 12 French political historian François Hourmant (1997, 2000) has focused on French intellectuals' travel narratives on the Soviet Union, the PRC and the Republic of Cuba following the Cuban Revolution. Hourmant has also referred to Italian journalists and politicians Maria Antonietta Macciocchi and Alberto Iacoviello, and Italian writers and journalists Alberto Moravia and Furio Colombo. However, Hourmant uses these as "French" sources to refer to their influence in the French cultural and political context.

I argue that the historical, social, and cultural coordinates of twentieth-century Italy – from the late 1890s to the late 1980s – as well as the historical, sociological dynamics operating within it in terms of geopolitical relations both with the PRC, or the Soviet Union, and the United States, and with the other European countries, all contribute to making the study of discursiveness of the Italian intellectuals' fascination and disillusionment with the PRC a case study of its own kind. This case study is also characterized by its specific time frame of interest in the PRC, as well as by a strong anti-fascist motivation that goes hand in hand with the reconsideration of the direct experience of the Italian Resistance movements in post-World War II Italian society. The travel writings on the PRC from the twentieth century, their political relevance, and their discursive functions, as well as the political *impegno* of the Italian intellectuals producing them, all need to be analyzed with regard to this specific context.

Academic study of Italian travel literature on China has investigated some specific aspects of the narrativization of China in the twentieth century connected to the political and propagandist use of the travel narratives on China written by Italian writers, journalists, and politicians. In an appendix to the Italian edition of Paul Hollander's *Political Pilgrims*, Loreto Di Nucci (1988) sketches a concise and partial outline of the so-called political pilgrimages to China by Italian intellectuals, arguably following the theoretical implications of Hollander's work. More recently, Laura De Giorgi (2010a) has also outlined the representation of China in the fascist accounts of Italian fascist journalists Mario Appelius and Roberto Suster and the propagandist validity of their narratives for the Italian readership during the Fascist Ventennio. Maurizio Marinelli (2007, 2014) has investigated the Italian presence in the Italian concession in Tianjin and its representation by Italian writers and diplomats. Alessia Pedio (2013) has analyzed extensively the travel narrative from the most prominent fascist journalists reporting for *Popolo d'Italia*, the newspaper founded by Benito Mussolini in 1914. De Giorgi and Polese Remaggi have analyzed the travel narratives of Italian intellectuals during the 1950s in relation to the Italian and European political situations of the time (De Giorgi 2010b, 2013, 2017; Polese Remaggi 2010). Rosa Lombardi has outlined the different portraits of China by Italian intellectuals in the twentieth century (2006, 2007). In

her monograph on twentieth-century Italian travel writing, Gaia De Pascale discusses how the PRC was narrated by the Italian writers Fortini, Cassola, Parise, Arbasino, and Malerba (2001, 157–185). Finally, Shirley Ann Smith (2012) has published the only comprehensive, multidisciplinary research on the Italian colonial presence in China, which is therefore confined to the first half of the twentieth century; her study focuses on the accounts of emblematic fascist intellectuals and politicians (among others, the journalist Luigi Barzini Sr. and the diplomats Galeazzo Ciano, Salvago Raggi, and Daniele Varé).¹³ However, the narrativization of China in Italian travel literature has not been previously investigated as a single though multi-layered phenomenon encompassing the entire twentieth century, and in light of recent postcolonial and post-structuralist theories.

Italian travel writing on the country since the late 1890s has depended substantially on the specific historical dynamics operating in China, which has also had deep political repercussions at the global level. Italian writers and reporters were certainly conscious of such dynamics, particularly those aspects concerning the international position of the country. They used such knowledge to contextualize the events that they witnessed in Chinese society in order to improve the understanding of Chinese and international events of their times, such as the emergence of Chinese nationalist

13 A relevant and comprehensive source on travel writing on the PRC is *La cortina di bambù* (2007) by Italian journalist Michelangelo Cucurullo. *La cortina di bambù* focuses, respectively, on the travel narratives from the 1955 *Il Ponte* delegation; the 1980 delegation of the Sindacato Nazionale Scrittori (Italian Writers Association, SNS); travel narratives expressing the relationship between PCI and CCP; and a selection of Italian authors (Emanuelli, Malaparte, Masi, Moravia, and others) who, according to Cucurullo, went to China in search of the exotic (2007, 181). Following Hollander (1981), Cucurullo classifies the data from these narratives according to specific themes (places, traditions, population, and society, and others), and concludes that China is used by Italian intellectuals to project their utopian ambitions, and subsequent frustrations (2007, 259). Another interesting anthological source, encompassing the entire period circumscribed in this study, is Danilo Soscia's *In Cina, Il Grand Tour degli Italiani verso il Centro del Mondo* (2010), which comprises a collection of excerpts from travel narratives produced by Italian intellectuals, journalists, writers, and artists who visited China in the twentieth century.

movements and Pan-Asianism in the 1900s, 1920s, and 1930s, the collocation of the PRC in relation to the Cold War dynamics in the 1950s, the consequences of the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s, the establishment of a relationship between the United States and the PRC in the 1970s, and the development of a market-based economy in the 1980s. It is therefore justifiable to argue that if there were many differences in the way China was approached, defined, and narrated by Italian intellectuals over the century, it was partially because China itself changed enormously during the twentieth century. At the same time, my research shows that the political commitment of the travelers was always the most determinant factor in their representation of China. Even if authors like Franco Fortini disagreed on specific topics or events, such as the detention of Chinese writer and literary theorist Hu Feng in 1954, analyzed by Xin Liu (2018, 260), their travel narratives were nonetheless part of discursive practices that ultimately embodied specific Italian identities and ideologies of the time.¹⁴ More importantly, Italian writers did not conceptualize China on its own terms. They measured its difference or affinity by comparing it with Italy and by the yardstick of Western civilization and its specific values and ideologies, as openly pointed out by Italian writer Luigi Malerba (1993, 22–23). The

14 Xin Liu (2018) argues that Fortini and Malaparte did not “intentionally distort and embellish what they observed in China in order to transmit their political ideologies” (260) or that they did not “avoid talking about the backwardness and social problems in the PRC” such as poverty and disorder (*ibid.*). However, the delegation tours through which most Italian authors visited the PRC in the 1950s and 1960s were organized and managed by the CCP, and therefore, as sinologist and political scientist Marie Brady argues, the tour participants were “selected for their credibility and their favorable attitude toward Beijing,” because “a visit to see the new China was not meant to be an exchange of ideas: the visitors’ role was to learn and admire, and if possible write favorable reports which could be used in China and in the West” (2003, 94). The fact that Fortini and Malaparte also expressed their concern for certain topics or events, such as the detention of Chinese writer and literary theorist Hu Feng in 1954 does not invalidate the preponderant role of the discursive practices embedded in their narrative. See Chapter 4 for a detailed analysis of the propagandistic content of the travel narratives produced in the 1950s.

referential use of China for the consolidation, negotiation, and/or redefinition of specific identities at the personal, social, and national levels, according to both the specific ideological beliefs of the narrators and the geopolitical dynamics in which Italy and China moved at the time, is shown to be the most significant aspect in this analysis of twentieth-century Italian travel writing on China.

The Political: Textuality and Referentiality

The agency of the political in the process of representing and narrativizing twentieth-century China as the Other has been a focal point, if not the bone of contention, of international academic interest in the topic over the past four decades, particularly in the fields of Chinese studies, comparative literature, history, and political and social sciences.¹⁵ Being strongly dependent on postcolonial studies and French post-structuralism, such scholarly interest has, on the one hand, addressed the discursive and referential nature of the representation of China, in relation to its sociopolitical contexts of production as well as the political ideas and involvement in society of its authors (Chow 1993; Cohen 1984;

15 Visible in the selected influential works of contemporary academics in the fields of comparative literature, history, and political and social sciences are Paul Cohen's *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (1984); Colin Mackerras's *Western Images of China* (1987); Lisa Lowe's *Critical Terrains* (1991); Rey Chow's *Writing Diaspora* (1993); Zhaoming Qian's *Orientalism and Modernism* (1995); Arif Dirlik's *Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism* (1996); Jonathan Spence's *Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (1998); Zhang Longxi's *Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China* (1998) and *Allegoresis: Reading Canonical Literature East and West* (2005); Marie-Paule Ha's *Figuring the East: Segalen, Malraux, Duras, and Barthes* (2000); David Martin Jones's *The Image of China in Western Social and Political Thought* (2001); David Porter's *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe* (2001); Haun Saussy's *The Great Walls of Discourse and Other Adventures in Cultural China* (2001); Eric Hayot's *Chinese Dreams: Pound, Brecht, Tel Quel* (2004); Eric Hayot, Haun Saussy, and Stephen Yao's *Sinographies: Writing China* (2008); and Daniel Vukovich's *China and Orientalism: Western Knowledge Production and the PRC* (2012).

Dirlik 1996; Lowe 1991; Mackerras 1987; Spence 1998; Vukovich 2012). On the other hand, scholarly interest has addressed the nature of the representation of China as an interrelational and textual epistemological phenomenon, thus focusing on the processes of representation of China rather than on its political significance (Hayot 2004; Hayot, Saussy and Yao 2008; Porter 2001; Saussy 2001). Advocating for the need for cultural mediation between China and the West, a third approach has focused on the dialogue between the two opposite poles, rather than on the textual or political nature of China in Western literary texts (Jones 2001; Porter 2001; Zhang 1998, 2005). While recognizing the influence of the political in the representation of China, this third approach has tended to disregard the discursive nature of the representations of China produced in Western literary texts as well as the propagandist content of such representations. In the three approaches, referentiality and textuality have therefore been regarded as alternative, and even opposite and incompatible aspects of the narrativization. It is also worth noting that the theoretical speculations on the manifold narrativizations of China in Western literary texts privileging the political, textual, or intercultural approaches produced by Western academia mainly reflect a dialogue between those three different positions in three overlapping chronological phases (respectively, the late 1970s to late 1990s, early 1990s to late 2010s, and early 2000s to the present), as well as the popularity of one of those paradigms in a particular chronological phase.

In this book, I take into account those three different approaches, and as outlined in the introduction, I regard textuality and referentiality as concurrent aspects in the narrativization of China as the Other in the twentieth-century Italian travel narratives considered in the present study. I argue that in those narratives, China is approached and written as a text – a text inscribed in a precise historical and political context in which it gravitates, and in the precise historical, political, and ideological context of the author who writes that text.

To analyze how China has been portrayed in twentieth-century Italian travel writing, I draw from the Sinographic method elaborated by Eric Hayot (2004) as well as the Sino-orientalist critique elaborated by Daniel Vukovich (2012), respectively, from the second and first approaches

introduced above. I consider contributions by Hayot and Vukovich valuable contemporary developments of the Western scholarly interest in the agency of the textual and the political in the process of representing and narrativizing China as the Other. Because I consider that textuality and referentiality are both involved in the process of representing China in the twentieth century, I regard the post-structuralist theoretical framework of the Sinographic method as compatible with and complementary to the Marxist ideology critique as well as the Marxist-inspired anti-colonial theory underlying Vukovich's definition of Sinological-orientalism.¹⁶

In accordance with the Sinographic method, I regard my work on the representation of China by twentieth-century Italian intellectuals as a study of a "particular writing of China ... establish[ing] a particular Chinese difference (from the West, from itself) and mak[ing] its difference visible" (Hayot 2012, 185). My research also investigates the set of disciplinary and cultural practices that shaped the various depictions of China (Hayot, Saussy, and Yao 2008, vii). I point out the referential validity of such representations as well as the ontological instability of the China looked on by the Italian writers, journalists, and politicians discussed in this book. Therefore, I trace the functionality of the writing of China as an act of self-identification authorizing Italian authors to shape or justify a particular aesthetics and politics considered central in the philosophical trends of the twentieth century (Hayot 2012, 185). However, with regard to the political and ideological value of such representations, I find that the political precedes and shapes the act of writing a particular representation of China.¹⁷

16 Vukovich, however, disregards the Sinographic method. He defines this method as "a self-referential and abstract discourse precisely for its unclear relation to its political reference," and argues that "while valid at the formal level of the signifier, ... [Sinography] misses the point of the Marxist-inspired work on globalization: the world remains structured neo-colonially by a core/periphery division centred on the West and First World, which exercises economic and political, if not cultural hegemony over 'the Rest'" (2012, 140).

17 Eric Hayot, in contrast, argues that while orientalism defines the "way a particular 'China' shifts over time" ([2004] 2012, 183), "we are still missing the name for the idea *before* it turns into the orientalist process" (183). Therefore, Hayot collocates the act of writing "China" before the orientalist process (183). In *The Hypothetical Mandarin* (2009), Hayot theorizes further the referentiality of China for the West,

While affirming the impossibility of ignoring reference and therefore politics in its process, the Sinographic method situates the act of narrativizing China directly in Roland Barthes's non-referential mode of the *faraway* (Hayot, Saussy, and Yao 2008, viii), and claims the functionality of the distance to "describe something like the internal geography of the species rather than anything of the surface of the planet" (x).¹⁸ The specific historical and cultural context subsumed by any particular depiction of China as well as the ideological and propagandist use of such a depiction in that context all occupy a marginal role in the Sinographic method, since the context itself is regarded as metalanguage and therefore as non-referential.¹⁹ The Italian writers, journalists, and politicians referred to in this study, as members of an elite class of politically active intellectuals, all had specific political and propagandist intentions, and they successfully influenced, not only the political ideas of their contemporary and future readership, but the readership's ideas about China and the PRC as well.

as well as China's role as the epistemological limit for the West: "'China' has been most consistently characterized as a limit or potential limit, a horizon neither of Otherness nor of similarity, but rather of the very distinction between Otherness and similarity . . . a *form* [emphasis in the original] of all forms of totality, a figure against which other forms of totality have been measured" (2008, 8). And he defines the relation between China and the West as ecliptic (11), and as functional for "help[ing] the West to understand itself as a civilization and as modern" (12).

18 In *The Empire of Signs* (1970), Barthes gives his own conceptualization of Otherness as a textuality, which he situates in the *là-bas/faraway* – "somewhere in the world" where the observer can choose "not to claim to represent or analyze reality itself" but to "entertain" the idea of an unheard-of symbolic system, one altogether detached from our own" in order to try "to write the history of our own obscurity" and "search the very fissure of the symbolic" (1992, 3–4). Barthes considers Otherness, specifically Japan, as a system of features isolated by the observant, rather than a reality to be compared and contrasted historically, philosophically, sociologically, culturally, and politically. Therefore, while the faraway can allow the intellectual to look into his/her own culture's obscurity to "manifest the density of his/her narcissism, tally down [his/her] appeals to difference . . . [as well as his/her] ideological recuperations" (*ibid.*), the experience of the faraway is primarily aimed at shedding some light on the symbolic.

19 "... the metalanguage of the reference is just more language" (Hayot, Saussy, and Yao 2008, p. xi).

Therefore, the travel narratives produced by these Italian authors need to be situated in the precise geopolitical context in which they were produced, and analyzed in relation to the interference of the political in the production, diffusion, or marginalization of knowledge about China in Italy – and also in the West, as Vukovich (2012) suggests.

Concerning the validity of the use of Barthes's *faraway* for the analysis of China, it is worth noting that Roland Barthes himself did not conceptualize the PRC in that way. In his 1974 trip to the PRC, Barthes regarded China as a well-defined and contained political space completely structured by the Maoist discourse.²⁰ In his own words, Maoist China was an “absolute political totalitarianism,” and a “text without a gap” (2012, 191–192). In his article “Alors, la Chine?” (Le Monde, May 24, 1974), Barthes summarized his Chinese and Maoist experience as follows: “[En Chine] les objets idéologiques que notre société construit sont silencieusement déclarés *im-pertinents*” (1994, 32),²¹ and that at the same time “la Chine ne donne à lire que son Texte politique. Ce Texte est partout: aucun domaine ne lui est soustrait” (33).²² In the idea of the political text, Barthes himself put together the two aspects of textuality and referentiality, regarding them as complementary rather than mutually exclusive and conflictual.²³

20 Roland Barthes traveled to China in 1974 on the Tel Quel delegation trip. Along with Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva, Marcelin Pleynet, and François Wahl, Barthes left Paris for a supervised three-week tour of China. The Tel Quel trip to China was a consequence of the Tel Quel group's temporary fascination with Maoist China, as well as their increasing distrust of the French Communist Party. In a few weeks, however, the aspirations of the Tel Quel group were frustrated by the actual experience of the PRC. The tour of China organized for the Tel Quel followed the pattern of an all-inclusive itinerary managed by the CCP's Luxingshe Agency, and happened during the Criticize Lin Biao, Criticize Confucius Campaign (批林批孔运动).

21 “[In China] the ideological objects that our society constructs are silently declared *im-pertinent* [emphasis in the original]” (Barthes 1986–1987, 117).

22 “China offers very little to be read aside from its political Text. That Text is everywhere: no area is exempt from it” (Barthes 1986–1987, 118).

23 While the publication of “Alors, la Chine?” underscored Barthes' need to express his difficulty in relating to China, it also gave voice to Barthes' refusal to publish either a positive or a negative politically engaged piece on Maoist China, since he himself stated that the French leftist overenthusiastic idea about Maoism was

The work of Daniel Vukovich (2012) is intended to situate the process of writing of China in a historical, geopolitical context. In accordance with Vukovich's work on Sinological-orientalism,²⁴ I consider the role of Cold War strategies of knowledge production crucial in the creation of politically functional representations of the PRC, as well as the influence of economic and capitalist infrastructures in post-Maoist China (2012, 1) on the selected authors and travel narratives. Vukovich emphasizes the shift from the traditional orientalism based on the essential difference between East and West to a new type of orientalism characterizing China as a becoming sameness, which is the necessary development of the neocolonial context (1, 5, 9).²⁵ I argue that difference and sameness between China

unreliable. The piece was popular and was also republished in a deluxe edition. However, it also sparked severe criticism. Symbolic of such criticism, Sinologist Pierre Ryckmans, aka Simon Leys, ironically praised Barthes for "bestow[ing] an entirely new dignity on the old and unjustly disparaged activity of small talk" (1978, 89).

- 24 A quite succinct definition of Vukovich's Sinological-orientalism is "Sinological-orientalism or the 'real China' that is leaving its past behind, and haltingly but inevitably becoming-the-same as the U.S.-West, is precisely a 'socially valid, therefore objective' category of thought in the Marxist sense. It thinks. It does a certain amount of worldly work; it produces knowledge and careers as well as art. It thus has an effectivity quite beyond or separate from its Truth; it works as a regime of truth. It is also capitalist – in its function [...] and in its genesis and inner logic. But to say it is capitalist means not only that it corresponds to the current globalized mode of production, but is also to say that it is political and socially constructed" (Vukovich 2012, 147).
- 25 Vukovich gives a precise historical and geopolitical localization of the process of representing China – the PRC – as a *becoming sameness*, and emphasizes its fundamental role in the act of narration: Deng Xiaoping's pro-capitalist "reform and opening-up" political strategy (改革开放), and the consequential "West[ern] economic, political, and discursive responses to [the PRC's] subsequent rise to global prominence" (2012, 2). According to Vukovich, it is precisely the transformation of China by Western capitalism, as well as its consequential historical background, that provides the basis of Sinological-orientalism (143). In this way, Vukovich situates the political as the basis of the process of representing China and connects the US-Western discursive productions of China directly to those of Western imperialism, which he regards as now enveloping the whole world and conflicting with China's dominant role as a political antagonist of the United States.

and Italy are fundamental to the production of specific Italian identities through a process of Othering, which structures the self-perceptions of the Italian writers by operating in a practically non-colonial context, even in the case of the travel narratives from the early twentieth century and the Fascist Ventennio (1922–1943). In accordance with Vukovich's work, I also show the positional superiority of the Italian intellectuals narrating China,²⁶ since I find that such a discursive strategy encompasses most of the travel narratives analyzed – explicitly in the narratives from the early 1900s, the Fascist Ventennio, and the decade 1978–1989. In the travel narratives from the remaining two periods, the positional superiority of the Italian intellectuals considered is implicitly present notwithstanding the Italian intellectuals' subordination to their Chinese counterparts, and their consequential acritical use of the official Chinese Communist data, as well as of Maoist discursive instruments (e.g., the before/after rhetoric and the hundred years of humiliation rhetoric).

A major aspect symbolizing both the political and the referential nature of the representations of China resulting from the Italian travel narratives examined in this study is the systematic shift from positive to negative representations, and vice versa, in accordance with the specific discursive practices functional to the self-assertion of a particular identity and ideology. As historian Collin Mackerras explains, the representations of China are variable, their variation depending on power, and they are strongly affected by the specific geopolitical dynamics of the time in which they are narrated.²⁷

26 Vukovich redefines Said's concept of positional superiority (Said [1978] 2013, 7) as "that tactic or de facto strategy by which the object of study is kept in place, never allowed to challenge let alone displace the effectively a priori assumptions, conclusion, and discourse" (Vukovich 2012, 3).

27 See Mackerras (1999, 177–189). The categorization of the different representations identified by Mackerras does not coincide with that identified in twentieth-century Italian travel writing; nonetheless, Mackerras's conclusion can be applied to this research. Mackerras argued that between the 1930s and 1940s, US writers such as Pearl Buck promoted "essentially conservative and positive images about China and its countryside" ([1987] 1999, 179). The US representation of the 1950s and 1960s became negative and served to "denounce the PRC as aggressive and a 'threat' to itself and the world" (179). This negative image was replaced by a more positive one of the PRC after the Nixon visit in 1972, regardless of the fact that China was "still

The direct correlation between the different styles of narrativizing China in the selected twentieth-century Italian travel narratives as well as their close ties with the political discourses in twentieth-century Italy, and the specific geopolitical dynamics influencing the knowledge produced, are aspects visible throughout my research. As I keep track of the direct correlations among the contextual aspects subsumed by specific representations, I underline the specific historical and political circumstances promoting the negative characterization of China during early twentieth-century Italy and the Fascist Ventennio, as well as the positive characterization of Maoist China in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and finally again for the negative characterization of post-Maoist China in the 1980s. Along with that, I give an account of the practices of self-identification that each of the representations of China imply, as well as the ideological background influencing these practices.

The discursive and referential nature of the representation of China also deserves some supplementary considerations regarding the act of writing China as an orientalist rhetorical and discursive act. The historian Arif Dirlik points to the indisputability of Said's orientalism as a mechanism intrinsic in the "European conceptualization of the world, fully articulated in the course of the 19th century ... [and placing] Europe at the pinnacle of development ... [and ordering] the globe spatially and temporally in accordance with the criteria of European development" (Dirlik 1996, 100).²⁸ More importantly, the application of Said's orientalist theory

in the throes of the Cultural Revolution" (179). The post-1972 positive representation lasted until the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 (180).

28 Similarly to Dirlik, Mackerras defined the discursive practices underlying the act of narration of China in literary texts as orientalist practices, specifying that they are still operating in contemporary society: "The assumption that China exists largely to show the superior moral virtue of the West, or for the triumphs, profits, and amusement or pleasure of Westerners, is still widespread. *Orientalism* is certainly in decline in the West, but it is far from dead" (1999, 183). The importance of Edward Said's orientalism in the contemporary historiography of China and its validity as an instrument of theoretical critique of the sociopolitical and historical articulation in twentieth-century society has undergone a notable shift, with the result that the Mackerras's and Dirlik's decades-old publications are still current today, and therefore cited in most academic research on the topic.

to China as a field of academic investigation raises questions about the heterogeneous construction of the Orient as the Other of the Occident in orientalist practices (Lowe 1991, 4–5), and on the ongoing process of production of orientalist practices in the contemporary representation of China (Vukovich 2012). Moreover, in the construction of such narratives, as Dirlik argues, one needs to consider the question of the “oriental’s participation in the unfolding of the discourse on the orient” (1996, 112), turning such orientalist practices into a relationship with China and the Chinese people (100), in which the Chinese people play an active part in defining the orientalist traits of a specific image of China. My study shows that the narrativization of China in twentieth-century Italian literature results in at least five heterogeneous, intertwined oriental topoi of China, a few of which were produced with the participation of the Chinese in specific time frames (1949–1985). Such themes can in turn be traced directly to the political, intellectual, and cultural milieu of the Italian intellectuals narrating China, as well as to the same geopolitical dynamics in the legitimation of the knowledge produced in their relative narrations of China.²⁹ My research, however, shows that such oriental topoi of China were not part of processes of colonization of the country as well as of colonization of the knowledge about the country, but were primarily functional to processes of Italian national and cultural identity formation.

In addition, these narratives call for the historical and political reconsideration of the cultural milieu of the Italian intellectuals narrating China, as well as of the processes of selection and exclusion of specific intellectuals and narratives among them by contemporary scholars. The presence of orientalism in the contemporary production of knowledge on China and the PRC as emphasized by Mackerras, Dirlik, and Vukovich also calls for a more critical historiographic approach to the understanding of past and present academic productions of knowledge on China in order to depart from a Eurocentric historical conceptualization of the world (Dirlik 1996,

29 As mentioned earlier, these five oriental topoi of China find their particular natures in the influence of nationalist, fascist, and anti-fascist ideologies during the early 1900s, the Fascist Ventennio, and the 1950s, as well as in the multifaceted articulation of Italian communist and socialist ideologies in the 1960s and 1970s and their anti-leftist counterparts in the 1980s.

118).³⁰ The present research, therefore, also considers the political and cultural context of the contemporary scholarly works on the topic, and the dearth of scholarly works on the topic from Italian academia.

My research considers also a number of critiques of the methods of analyzing the representations of China and Chinese cultures in Western literature that privilege both the political, and therefore discursive and anti-orientalist, and the textual analysis of such representations, driven by academics, and emphasizing the need for intercultural mediation. I acknowledge the need to observe that the representations produced by Italian intellectuals and disseminated by newspapers, magazines, and books to the Italian readership reflected a method of analyzing Chinese society that claimed to be, and was in fact regarded as, scientific.³¹ However, I argue that the historiographic work on how and why China is narrated is as relevant as the historical work on China “addressing the empirical realm of social facts” (Jones 2001, 9–10). By investigating the political, intellectual, and cultural milieu within which the travel narratives were produced, rather than the empirical realm of social facts concerning China, my research does not aim to establish the quantum of truth about Chinese society, history, and culture present in each narrative depiction of the country. The truthfulness or falsity of the data presented in the selected travel narratives does not affect the validation of Italian national and cultural identity formation practices subsumed by each narrativization; nor does it affect the

30 Historians Paul Cohen and Colin Mackerras, among others, have argued that in the historical analysis of China written by Western authors, the political and cultural context of the author is fundamental to the way China is narrated. Paul Cohen’s premise of the study of US historiographic sources on China goes straight to the point: “Among the several factors governing the evolution of any field of historical inquiry, the political, intellectual and cultural milieu within which the historian lives and works is primary; everything else is secondary” (1984, XV). Similarly, Mackerras has remarked that, not only is the methodology used by Western authors strongly dependent on their respective backgrounds, but their methodology is also biased by their own ethnological and political assumptions (1999, 1). Cohen and Mackerras have aimed at emphasizing both the limits of the ethnographic bias in the Western production of knowledge on China and the need for a more empirical, China-centered approach.

31 See Jones (2001, 10).

assessment of the influence of such practices in twentieth-century Italian society. The reason for not considering these aspects is that each of the narrations produced, as part of a discourse, operates in a regime of truth that is validated by power dynamics within the society in which the narration is produced.³²

The representation of China produced by Western intellectuals may not be entirely discursive, as suggested by Zhang Longxi, a leading scholar in East-West cross-cultural studies, since “the understanding of culture and history is not, and not merely, a matter of subjective projection, linguistic coherence, or ideological control” (Zhang 1998, 2). Nonetheless, in this particular research, the subjective projection of the Italian intellectuals narrating China as well as the ideological control that was exerted on them in both the PRC and Italy, or that some of them exerted in Italy, play a primary role in the representations of China that they produced, as well as in the construction of a discourse on China for the Italian readership – a discourse determined primarily by Italian, Soviet, and Maoist propaganda, and serving specifically to indoctrinate the Italian readership. In this regard, in addition to the linguistic coherence of their narrativization, the subjective projection of Italian identity in the narrativization of China as well as the ideological control present in both Chinese and Italian societies are therefore fundamental for understanding the discursive and textual aspects inherent in the study of the narrativization of China in twentieth-century Italian travel narratives.

Furthermore, scholarly works on cross-cultural dialogue are also critical of the dichotomy between the West and China in Western academia, in which the two concepts – and areas of study – are regarded as conceptually monolithic, radically different, and often mutually unintelligible (Jones 2001, 144; Zhang 1998, 8–9). Those scholarly works therefore underscore the two-way nature of the cultural exchange between the West and China, and regard the contact between the West and China as a “creative ... and highly ambivalent engagement with an oriental Other ... [constituting] the basis of an often contradictory, but pluralistic set of discourses that in turn facilitated an evolving understanding of the idioms of culture, history

32 For a definition of regime of truth, see Foucault (1975, 23, 30).

and sociology” (Jones 2001, 143–144). The present research, on the other hand, shows that the dichotomic representation of Italy and China – as “us” and the Other – in the selected travel narratives has a precise function in the discourses that those narratives promote, serving to legitimate the ideological position relative to their authors’ sense of national identity and political engagement. At the same time, though on a different theoretical basis, I show the significance of the encounter of the twentieth-century Italian intellectuals with China – as the Other – as part of a dialogical process that presupposes the willingness of those Italian intellectuals to question their position in order to establish their own identities and cultural awareness.³³

33 See Zhang (1998, 26) and Porter (2001, 242).

Italian Travel Narratives of War, Modernity, and Patriotism in Late Imperial and Early Republican China (1898–1916)

Erano passati pochi anni dall'umiliazione di Adua ... i più giovani erano divorati dal desiderio impaziente di riconoscimenti internazionali, di avventure, di gloria, e di grandezza ... l'Italia con lui [Luigi Barzini Sr.] era finalmente presente in un mondo che si dimenticava continuamente della sua esistenza e che, un poco, la disprezzava.
– Barzini Jr. in Barzini Sr. 1959, XIX-XX¹

In the late 1890s and the early 1900s there was a substantial increase of interest in China in Italian society. This was partly due to the refusal by the Chinese Empire to grant the Port of Sanmen to the Kingdom of Italy (1899), as well as to the deployment of Italian troops in the Boxer Rebellion (1900) and the first Peking to Paris automobile race (1907). During this period, the Italian journalist Luigi Barzini Sr. traveled to China as a war reporter for *Corriere della Sera* to divulge news on the Boxer Rebellion, then to narrate the first Peking to Paris automobile race – which was won by the Italian team led by prince Scipione Borghese.² A few years later in 1915, the journalist, opera writer, and literary critique Renato Simoni also

- 1 “A few years had passed since the humiliation of Adwa ... the younger generation was consumed by the eager yearning for international recognition, adventure, glory and greatness ... Because of him [Luigi Barzini Sr.], the country was finally present in a world that would easily forget that Italy existed, and that would even despise the peninsula a little” (Barzini Jr. in Barzini Sr. 1959, XIX-XX). In this chapter, I refer to the Italian Journalist Luigi Barzini (1874–1947) as Luigi Barzini Sr. to distinguish him from his son, Luigi Barzini Jr. (1808–1984), who was also a renowned *Corriere della Sera* journalist and reporter.
- 2 Luigi Barzini Sr. was also a war reporter during the Russian-Japanese War in the Manchurian region in 1904–1905. The Barzini's travel narratives in Manchuria and the subsequent representation of the conflict will not be discussed in this chapter.

traveled to China as a reporter for *Corriere della Sera*. More travel narratives on China were produced by the naval officers Lanberto Vannutelli, Eugenio Chiminelli, Mario Valli, and others, who were dispatched to China during and after the Boxer Uprising and published in the main Italian geographical and literary reviews of the time.

Traditional Italian historiography framed the Italian presence in China at the turn of the century and in first two decades of the twentieth century as a minor and exceptional episode. The production of scholarly publications by historians of Italian colonialism and military history, as well as from sinologists has therefore been scarce (Labanca 2000).³ The representation of China in the Italian society of those days, its relation to the process of construction of a national identity reflecting liberal Italy and its international mission have not been thoroughly discussed. According to the sinologist Laura De Giorgi “the attitude towards Chinese events reflected more or less the same political and cultural assumptions of Italy’s Western partners; neither the Republican Revolution in China nor the First World War substantially changed this position” (2010, 575). This chapter suggests that while the portrayal of Late Imperial China made by Italian press was consistent with that diffused in the international press, the political discourse subsumed to it was substantially different. The travel narratives produced during this period reflected the colonial, economic,

3 The attention of historians of Italian Colonialism during the Liberal period has focused primarily on the Italian presence in Northern and Eastern Africa, since the start of its colonial presence in 1869 when the *Società di Navigazione Rubattino* (Rubattino Shipping Company) had acquired the Eritrean port of Assab, as well as on Italian migration to the Americas. Monographic works on the Sino-Italian relations during the Liberal period and in the fields of international politics and China Studies are still lacking. Recent studies of Sino-Italian relationships have dedicated a section on the diplomatic relationships between the kingdom of Italy and Late Imperial and Early Republican China (De Giorgi and Samarani 2011) or on the reception of China in Italy in such periods (Bertuccioli and Masini 1996). Other publications have analyzed a few specific aspects of the Italian presence, such as the war reportages of Barzini (Corradini 1958, De Courten 2001, Smith 2012, Sweeny 2015), the travels of Giovanni Vacca (Lioi 2016) the institution of the Italian concession in Tianjin, the San Men affair (Coco 2019), as well as the production of knowledge of geographic societies on China (Lucchesi 2015).

and political ambitions of the Kingdom of Italy in China, supported the idea of a *più Grande Italia* [*a Greater Italy*], i.e., post-independence Italy, as a free, modern, and progressive fatherland, and aimed principally at providing a positive image of the international reputation of the Kingdom of Italy to the national readership. Moreover, the narratives about China of this period displayed the contrast between Italy as a new, progressive, and modern nation-state and an emerging colonial empire; and China as a reputedly millennia-old, immutable, and despotic empire in decadence and struggling to achieve its own process of regeneration. This contrast resulted from the embedding of both popular and erudite knowledge on the Chinese empire going back to the thirteenth century, which was developed on the idea of a uniquely Italian, privileged relationship with China (Ward A. 2010, 19).⁴

This chapter outlines the depiction of China in Italian travel writing in relation to Italy's international ambitions, as well as to the development of diplomatic relationships between the Kingdom of Italy and the Chinese Empire at the turn of the century. The first section provides introductory information on the Kingdom of Italy and the Chinese Empire and explores the sociopolitical and economic reasons that led late Ming China to become a topic of popular interest in Italian society in those years. The second section is dedicated to the analysis of Luigi Barzini's portrayal of China during the final stages of the Boxer Rebellion and on the occasion of the first Beijing-Paris race (1907). In this section, I show that Barzini's depiction of China as a regressive empire in decline was shaped by the journalist's nationalism, which produced an image of the Kingdom of Italy as a very modern country deserving to be among the most powerful nations in the world. Such characterizations of China and Italy continued in the narratives on Early Republican China by Renato Simoni, which are introduced in the third section. The fourth section explores the narratives on China produced by military officers and diplomats, and shows that

4 Such imaginary contributed to the "uniquely Italian thematization of China in the Settecento [Seventeenth Century]" in Italian operas, along with the idea that theatre was a most convenient space to articulate problematics specific to the Italian Enlightenment (Ward A. 2010, 18–19).

such narratives are primarily motivated by the need to legitimate Italy's status as a great nation.

Italy and China at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century: The Sanmen Affair and Yellow Perilism

For a clearer understanding of how China was narrated to the Italian readership at the turn of the century it is important to provide an outline of the diplomatic, economic, and political scenarios of the two countries and ties between them in the second half of the nineteenth century. The diplomatic relations between Italy and China formally set off in the 1866 with the signing of the first commercial treaty between the two countries. Concluded five years after the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy (1861), this first political and commercial treaty was a result of the explorative mission in Asia led by the admiral Vittorio Arminjon, who earlier in the same year had also signed a commercial treaty with Japan. Such missions were approved by the Italian Prime Minister Alfonso La Marmora and were principally aimed at securing silkworm cocoons and raw silk for the Italian silk industry, which had been affected by the spread of pébrine, a silkworm epidemic (Coco 2019, 329–330).⁵ In the 1850s, the silk industry was already a very important economic activity considering that raw silk amounted to 86 percent of the total exports from Italy during those years (De Angeli 2013, 34). The importance of that industry increased in the following decades and, by the late 1870s Italy had become the foremost producer of silk in Europe and was second only to China in the world (35).⁶ In spite of the 1866 treaty and the importance of silk trade

5 See also, Smith (2012, 4–5). Even before the Italian unification, the prime minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia Camillo Benso Count of Cavour had opened a consulate in Canton in 1857 to prompt commercial activities connected to the silk industry (De Angeli 2013, 34).

6 After 1887 and in the following decades the silk industry was in decline in Italy, endangered by Chinese and Japanese competition, as well as by the effects of Italy's

for both countries, however, the economic and diplomatic relevance of Italy in China did not improve. Italian private investors had little interest in China, and there was no regular Italian shipping line connecting Italian and Chinese ports. Italy also lacked the necessary economic infrastructure, and business transactions were managed by other European companies; therefore, economic initiatives were occasional and unsystematic (Smith 2012, 5). In addition to that, the Italian presence in China until the Boxer War was scarce and consisted mainly of missionaries and nuns (Samarani 2013, 50–52).⁷ Furthermore, the geographic and cultural distance between the two countries, the Chinese empire's mistrust, as well as Italy's incapacity to profit from any commercial and diplomatic opportunities (De Giorgi and Samarani 2011, 18), all contributed to a standstill in the Sino-Italian diplomatic, commercial, and cultural relationships.⁸

In spite of the standstill, the Chinese empire became a topic of national interest in the spring of 1899 as the Luigi Pelloux Government (1898–1900) planned to set up a concession in the Zhejiang region, in the bay of Sanmen, for commercial expansion in the country. Italy's colonial ambitions in China were narrated and commented in the main Italian newspapers and magazines of the time, such as *Corriere della Sera*, *Tribuna*, *Avanti*, *Popolo Romano*, *Rivista d'Italia*, and others (Di Mattia 1984). Commentators had contrasting opinions on the matter, which reflected the political orientations of those newspapers as well as their own ideals. Those who were critical of the initiative of the Pelloux government, like Lombroso in *Nuova Antologia* (1899), viewed with pessimism the idea of an Italian settlement in China, lamented the excessive costs of the operation, the distance between the countries, the Italian government's lack of preparation, and the absence of a proper military and diplomatic infrastructure in Asia to support it. They also argued the possible negative diplomatic effects between Italy and other European countries, especially France and Russia. As an alternative, these commentators advocated redirecting Italy's financial resources destined to

1887 protectionist laws to safeguard national production, and the economic depression affecting the country (De Angeli, 35).

7 In 1881 there were 188 Italians in the country, and 1901 there were 273. The migration flows matched the trend of Italian presence in Asia (Samarani 2013, 50–52).

8 See De Giorgi and Samarani (2011, 17–22).

develop an infrastructure in Asia to addressing underdevelopment in the Southern portion of the peninsula. They also advocated diverting Italian colonial interest to South America rather than to China and strengthening infrastructures for Italian migration in Brazil (340–341). Enthusiastic commentators, such as those from the pro-colonialist newspaper *Tribuna*, however, regarded China as an opportunity not to be missed and favored belligerent measures. They argued Italy's right to safeguard its economic interests in China, albeit the traffic volume of Italian goods was minimal and it was also mainly managed by foreign trading companies.⁹ Exemplary of such position was the academic Mario Carli, in *Rivista d'Italia*:

L'Italia aveva diritto in Cina a quel posto che gode nel resto del mondo, e lo avrà. La bandiera italiana che sventola nella baia di Sanmen non è la per velleità di conquista o atti di ostilità contro la Cina, ma solo per proteggere i nostri diritti e i nostri interessi che il governo di Pechino non è più in grado di garantire. (1899, 477)¹⁰

With the aim of promoting Italian economic and explorative activities in China at the turn of the century, Mario Carli, with the assistance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, published a detailed geographic study on the Zhejiang, the region containing the bay of Sanmen (*Il Ce-Kiang: Studio geografico-economico*, 1899).¹¹ In spite of such optimistic considerations, the interest in China continued to be characterized by economic shortcomings, political uncertainty, and lack of colonial experience, as it was mainly motivated by the desire to gain international political prestige (Trafeli, 155).

Consequently, Italy's colonial ambitions in Sanmen did not end well. As soon as the Italian Minister in China Giacomo De Martino presented an official request for a harbor area in South-Eastern China to the Empress Dowager Cixi, the matter escalated into an international

9 See Di Mattia (1984).

10 "In China, Italy is entitled to the same place that it holds elsewhere in the world. And Italy will get it. The Italian flag is not flying in Sanmen Bay out of a desire of conquest or hostility toward China. It is there to protect our rights and interests, which the government of Beijing can no longer ensure" (Carli 1899, 477).

11 Most of the articles written in Italy focusing on China, like Carli's work, were collated news selected from other international sources. The present study will not rely on them for the representation of China to the Italian readership.

diplomatic incident and become notoriously known as the Sanmen affair.¹² The Chinese empire declined De Martino's request causing the angered De Martino to provide an ultimatum to the empress, which she disregarded. De Martino then briefly contemplated the idea of military action on the example of the British gunboat diplomacy which led to the Opium Wars (1839–1842, 1856–1860), but he had to retract his request. The failure of the acceptance of Italy's requests and the Sanmen incident become symbolic of Italy's unpreparedness to expand its interests in the Chinese empire, and ultimately of the diplomatic and political inefficacy of the Pelloux cabinet. It led to the dismissal of the foreign minister Canevaro and the Italian Minister in China De Martino, as well as to the termination of the first Luigi Pelloux cabinet on May 3, 1899. The repercussions were severe also at an international level. The provocative attitude of the Chinese counterpart refusing to interact with the Italian diplomats in Beijing was a matter of public interest that affected greatly Italy's international reputation (Smith 2012, 10). The most renowned narrator of the Boxer War to the English-speaking world (French 2004, 79), the Australian *Times* correspondent from China and political adviser of the United Kingdom George Ernest Morrison derided Italian diplomats in Beijing and their handling of the negotiations.¹³ This scenario was the basis for the immediate necessity to reverse the negative international image of the Regno by joining the international expeditionary force to quell the Boxer war in the spring of the 1900 as discussed in the next section of this chapter.

The failure of the Sanmen affair was somehow the result of Italy's own status as a young nation lacking both a consolidated diplomatic, imperialist

12 It is believed that De Martino's official request did not have the authorization of Italian Foreign minister Felice Napoleone Canevaro. For more details on such diplomatic accident and its consequences, see Coco (2019); De Giorgi and Samarani (2011, 22–28); and Xiang (2003, 79–103).

13 Morrison, argued that "it is almost inconceivable that Italy could have ever anticipated that [its] demands would be granted by China, presented as they were by a Minister ignorant of the very elements of Chinese affairs and unsupported by the exhibition of force" (*Times* May 9, 1899, 7). On the matter, see Xiang (2003, 91–97). The Sanmen Affair is also described in the Morrison's personal correspondence, see Lo Hui-Min (1976, 114–120).

infrastructure and the intimidating international reputation of great world powers competing for economic, military, and industrial supremacy like Britain, France, and Spain. In the 1890s Italy was still a relatively new nation-state. It had achieved national unification in 1861 and taken Rome from the Papal States in 1870. It was a mainly agricultural country, on its way to industrialization. Italy had moved toward an active colonialist international strategy in the 1880s, after a decade of “quietly keeping itself a distance from the Western powers” (Labanca 2002, 39) in order to consolidate its international position as a nation, and eventually become as prominent as Western powers. International prestige had been the principal motivation for Italy’s colonialist and diplomatic policy-making in the 1880s, which culminated in the acquisition of the Eritrean port of Massawa in 1885.¹⁴ In the case of its active involvement in the “Scramble for Africa,” Italy’s expansionist and pro-imperialist policies aimed at avoiding its geopolitical isolation by hands of other European nations, especially France; and, at the same time, keeping at bay the attentions of those nations for the Italian peninsula. For the same reasons, Italy had strengthened its pro-British stand (49).¹⁵ The “inferiority complex” that monarchic Italy had toward France, Britain, and Germany was among the thrusts for the Risorgimento in 1861 as well as the construction of a “Greater Italy” equal to Western Powers, and, later on, for the development of the myth of Italy’s universal supremacy as a nation and civilization (Gentile 2009, 40–41).¹⁶

The sociopolitical and historical scenario that imperial China had been facing since the mid-1800s was different than that of the Kingdom of Italy. While Meiji Japan was going through a formidable program of

14 Commercial interests, national propaganda and pressures from colonialist political groups or military officers were all aspects of secondary importance when compared to the diplomatic and governmental benefits of such international pro-colonialist stand (Labanca, 48 and 55).

15 Italy’s decision of becoming an ally of Germany and Austro-Hungary by joining the Triple Alliance in 1882 had analogous reasons.

16 The Italian statesman Francesco Crispi, a protagonist of the Risorgimento and key figure of Liberal Italy, was the major advocate of Italy’s expansionism in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, and his career as a prime minister was interrupted by the defeat of Adwa in 1896.

socio-economic, industrial, cultural, and military reforms, nineteenth century China saw its darkest years. The Chinese empire faced steep decline, unprecedented international disdain, loss of territorial integrity, and semi-dependency from Western powers. Furthermore, the empire was forced to accept a series of humiliating treaties and restrictions, which greatly affected its own Sinocentric view of the world. China was never a direct Western colony, like India. However, it was part of the European, especially British, imperialist infrastructure since the First Opium War (1840–1842). The tragic condition faced by the Chinese empire was exacerbated by the defeat inflicted by Japan, a former tributary country of China, during the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894–1895, and had deep repercussion on the country and its people until the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949.¹⁷

The subjection of China by the European and Japanese imperial infrastructure meant the institutionalization of a highly hierarchical and racist view of the world accompanied by the development of Western scientific and cultural knowledge on the Chinese civilization and its people. The accounts of mid- and late nineteenth-century Western diplomats, missionaries, and travelers depicted the Chinese empire as inferior to Western nations, resilient to technological, social, and political change and, therefore, destined to misery; and its inhabitants as hordes of xenophobic “yellow” people.¹⁸ Those images, as the China Studies scholar Collin Mackerras argued, conveyed Western imperialism and were symptomatic of the fact that “Europe colonised not only parts of China, but also knowledge about it” (1999, 40 and 57). The subjection of China, therefore, produced dominantly negative images of the country obliterating the admiration and study of the Chinese culture, as well as the reciprocal flow of influence between China and Europe, which had characterized the accounts of European missionaries and travelers on Ming and early Qing Chinas in

17 On the topic, see David Scott (2008).

18 The classification of the Chinese as a “yellow race” was also recent (late Qing dynasty) and it was part of the European imperialist discourse on China. As argued by Mungello, European missionaries travelling to the Chinese empire in the sixteenth century referred to the Chinese as White people (2005, 123–125).

the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁹ Connected to such a conventional and widespread image of the country and to European Imperialism, the “Yellow Peril” (Gelbe Gefahr) was a rhetoric popularized by the German Emperor Wilhelm II since 1895. The basis of yellow perilism was the fear of an imminent Chinese and Japanese military expansion toward Europe also magnified by the Sino-Japanese conflict in 1894–1895. Such rhetoric had a strong racist demarcation and served also as a premise for Wilhelm’s imperialist initiatives in China, culminating with the occupation Qingdao and the Jiaozhou Bay in 1897, as well as for the organization of the International Expeditionary force to subdue the Boxers (Blue 1999, 123–124). The racist discourse subsumed to yellow perilism was linked to Joseph Arthur de Gobineau’s racial theory expressed in his *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines* (*An Essay on the Inequality of the Human races*, 1855), as well as to the Western concepts of modernity and progress.²⁰ The mediatic use of the yellow peril rhetoric gave voice to anti-Chinese sentiments also in other countries, in particular in France, England and United States.

The yellow perilist rhetoric was present in Italy and influenced the cultural and political debates as well as the production of knowledge on the Chinese Empire. The Italian narrators discussed in the next section of the chapter, the journalist Luigi Barzini Sr., the navy lieutenant Eugenio Chiminelli, and the diplomat and sinologist Ludovico Nocentini among others, often referred to racial differences between the Chinese and Italian peoples and assumed the backwardness and despotic character of Chinese civilization and the eccentric habits of its people. They regarded China and the Chinese as silent objects of observation and constructed the empire as antithetic to the Kingdom of Italy. In their narratives, China was put in a Western-oriented evolutionary perspective that relegated the millennia-old empire to a subaltern sociopolitical and cultural position.²¹ However,

19 For and introduction on the mutual influence between China and the West from 1500 to 1800, see Mugello (2009).

20 For a detailed account of the influence of Gobineau’s racial theory on the German Emperor Wilhelm II and the Yellow Peril rhetoric, see Blue (1999).

21 Such considerations on the inefficacy of the Qing governmental structure were widespread in Europe since the early nineteenth century. It is sufficient to bring

by promoting the idea of the Reign of Italy's growing international reputation as a great nation to the national readership, such narratives served primarily as a revitalizing symbol for Italian patriotism.²² The significance of the link between patriotism and narrativization of China is expounded in the following sections.

“Cina Morta” or “Dead China”: Patriotism and Modernity from the Boxer War (1900–1901) and the Beijing-Paris Race (1907) in Luigi Barzini Sr.

Mentre dalla cima del picco di Hong Kong scrutavo l'orizzonte – come un buon Robinson Crusuè [Crusoe] – in attesa di una nave da guerra che mi portasse a Ta-ku [Dagu], un frastuono di cannonate mi ha scosso dalla mia spettativa meditabonda. Niente di spaventoso. La *Vettor Pisani*, proveniente da Singapore, entrava nella rada, e le navi inglesi ancorate e i forti sul Picco [Victoria Peak] salutavano la nostra bandiera con le loro voci tonanti.

to mind the most renewed considerations of the admiral George Macartney in relation to the 1792–94 British diplomatic mission to China to obtain trade concessions from Qianlong Emperor (1735–1796). Through Macartney's accounts, the image of the Chinese empire as a decadent underdeveloped society of the empire of China obliterated the idea of China as a most advanced socio-economic and governmental structure promoted by Jesuits since the seventeenth century.

22. An exception to such discursive strategy was the Italian physician and criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who referred to *Pericolo Giallo* (Yellow Peril) to criticise the colonialist ambitions of Italy in eastern China (1899). Lombroso's characterization of the Chinese civilization was less negative than that provided by Emperor Wilhelm II, since he acknowledged that the Chinese civilization was different than its European counterpart, but not inferior to it (336). Lombroso praised the century-old stability of the Qing empire, bureaucratic character of its administrative structure as well as its hierarchic social system. However, Lombroso too argued that the Chinese would have eventually insurged against European imperialism armed with their presumed statal fanaticism (337) and copious numbers (338). Lombroso did not travel to China, he based his argument on contemporary sources.

Mi sono precipitato come una valanga sopra la *Pisani* alla testa di una piccola squadra di *coolies*, seminudi recanti la mia roba, inseguito da una legione di portatori di palanchino che aspiravano all'onore di portare il mio peso, e da un nuvolo di tiratori di *rickshas* [rickshaw] che contendevano loro l'onore suddetto.

– Barzini 1917, 57²³

After the catastrophic end of the Sanmen affair, a new reason for interest in the Chinese empire was provided by the Boxer siege of Beijing in the summer of the 1900 and the international forces deployed to quell it.²⁴ The Boxer War was soon to become a notorious episode of world history. In Europe and the United States the intervention of Western troops was depicted as a civilizing expedition to rescue the lives of hundreds of

23 “I was gazing into the horizon like a good Robinson Crusoe from the [Victoria] Peak in Hong Kong, while awaiting a military cruiser to reach Dagu. Suddenly, the uproar of cannon shots interrupted my meditations. There was nothing to be afraid of. The *Vettor Pisani* had just entered the harbor on its way from Singapore. At that precise moment, the British ships anchored in the port and the forts on the peak all welcomed our flag with their thundering voices. / I descended like an avalanche towards the *Vettor Pisani* in the lead of a small squad of half-naked *coolies* carrying my belongings. I was chased by a legion of palanquin bearers who had set their heart on having my weight on their shoulders, and a swarm of rickshaw pullers competing for the same honorable deed” (Barzini 1917, 57).

24 Originating in the Shandong province as an anti-Catholic movement in the late 1890s, the Boxer Rebellion spread out in Norther China changing into an anti-foreigner revolt and gaining the consent of the local governments, and later, the Dowager Empress Cixi. The rebellion degenerated furthermore with the assassination of the German Minister to China, Clements Von Ketteler, by Manchu soldiers while on his way to negotiate with the Chinese authorities the safe departure of Western citizens from Beijing. The main locations of the conflict were the legation quarters in Beijing, where Western citizens were besieged, and the two coastal cities of Dagu and Tianjin, where the international forces moved toward Beijing under the leadership of the British vice-admiral Seymour. In Dagu, Western troops were able to take control of Chinese forts and afterwards the Western coalition gave the Ming court an ultimatum, which Cixi refused. The foreign legations were freed on August 15, 1900. On the same day, the empress had to leave the Forbidden City. The Chinese capital, Dagu, and Tianjin were occupied until the Chinese empire signed a peace agreement in September 1901, committing to pay war reparations to the countries involved in the conflict.

Western missionaries and diplomats from a crowd of bloodthirsty, xenophobic fanatic Chinese.²⁵ On June 19, the *New York Times* thundered that “China declared war against the World when the Taku [Dagu] forts opened fire against the international fleet” (*New York Times*, June 19, 1900, 1). The *Times* of London argued that “breaking down the Chinese Wall” was necessary for the “spirit of modern civilization” and “genuine humanity” to progress (*Times*, June 20, 1900, 7).²⁶ In the same days, the yellow perilist German Emperor Wilhelm II had prompted his troops to “show [themselves] Christians, happily enduring the face of [Chinese] heathens”, whom he also defined as “savage foe[s]” (Wilhelm II quoted in Blue 1999, 124).²⁷

Italy was the penultimate nation to deploy its military resources comprising 1882 soldiers, 71 officers, and a small quota of infrastructures (Labanca 2000, iv). The relatively meagre resources deployed by the *Regno* were indicative of the fact that a substantial part of the government and public opinion had contested the expedition for its costs, as well as the very limited economic and commercial activities that Italy had to safeguard in China (Labanca 2000, iv). In line with the agenda of their respective parties, a few socialist Italian politicians had expressed their dissent in parliamentary sessions and in the newspapers. An example of such dissent, the socialist Leonida Bisolati had criticized the Italian government for privileging its expansionist policy over the deep national economic and political and social crisis that the country had been experiencing: “Oggi la spedizione cinese si concepisce, si organizza e si compie mentre il Paese esce appena da una terribile crisi di miseria, mentre il diritto pubblico è lo

25 For more information on the Boxer Uprising, also known as the Boxer War, see Cohen (1997) and Bickers and Tiedermann (2007).

26 “The spirit of modern civilization and the genuine humanity which is the achievement of the Christian faith will only make way, among a nation which is enslaved and degenerate, when the European Powers have broken down the Chinese wall by force” *Times*, June 20, 1900, 7.

27 For an overview of the excitement of Western Press concerning the Boxer War, see Paul French, “Boxers and Treaty Porters. Headlines Change History” (2004, 63–86).

stato d'assedio permanente" (Bisolati in Del Boca 2005, 92).²⁸ Bisolati referred to the increasing popular manifestations of dissent repressed by the government contesting rampant unemployment, heavy taxation, and the increase of the price of bread. The crisis culminated with the assassination of the Italian king Umberto I by the anarchist Gaetano Bresci, on July 29, 1900, in the same days of the Boxer War.

Italy's timely participation in the Boxer War was a measure to regain international prestige after the defeat of Adwa (1896),²⁹ as well as a punitive measure for China's unwillingness to grant a territorial concession to the *Regno d'Italia* in the Bay of Sanmen (Del Boca 2005, 89). Italian ambitions in China and the political rhetoric around the participation of the *Esercito Regio* [Italian Royal Army] to the Boxer War were, in fact, inextricably intertwined with the disastrous development of Italian colonial expansion strategies in the Horn of Africa and the international scorn that followed the defeat suffered by Italian troops in Ethiopia. The references to Italian colonialism in Africa in relation to the Italian government in China were explicit in the political and public debates of the end of the century, and the Ethiopian War served as a measure of comparison for the Chinese expedition among diplomats and officers witnessing one or both events. The strategies of recruitment, equipment and preparation of the *Esercito Regio* on its way to China were patterned after those used in East Africa by the Italian government (La Banca 2000, v-vi). More importantly, the defeat of Adwa directly caused the Chinese expedition to be perceived as imperative to restore the international reputation of the *Regno* (v).³⁰

28 "Today, the expedition in China is being conceived, organized and enacted while Our Country is emerging from a terrible crisis of misery and public law is under permanent siege" (Bisolati in Del Boca 2005, 92).

29 In Adwa, Italian troops had been overcome by the Ethiopian forces assisted by French and Russian advisers and weaponry during the First Ethiopian War (1895–1896). On that relationship see the works of the historians Labanca 2000 and Del Boca 2005.

30 This is also the position of a most reputable historian of Italian colonialism, Angelo Del Boca, who asserted that Italy's participation to the Boxer War was a measure to regain international prestige after the defeat of Adwa, as well as a punitive measure for China's unwillingness to grant a territorial concession to the *Regno d'Italia* in the Bay of Sanmen (Del Boca 2005, 89).

At the time of the Sanmen affair and the Boxer War, very few Italians had the chance to travel to, or reside in, the Chinese empire. Those that did were predominantly Catholic priests and missionaries. Consequently, most articles written in Italy focusing on China were the result of collated news selected from other international newspapers, or narratives produced by missionaries, sinologists, diplomats, military officers, and merchants, who often served also as amateur journalists. Based in Beijing in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Italian sinologist and diplomat Guido Amedeo Vitale wrote for the newspaper *La Tribuna* under the pseudonym “Il Pechinese” [“The Pekinese”]. The director and owner of *La Tribuna*, Attilio Luzzatto, had chosen Vitale to promote the Italian intervention, since the widely read journal was supportive of the Italian colonialist ambitions. Vitale, rather than advancing Luzzatto’s agenda, proved to be more concerned with depicting the pillaging and destruction of China as well as the rape and murder of countless Chinese peasants that took place during the Boxer Uprising (Fatica 2002, 272). In the months preceding the siege of the Legation quarters in Beijing, Amedeo Vitale pointed out the ambiguous stand of the missionaries in China as well as the persecution of innocent Chinese peasants for the attack to Westerners (265–267). At the same time, as a diplomat living in Beijing in the late 1800s and early 1900s, he had been directly involved in the Sanmen affair. In such circumstances, Vitale had been heavily criticized for mistranslating part of the Italian requests to the Chinese court. Therefore, he had mixed feeling about the Italian role in the Boxer revolt (Fatica 2002, 268).³¹

The start of the Boxer War marked a significant change as such narratives were complemented by eyewitness reports by war correspondents (French 2004, 66). The young Italian *Corriere della Sera* journalist, Luigi

31 Vitale was passionate about Chinese culture, and he was married to a Chinese citizen, Luisa Wang. According to the diplomat and sinologist Federico Masini, Vitale was the best interpreter in Chinese working at the Italian legation (2006, 37). Vitale also published an anthology of Chinese poems, *Chinese Folklore. Pekinese Rhymes* (1896) in English, a Mongolian grammar and dictionary in French, *Grammaire et vocabulaire de la langue mongole (dialecte des Khalkhas)* (coauthored with Eduard De Sercey, 1897), and a textbook, *A first reading book for students of colloquial Chinese – Chinese Merry Tales* (1901).

Barzini Sr. was the first Italian reporter to be sent to China. Barzini was followed by the *Tribuna* journalist and poet Giacomo Gobbi-Belcredi, and the nautical engineer Lorenzo D'Adda who was contracted by *Secolo*.³² Organized by the executive secretary [segretario di direzione] of the *Corriere della Sera* Luigi Albertini, the deployment of Luigi Barzini to China was a major commercial operation developed to make *Corriere della Sera* the most read newspaper in Italy. The initial top secrecy of the trip was aimed at throwing off all other Italian newspapers, and winning over the competition of *Secolo*, the other Milan-based major newspaper of the time. (Magri 2008, 21–24). Barzini eventually reached Northern China only after the International Legations in Beijing had been already secured by the International Expeditionary troops on August 14 and therefore witnessed only the final phase of the revolt. Nonetheless, he produced memorable accounts of the expedition and descriptions of Imperial China according to his own, innovative journalistic prose, which “avoid[ed] literary embellishments . . . simple, direct, fast, naked style” (Magri in Sweeny 2015, 49). Influenced by British journalism and opposite to the emphatic, elaborate, and ornate Italian journalistic prose of the time, such a style, later would be referred to as “barzinismo.”³³ Thanks to such compassionate accounts of the conflict, China became a major topic of public interest again and Barzini himself became a national celebrity and an internationally respected journalist.

Barzini's accounts during his six-month stay in China consisted of a set of newspaper articles shipped via mail and, later, wired via telegraph to Italy and published on *Corriere della Sera*. In the years that followed, such articles were collated and published as a book, *Nell'Estremo Oriente* (1904). In the initial accounts, the Boxer War was presented as a new crusade uniting all civilized nations, and as a battle between Western development and Eastern immobility (14). Barzini also characterized it as a “spaventosa bufera di odio, di fanatismo, e di malvagità [che distrugge] tutto quanto è straniero” (45). The conquest of the forbidden city was exemplary of such

32 Lorenzo D'Adda and Luigi Barzini were also the only Italian war reporters in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese war (1904–1905).

33 For more details on the matter, see Magri's “Nasce il Barzinismo” (2008, 121–134)

an attitude, since Barzini regarded it as the true sign of the victory of the West over China and, therefore, the greatest achievement of the expedition:

L'occupazione della città interdetta è la più grande affermazione della nostra vittoria. È il trionfo. I vincitori dell'antichità legavano ai loro carri dorati i re vinti e le file di schiavi. Noi abbiamo fatto di più: abbiamo avvinto in un solo laccio la religione, le credenze e le superstizioni di quattrocento milioni di vinti. Calpestando la terra imperiale, abbiamo calpestato il culto millenario del più grande popolo del mondo. (127)³⁴

After witnessing the atrocity of the conflict, however, Barzini described it as a horrible nightmare and the Chinese as victims of the wickedness and cruelty of Western troops. Similarly to Amedeo Vitale, Luigi Barzini Sr. depicted China as an immense graveyard: “tutta la Cina non è che un cimitero” (Barzini 1917, 63).³⁵ All around the area of Dagu and on the way to Tianjin, Barzini saw destruction and wilderness. Corpses of Chinese and domestic animals were visible along the way. All survivors had abandoned the area in haste leaving their belongings behind. Broken walls and ruins showed the signs of war. The railway and telegraph lines, signs of Western modernity, had been destroyed (Barzini 1917, 62–64). In Tianjin, the evidence of the conflict was even harsher. The signs of war and destruction were visible everywhere in the landscape, and it was understandable that Barzini would be astonished by the deserted, gloomy atmosphere (63 and 69). The Italian historian Corradini emphasized the good intentions and “objectivity” of the Italian journalist for seeking to provide better information on the conflict to the Italian readership (1958, 71 and 75).³⁶ The

34 “The occupation of the Forbidden City is the greatest assertion of our victory. It is our triumph. In ancient times, those who won would tie the vanquished kings and their coffle of slaves to their golden chariots. We did more than that: We bound in one rope the religions, beliefs and superstitions professed by four hundred million defeated [souls]. By trampling the imperial land, we trampled the millenary cult of the largest populace in the world” (Barzini 1917, 127).

35 Vitale: “la campagna cinese non è che un cimitero” (Vitale in Fatica 2002, 273). According to Barzini, the Chinese countryside void of its native people – “la Cina senza i Cinesi” – is, conversely, green and well maintained. In some areas it looks like the Roman plateau (72–73).

36 Corradini’s article is representative of the renewed interest in China that followed the foundation of the PRC in 1949. His emphasis on Barzini’s accuracy and witty

destruction and pillage of the country during the conflict were, however, reinforced Barzini's own interpretation of the Chinese as a backward, dying civilization (Barzini 1917, 63). Such a view was consonant with the predominant Western discourse on the Chinese empire as stagnant and less developed than its Western counterparts, as introduced earlier on in this chapter. Defined as the city of death (85) for being deserted, Beijing was compared to Pompeii at night evoking in him the same infinite sadness and feeling death all around him (88). The Chinese Boxers were depicted as harmless and backward fanatics using inadequate white weapons (92). They were regarded as an indistinct, disorganized multitude, just like a flock of sheep (122), to be pitied (174). The Chinese imperial soldiers were negatively described as clumsy and afraid, lacking discipline and often fleeing the combat (75, 185). Their attacks were "stupid" and ill-conceived (98) and therefore destined to fail (109). Chinese military techniques, equipment and preparation were, ultimately, reputed inferior to those of the Western troops, particularly by Italian soldiers (163).³⁷

According to the Italianist Shirley Ann Smith, it is possible to distinguish two different, successive phases in Barzini's approach to China. In the first phase, Barzini showed a "distinct colonial distancing" (2012, 31–32) that praised the colonial civilizing mission of Western powers in Hong Kong and belittled anything Chinese (Barzini 1917, 41). The historian of China and Japan Corradini also distinguished the earlier accounts of the conflicts from Barzini's latter ones and specified that the formers were influenced by the information that the journalist had read before reaching Beijing, as well as by the accounts that he had gathered in Hong Kong from Western missionaries who sought refuge in the coastal city (1958, 73–74). Barzini's colonial distancing was also clear in his interviews to a group of missionaries who had escaped the revolt. On that occasion, Barzini characterized the Chinese as relentless, xenophobic "aguzzini" [prosecutors]

remarks shows the trend of the time, the late 1950s, in Italy when many politicians, businessmen, and intellectuals sought to strengthen the cultural, commercial, and political relations between the two countries in absence of official diplomatic ties.

37 The Chinese troops trained by British officers were, in Barzini's accounts, the exception to the rule, since their military discipline was as effective as that of Western troops (185).

of all missionaries, who were portrayed as innocent victims. (Barzini 1917, 45). The second phase occurs after Barzini was gradually exposed to the violence of the conflict on the one hand, and positive contacts with the Chinese people and society, on the other; such experiences resulted in a radical change in Barzini's vision of the Boxer uprising and of Western civilization (Smith, 35). Barzini's later reports, therefore, reflected the journalist's sympathy for the Chinese and his praise of Chinese civilization. In those reports he openly questioned the official reasons of the engagement of the international army, and saw in such engagement an act of aggression justified by the ambition of Western countries to develop their commercial presence in China (Barzini 1917, 195–197). Smith saw this change of perspective in Barzini as the proof of the Italian journalist's "movement into a zone of cultural hybridization" (39), thus referring to the concept of hybridity as theorized by critical theorist Homi Bhabha.³⁸ Smith's perspective brings to the foreground Barzini's own experiences of China rather than the historical events that the Italian journalist witnessed. However, the focus on Barzini's renegotiation of his own identity does not account for Barzini's unmuted patriotism. While Barzini's later reports were critical of the yellow perilist discourse on the Chinese and of the international forces, such considerations did not affect Barzini's patriotic descriptions of the Italian army engaged in the Boxer Uprising. Barzini never questioned the Italian participation to the expedition. He rather questioned Italy's logistic inefficiency and its deployment of scarce resources (De Courten 2001, 9). In spite of his sympathy for the Chinese and his critique of the "barbarian" brutality of the Western troops, Barzini's narratives legitimized Italy's self-projection as a young nation working hard to becoming an international power at the expense of the Chinese civilization.

Barzini's loyalty to the national cause in fact ran through the entire collection of reports and outweighed the author's "objectivity" in quite a few occasions. When still on his way to China, the journalist was enraptured by

38 This use of Bhabha's concept of hybridity is quite problematic since Bhabha's work implies the contextualization of the relationships between colonizer and colonized in colonial and/or postcolonial settings as well as a thoughtful consideration of the power dynamics and discursive strategies embedded in such settings (Bhabha 2004).

the ethereal sight of three cruisers from the *Regia Marina* – *Vettor Pisani*, *Vesuvio*, and *Stromboli* – which were on their way to China. Barzini described them as gilded by the morning light and adorned by the Italian flag (23).³⁹ Barzini's enthusiasm for the *Regia Marina* was clear in the description of the journalist travel from Hong Kong to Dagu on board of the *Vettor Pisani*. In that seven-day trip Barzini felt at home as he “respirav[a] l'aria della patria, nel bel mezzo del Mar Giallo” (57).⁴⁰ Patriotism was also clear in his descriptions of the days spent with the Italian troops in the area of Dagu and Tianjin, where he reported witnessing the troops protecting the “santa bandiera” (61) with their own lives.⁴¹ On the occasion of the siege of the Legations in Beijing, Barzini praised the Italian army for taking control of pagodas, against the phantasmagoric presence of a world, imperial China, dead and gone forever (132).⁴² The bravery and heroism of the Italian troops are said to be extraordinary:

L'abnegazione, il coraggio, la pazienza dei nostri uomini, che non avendo più una Legazione da difendere le hanno difese tutte, cominciano a diventare argomento di leggenda. (109)⁴³

I nostri soldati sono ammirabili; il loro valore è stato provato. La colonna Seymour ha dovuto la sua salvezza all'eroismo dei nostri marinai. (218)⁴⁴

Another relevant aspect is that heroism also meant nationalistic dedication and loyalty to the Italian Royal family. Barzini reported that Italian troops found their strength by unanimously shouting “Savoia!”

39 Smith underscored Barzini's “laudatory and nationalistic” notes on the Italian military ship *Vettor Pisani* when travelling north to Dagu, in the Tianjin area (Smith 2012, 33).

40 “... breathed the same air as in [his] fatherland, in the middle of the Yellow Sea” (Barzini 1917, 57).

41 “... the saint [Italian] flag” (Barzini 1917, 61).

42 Vitale also argued the prowess of the Italian *Bersaglieri* (Fatica 2011, 272).

43 “Our men did not have a legation to protect any longer, but they defended all of them. Their abnegation, bravery and patience are becoming legendary” (Barzini 1917, 109).

44 “Our soldiers are admirable. Their virtue was proven. The Seymour column owes their safety to the bravery our sailors” (Barzini 1917, 218).

when charging their opponents (113, 116). Such emphasis on patriotism and monarchy is most important if we consider that the murder of Umberto I had happened just a few weeks earlier. Anarchic sentiments were allegedly extraneous to Italian soldiers, as Barzini made use of such term to denounce that other Western troops usurped their power in Beijing against the Chinese people (90).⁴⁵ Barzini's profuse laudatory remarks to the *Regia Marina* were, however, at odds with the negative international reputation of the Italian fleet dispatched to China for the Sanmen affair, and even during the Boxer Uprising.⁴⁶

Barzini's patriotism was clear even before reaching the Chinese shores, in Penang (Malaysia), when he received the news of the assassination of the Italian king Umberto I on July 29, 1900. On that occasion, Barzini related his failed attempt of reaching the Italian consulate due to the impossibility of communicating with a local rickshaw puller, who Barzini described as a slow-witted, muscular man-horse. Barzini described his tour of Penang until he read the news of assassination in a local newspaper, the *Penang Times*, in a telegraph office. In this account, the contraposition between Barzini's Italianess and the Otherness of Penang, Malaysia is particularly relevant. The journalist's emotional state seemed to accentuate the dichotomy perceived between the two different cultures. The zoomorphism and presumed stupidity of the rickshaw puller, the stench of "human multitude" described as peculiar of the race, the description of traditional customs as unusual and even picturesque (30–31); this rhetorical strategy reinforced

45 In praising the courage and dedication of the Italian troops, Barzini made sure that he paid homage also to those who lost their lives during the conflict, in particular the lieutenant Ermanno Carlotto, who was fatally injured in Tianjin on June 19, 1900. Carlotto's death resonated widely in Italy and also led to the approval by the Italian Parliament of sending nearly two thousand soldiers to China. Barzini also made sure to praise the activity of the Italian minister Giuseppe Salvago Raggi for his bravery and exceptional judgement (103, 105–107, 116).

46 Barzini Sr. biographer Enzo Magrì referred that the *Times* correspondent Morrison had witnessed a group of Italian sailors fleeing the combat zone during the siege like fearful beasts (2008, 49). The poor international reputation affected also the deployment of Italian troops during the Boxer War. The *Esercito Regio* was deliberately limited because of the lack of trust on the side of most of the commanders of the other military forces deployed in China (Labanca, vii).

the sense of Italianess of the author in contrast with the alterity of Asia, and China in particular since Penang and Singapore are according to the author “specimens of China sent abroad” (40).⁴⁷

Barzini praised Italian troops for their heroism and for their impeccable attitude also toward the Chinese, while condemning other Western troops for hunting down defenseless Chinese soldiers and civilians (76–77). Similarly, Barzini condemned the institutionalized pillaging and robbing that all Western soldiers were guilty of (75). Exemplary of this aspect is Barzini’s account of Italian troops feeding rice to a malnourished, Chinese old man (77). Elsewhere, Barzini argued that even Chinese military officers praised Italians for being good people unlike the other Westerners (181). The war reporter specified that Italian soldiers resisted the temptation of taking what was not necessary from the locals because they were “perle di ragazzi” (222).⁴⁸ Barzini’s profuse laudatory remarks on the *Esercito regio* were primarily functional to the creation of the “myth of the Italian heroism” (Labanca 2000, vii-viii). Such views on the brutality of Western troops are in line with those expressed by Amedeo Vitale who described the Russians and French soldiers as the authors of vicious and barbarian acts against the peaceful population in the area of Tianjin (Fatica 2011, 274). Historical sources, however, unveiled a different version of the facts. Italian soldiers and diplomats did partake in the pillaging of Beijing, just like all the other foreigners, and each Western nation accused the other of pillaging, while excluding its participation in such mischievous acts (Del Boca 2005, 100). The absence of references to the pillaging by the *Esercito Regio* [Italian Royal Army] in nearly all the published Italian travel narratives on the subject was due to practices of censorship and self-censorship enacted not only during the months in which the Boxer War took place, but also during the decades that followed it (Labanca 2000, vii-viii). It is reasonable to think that Barzini also performed the same kind of self-censorship. In this regard, Labanca’s publication of the private correspondence of an Italian military doctor, Giuseppe Messerotti Benvenuti, shed light on the

47 Such nationalist strategy is preponderant in the narrativization of China during the Fascist Ventennio, as discussed in the next chapter.

48 “exceptionally good boys” (Barzini 1917, 222).

pillaging and unjustified violence that Italian troops were responsible for during the Opium War.⁴⁹

Barzini's accolades of the intervention of Italy and the consequential construction of Italian heroism and the good character of Italian troops is significant also when compared to his descriptions of the other Western countries involved in the Boxer War, their troops and diplomats. As mentioned earlier, at the turn of the century China was at the center of an international territorial and commercial scramble between the United Kingdom, Russia, France, the United States, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Japan, and the Kingdom of Italy. All those countries had adopted aggressive policies to gain control of different areas of the Chinese empire and such policies had caused the relations among them to intensify. Barzini's open critiques of most of those countries, particularly of Russia, France, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, resonated with the geopolitical positioning of Italy of the time. Barzini portrayed the French army as disorganized and ineffective in spite of its big numbers (78, 133). France itself was defined as the "granpatria dell'operetta" (133). Furthermore, he argued that the French minister to China, Stephen Pichon,⁵⁰ was a double-dealer (100), and his actions unreliable and indecisive (134–135). Barzini questioned the effectiveness of the French protection of missionaries, which he defines as "una burletta" (ibid.).⁵¹ The protection of Italian missionaries during the Boxer Revolt was a matter of great interest for the Italian government and an important indicator of international prestige, as well as a powerful tool for colonial expansion in the Chinese empire (De Angelis 2013, 30).⁵² As for Russia, Barzini openly questioned its presence among

49 See Nicola Labanca, and Giuseppe Messirotti Benvenuti, *Giuseppe Messirotti Benvenuti: Un italiano nella Cina dei Boxer*. Modena: Associazione Giuseppe Panini, 2000. Notice also Labanca's most interesting analysis of Giuseppe Messirotti Benvenuti's portrayal of China (xiii-xviii), which is consistent with the Italian narrativization of the East Asian country and its inhabitants produced at the turn of the century.

50 As a journalist and diplomat Pichon produced his own account of the siege of Beijing, *La ville en flammes* (1902), along with the French naval officer and novelist Pierre Loti's *Les Derniers Jours de Pékin* (1901).

51 ... a joke" (Barzini 1917, 135).

52 The Italian government took advantage of the Sino-French War (1884–1885) to send Italian passports to its nationals so that they could make use of the privilege

the civilized nations (Barzini 1917, 80–81). He portrayed Russian soldiers as reckless, muscular men less merciful than Vandals (124–125).⁵³ Barzini had a negative view also on the Austro-Hungarian army. He depicted their captain Eduard Thomann von Montalmar as a madman and a coward and blamed him for proclaiming the retreat of the Western troops during the Boxer assault, which, according to the journalist had, caused the fall of the Italian legation into the assailants' hands (102, 104, 106). Such critiques also showed some bitterness for their political, military, and diplomatic standing against Italian expansionism in East Africa and China. Barzini's open critiques recalled the anti-Italian stand of France and Russia in the Italian Ethiopian conflict leading to the battle of Adwa, and in the diplomatic incident of Sanmen. The political stand of the Italian war reporter is visible also in his copious laudatory remarks for the United Kingdom, its colonial empire, its generals and troops, which reflected the British dominant position of control of the Chinese territory and in Africa, as well as its apparent support of Italian expansionism in those regions.

Barzini's patriotism was also connected with economic interest, which was another main reason of mediatic interest in the Italian participation to the Boxer War in China. Barzini was enthusiastic at the idea of Italy's economic expansion in the Chinese market, since Italy, as a young nation, seemed to have everything to gain from it (197). In his considerations on the commercial activities in Singapore and Hong Kong operated Western nations, he praised the British imperial infrastructure, and questioned the inefficiency of the Italian counterpart (35–36, and 42–43). Barzini

of extraterritoriality granted to all foreigners with the Treaty of Nanjing (1842). The initiative disregarded the fact that issuing passports to all Catholic missionaries in China was a duty granted to France by the Vatican (De Angelis 2013, 31–33). Symbolic of the tense diplomatic relationships between France and Italy, those events and the protection of missionaries in China were destined to cause animosity between Italy, France, and the Vatican for over four decades.

53 Barzini's reference to the mercilessness of the Germanic people indirectly subverted the yellow perilist discourse embedded in the German Emperor Wilhelm II's call to arms to his troops after the assassination of the German Minister to China Clemens Von Ketteler on June 20, 1900. When dispatching his troops, Wilhelm II encouraged them to show no mercy and kill any Chinese fallen into their hands "Just like the Huns under the King Etzel [Attila]" (Wilhelm II quoted in Blue 1999, 124).

suggested that the Italian commercial inefficiency could be overcome by working with patience, humility, and perseverance as well as by providing for the necessary training of a new generation of businessmen in Italy in order to produce “agenti giovani, attivi, intelligenti e soprattutto amanti del loro paese” (37).⁵⁴ After dismissing the idea of the concession of a Chinese port to Italy, thus referring indirectly to the Sanmen affair, he envisaged that Italy would need to manufacture Italian products directly in China, develop its own consular and transport infrastructure in China and study the country, its people and its commercial production in depth (202–205). Barzini’s enthusiasm and future expectations were not met even in the decades following the conflict. As a result of its participation to the Boxer War, in 1902, Italy obtained the territorial concession in the port city of Tianjin on the side of the Hai River, where Italian citizens were allowed to perform economic and commercial activities freely and under Italian laws. The Tianjin concession, however, never developed into a major commercial and financial structure.⁵⁵

Barzini’s representations of China and Asia became internationally renowned in the years to follow, and with them that same patriotic sense

54 “... young, proactive, intelligent agents that are, most of all, in love with their country” (Barzini 1917, 37).

55 The concession required infrastructural works for the removal of a cemetery and a Chinese village, as well as draining and filling of salt marsh, and the Italian government advocated for private investors to take charge of such works (Francioni 2004, 150–151). Moreover, the bureaucratic processes of acquisition of exclusive rights from the government were quite long and tedious. Such conditions inhibited the initiative of prospective Italian investors in China, such as the *Società Italiana per il Commercio colle Colonie di Milano* (Italian Society for the Colonial Commerce in Milan) and the Roman bank Manzi & C. (Francioni 2004, 150–151). The development of the colony was slowly carried out under the direction of a royal administrator and a consul in Tianjin, but the economic development of the colony necessary for the consolidation of the commercial presence in the Chinese territory did not happen. (154–155). Similarly, the foundation of the Italian Colonial Trading Co. Ltd., first Italian bank in China, Shanghai, in 1902, served mainly to collect the war reparations obtained after the Boxer War (and payed in instalments for almost 40 years), rather than creating valuable economic and commercial initiatives (158). The Italian Colonial Trading Co. Ltd. was described by the Italian consul in Shanghai in 1906, Cesare Nerazzini, as “l’unica affermazione economica e

of Italian excellence contrasting the international reputation that the Reign of Italy had at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1907, the *Corriere della Sera*'s executive secretary Luigi Albertini gave Barzini the task of narrating the first Beijing-Paris car race, which was a major commercial operation organized by the French newspaper *Le Matin*. Barzini joined the race as a member of the Italian team led and financed by Prince Scipione Borghese, a nobleman, radical parliamentarian, and explorer. On board of an Italian-made automobile, an 35/45 hp *Itala*,⁵⁶ the team was able to win the competition, gaining international notoriety. While engaged in the transcontinental automobile race, Barzini produced newspaper articles for *Corriere della Sera* and the *Times*. Barzini's full account of the *Itala* team's colorful experiences was published by Ulrico Hoepli a few months after the completion of the race, in December 1908. Translated into 11 languages, *La metà del mondo vista da un'automobile. Da Pechino a Parigi in 60 giorni* become an international bestseller and was regularly republished until 1929. As Luigi Barzini Jr. argued in the introduction to a 1972 edition of the book, nearly all "respectable Italian families" had a copy of it and "by the late 1920s it had become one of the traditional gifts bestowed on diligent schoolboys who passed their examinations" (Barzini Jr. in Barzini 1986, xi). The ingredients for such an incredible success were, of course, all present. Luigi Barzini Sr. was at the time already the most famous Italian journalist of his time, while the automobile was at the time the most recent, popular invention. Moreover, the Italian readership was interested in the Peking to Paris race because it was in fact a competition of nations (*ibid.*, xii-xiv). Barzini's book had a strong patriotic appeal because it gave voice to "an Italian triumph of sorts after years of humiliating deceptions and defeats" (xiii), and emphasized the exceptional value of Italian genius, as it "seemed to confirm [Italian] qualities (mechanical capacity, moral determination,

commerciale dell'Italia in Cina" ("the one and only statement of Italian commercial and economic presence in China", Nerazzini quoted in Francioni 2004, 162).

It is also worth noting that the Italian consulate in Shanghai, established in 1861, was part of the commercial and diplomatic infrastructure inherited from the Kingdom of Sardinia.

56 Prince Borghese's mechanic and chauffeur Ettore Guizzardi was the third member of the team.

adventurous spirit) which foreigners, who thought of us [Italians] mostly as ‘mandolin strummers’, refused to believe we possessed” (xiii) [see Figure 1].⁵⁷

In an essay arguing the influence of Barzini’s *La metà del mondo vista da un’automobile* on Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s Futurist Manifesto, the Italianist Samuele Pardini aptly remarked that Barzini’s characterization of the motorcar stood for the West for its speed, technology, and modernity, and that such characterization operated in a “conceptual binarism,” between Asia and Europe showing two contrasting ideas of civilization (2009, 215). In advancing that dichotomy, Asia was characterized as static, old, and almost dead. China, as Pardini underscored, “appear[ed] as silence, as a hard soil, a huge empty, and solitary space like the oldest bridge made of marble untouched ever since Marco Polo crossed it” (216). The Chinese people in the Beijing marketplace were portrayed as “careless and picturesque,” uninterested in the “miracles of our civilization” (Barzini 1986 27) [see Figure 2]. The coolies pulling or carrying the car in case of major obstacles were as simple, patient, and indifferent, as well as playful as children when they are released from their duties (35). The inner part of the Chinese capital was once again described as “a labyrinth of narrow street” and “like Pompei, so worn by time” (28). Beijing brought the journalist to “some remote, immutable form of life fixed long ages ago” (22). The Great Wall was portrayed as “a fantastic freak of the earth, thrown up by some great unknown natural force” (43), and as an “amazing monument of Chinese fear, huge and senseless, both magnificent and ridiculous” (44). The Great Wall was therefore in sharp contrast two telegraph wires, described as “the sight of familiar faces” and “friends of us” that made the wall obsolete and useless. (43).

The difference embedded in these two monolithic views of Europe as the West, and Asia as the East, manifested itself also as a shift in time, in which the former is the dynamic “più presto” (Barzini 1908, 73), and the latter is a “torvo medioevo” (184–185).⁵⁸ Such dichotomy and the positional superiority implied in it, were consonant with Barzini’s narrativization of

57 The emphasis on Italian greatness is explicitly reinforced also by Barzini Jr. in the passage, despite Barzini Jr.’s different political ideas.

58 “... faster!” and “grim middle-ages” (Barzini 1908, 73 and 184–185).

China in this travel narratives on the Boxer War [see Figure 4]. Barzini's positional superiority was also pointed out by Pardini, who remarked that Barzini's "admiration for Asia is hardly an example of prototypical post-colonial advocate in the midst of European Imperialism. It [his admiration for Asia] serves him well and allows him to open up an entire discourse about Europe" (2009, 220) [see Figure 3]. Such aspects are visible in the excerpt below:

Con noi è l'Europa che passa. Nella velocità si riassume tutto il significato della civiltà nostra. La grande brama dell'anima occidentale, la sua forza, il segreto vero d'ogni suo progresso, è espressa in due parole: "più presto!" La nostra vita è incalzata da questo desiderio violento, da questa incontentabilità dolorosa, da questa ossessione sublime "più presto!" Nell'immobilità cinese noi portiamo veramente l'essenza delle nostre febbri. (Barzini 1908, 72–73)⁵⁹

The personal pronoun "noi," or "us," used by Barzini in the above quotation and throughout the book situated Italy among the greatest nations of Europe. That pronoun always implied "us Italians" and reiterated a patriotic idea, the exceptional value of historic and contemporary Italian genius, that had been contested internationally over the previous decade, especially in relation to Italy's ambitions in China. The automobile was the reification of such genius. *Itala* "had the elastic bounding of a feline animal" (Barzini 1986, 29), a "pride of its own," and it "seem[ed] to see the dangers and calculate the heights" (31). Even more than the automobile he had chosen for the race, Prince Scipione was most representative of the Italian genius and heroism in the team. According to the Italian journalist, Prince Scipione had a prodigious brain and peerless memory. He was exceptionally cultured and a polyglot. "Calmness, judgement, the power of logic invest[ed] his habits of thought with the exactitude of a mathematical instrument" (Barzini 1986, 13). He was strong-willed

59 "Europe is passing through thanks to us. Speed sums up all that is meaningful in our civilization. The word 'faster!' gives voice to the great yearning of the soul of the West, its strength and the true secret of its progress. Our life is driven by this violent desire, this painful insatiability, this sublime obsession of going 'Faster!' We have truly brought the essence of our fervor to the immutable China" (Barzini 1908, 72–73).

and capable of sacrifice. As an experienced adventurer and alpinist, he was muscular and swift. “He love[d] obstacles because he love[d] victory” (14). Above anything else, Prince Scipione was a member of the Borghese family, which was a most influential aristocratic and papal family in modern Italian history.

Renato Simoni’s *Vicino e lontano*: An Account of Early Republican China

Bisogna andar di là, in quella vecchia e resistente Babilonia che è Pechino, piena di mostri minacciosi e di etère servili, di principi miliardari e di bonzi tosati, in quella città d’oro, fetente e profumata, ruinosa e splendente, per comprendere che cosa è la fame, per pesare che cosa è la vita (Simoni 1929, 125).⁶⁰

Qui [in Cina] due principi [Yin and Yang], malgrado la loro modesta aria da bacilli, sono due personalità di gran conto. Figuratevi che prima che essi cominciassero ad evolvere, tutte le cose erano mescolate ed effuse. Non c’era niente di visibile e di palpabile. Insomma, un universo simile alla Repubblica Cinese. Ma Jang [Yang], che è il principio maschile, benefico, il cielo, l’atto, si è messo a svilupparsi in gara con Jinn [Yin] che è il principio femminile, malefico, la potenza, la terra; e sono nate tutte le cose attuali; i cinque elementi, le stagioni, l’umanità, i vizi dei mariti, le colpe delle mogli, le disonestà dei governanti, lo *squeeze*, tutto, tutto, insomma; tranne i fazzoletti. Ed è per questo che i cinesi, per forbirsi il naso, usano le dita (Simoni 1929, 40).⁶¹

60 “We must go there, to that old and resilient Babylon called Beijing, populated by threatening monsters and servile courtesans, billionaire princes and shaved Buddhist monks. We must go to that golden city both fetid and perfumed, ruinous and splendid, to understand what hunger is like, and grasp what life is like” (Simoni 1929, 125).

61 “Here [in China] there are two principles [Yin and Yang] of great importance, in spite of their modest, bacillary appearance. Just think, before they started to evolve, all things were blended together and diffused. There was nothing visible or tangible. Hence, it was a universe similar to the Chinese Republic. Then the

A dear friend and colleague of Luigi Barzini Sr., the journalist, satirist, playwright, and theatre critic Renato Simoni visited China as a reporter in the 1915.⁶² Simoni arrived in Beijing by train through the newly built Trans-Siberian railway. His travel was enjoyable, hassle-free and comfortable. Echoing Barzini's narration of the Beijing-Paris automobile race, Simoni made use of a European machine, the train, to describe the presumed static nature of Asia in contrast to the modernity of the European civilization: "il nostro *express* era troppo europeo. L'Asia era fuori, sotto la neve" (17).⁶³ The trans-Siberian train was described as luxurious, sparkling, cheerful, and full of voices and stories from all over the world (9) and of delicate London- or Paris-style perfumes (17). Siberian landscapes were depicted as peaceful and meek, cold and silent, monotonous and immense, ethereal (11, 17). However, Simoni suggested that underneath Asia's new European-like skin there was a "sentore confuso di razze decrepite, un putrido aroma di civiltà dissolte" (12).⁶⁴ The railway stations and their third-class waiting rooms along the way were regarded as exemplary of that condition for their reputedly beastly stench and loathsome promiscuity (13–14).

China had changed since the Boxer Uprising, European countries and Japan had consolidated their control in the country and the imperial power symbolized by the Empress Dowager Cixi was undermined, in spite of the attempts of the Qing to introduce institutional reforms such as the abolition of the civil examination system (1905) and the organization of regional assemblies. Cixi died in 1908, the last Qing emperor Puyi abdicated in 1912. In the same year, the Republic of China was established, whose first

masculine principle, Yang, which is the good, action and sky, started to develop in contrast to Yin, which is the feminine principle, the evil, power and earth. That's how all things were born: the five elements, the seasons, humanity, the vices of husbands, the faults of wives, the dishonesties of rulers, the *squeeze*, and everything else. Everything but handkerchiefs. And that is why the Chinese use their fingers to pick their noses" (Simoni 1929, 40).

62 Simoni coauthored the libretto for Giacomo Puccini's *Turandot* together with the Italian librettist, playwright, and music critic Giuseppe Adami (1926).

63 "Our express [train] was too European. Asia was outside [of it], beneath the snow" (Simoni 1929, 17).

64 "A confused feeling of decaying races. A putrid aroma of extinguished civilizations" (Simoni 1929, 12).

president was the doctor and intellectual Sun Yatsen (Sun Zhongshan), followed by Yuan Shikai whose government was short-lived too, since he was in office until 1915 and died the following year. In China, the second decade of the twentieth century was characterized by resistance to the central government, mutinies by local armies and territorial fragmentation. Central control was not achieved until the late 1920s; however, imperial decline and statal fragmentation had allowed cultural innovation, whose symbol was the May Fourth Movement in 1919. In the same years, in Italy, the leadership of the statesman Giovanni Giolitti between 1901 and 1914 led the country through the path of liberalism and economic modernization achieving an unprecedented economical and industrial development until World War I.⁶⁵ While the Republic of China was being established, Italy was engaged in the Italo-Turkish War (1911–1912), from which the *Regno* had gained the colonial territories of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in Libya.

Simoni's narratives emphasize the contrasting sociohistorical scenarios of Giolittian Italy and early republican China and foregrounded the Otherness of the Chinese empire. The image of Italy as a modern and progressive nation-state serves as a background and standard of comparison for the Italian librettist's negative representation of China. This aspect is clearly visible in Simoni pessimistic characterization of the Xinhai Revolution (1911), which led to the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912. The librettist reputed the revolution as distant from the Chinese people, void of any real "partigiani del progresso e della libertà" (27) and animated by a deleterious and belligerent top-down nationalism.⁶⁶ According to Simoni, the revolution also allegedly lacked a mastermind (30) and was instead orchestrated by imperial students and academics, whom Simoni described as "sdegnosi, eleganti, donnaiuli e arrivisti" (31), as well as conservative and impractically intellectual (*ibid.*). His interviews with two of the most prominent Chinese military and politicians of the time, Yuan Shikai and Sun Yatsen, confirmed his negative opinions on the Xinhai Revolution, its protagonists and the Chinese civilization itself. Simoni described the President of the Republic of China Yuan Shikai as a cunning,

65 Italy formally joined World War I in 1915 after an initial phase of neutrality.

66 "... partisans of progress and freedom" (Simoni 1929, 27).

moody individual prone to betrayal (51–53). He lightheartedly and sarcastically declared Yuan Shikai's elaborate elusiveness as a glimpse of the “Cina autentica! La vecchia Cina sorniona, diplomatica e commediante” (55),⁶⁷ against the inefficiency of his “piccola impertinza europea” (56).⁶⁸ While he declared himself defeated by Yuan Shikai's manipulative nature, Simoni's interview in fact served him well to confirm his negative opinions not only on the Xinhai Revolution and its protagonists, but on the whole Chinese civilization. The same approach is visible in Simoni's characterization of Sun Yatsen, who was depicted as an idealist and a contradictory person. Simoni described him as a Chinese socialist who owned a villa and had servants, as a man with a bad Chinese appearance and a good European education and for being “piccolo, tozzo, bruno di pelle, bruno di baffi ... [ma] europeo di pensieri e di abitudini” (66)⁶⁹; as a man with good ideas and theoretical concepts that that are inapplicable to early twentieth-century China (71). In the negative characterization of those Chinese politicians and intellectuals of the time, the Italian readership would possibly see also an indirect reference to the Italian “partisans of progress and freedom,” such as Camillo Cavour, Giuseppe Garibaldi, Francesco Crispi, and Giuseppe Mazzini, among others, as well as to the European education that those leading figures of the *Risorgimento* had acquired in their lives, some among them through forced exile.

Simoni's rhetoric centered on China's Otherness and inferiority pervaded also his descriptions of the Chinese civilization and people, as well as its philosophical and cultural heritage. He depicted China as a bizarre country (112), as the land of paradox, where everything is possible. Good education in China implied doing the contrary of what a person was asked to do in Italy (52). The Chinese “soul” was characterized by the subversion of all logic (71). Learning to read Chinese characters caused insanity and irrationality (107). Having to deal with such presumed irrationality was, according to Simoni, a noxious daily challenge for the Western mind

67 “... Authentic China! The old, sly, theatrical and diplomatic China” (Simoni 1929, 55).

68 “... small European impertinence” (Simoni 1929, 56).

69 ... small, stocky, dark-skinned, with a brown mustache ... [but] European of habits and thinking,” (Simoni 1929, 66)

(112). The Chinese philosophical and religious tradition of Buddhism and Taoism were described as less developed and even childish when implicitly compared to Christianity (78). The two passages at the beginning of this section on Renato Simoni's depiction of China clearly express his idea of the country and its millennia-old civilization. Simoni recurred to the paradox also to characterize the Chinese people, whom he generally described as apathetic, phlegmatic, and slow-witted (39); he portrays wealthy Chinese merchants as feminine figures wearing colorful silk robes and gesturing with their fans. One of them is ridiculed for being dressed in white silk like a maid on her first communion (98). Chinese women on the contrary wore trousers (100). The Chinese women entertaining Simoni and those merchants on a "flower boat" were described as "animal[i] a[i] qual[i] mancava poco per evolvere nella donna" (101).⁷⁰ Emblematic of such dehumanizing discursive strategy, is Simoni's description of the rickshaw puller. Regularly used as an allegory of China for Western travelers throughout the twentieth century, the rickshaw puller also served as a portrait of the chaotic state of the nation and its failed attempts at socio-economic and political renovation. Simoni ironically distinguished between two categories of rickshaw pullers, a "xenophile" puller for using Western pneumatic tires and "xenophobe" one and using traditional wood and metal tires (27). This dichotomy represented the appropriation of Western civilizing technology for inconspicuous, even fallacious, ends.⁷¹ Simoni argued that the Chinese had relinquished their humanity, rationality, and intellect; and had sold their souls for a meagre portion of lentils (20).

Simoni's referential characterization of China's Otherness in relation to Italy was manifest in his analysis of the fate of the Chinese rickshaw pullers, whom he linked to Venetian gondoliers or obsolescent Neapolitan *vetturinos*. Simoni also used a Southern-Italian concept, *camorra*, to define

70 "... animals that needed very little to evolve into women" (Simoni 1929, 101).

71 The portrayal of a young Chinese beggar in Beijing, whom Simoni called "liutenant," was analogous to the image of the xenophile rickshaw puller. Described as poor, cunning, and smiling, the child too was reputed emblematic of the condition of China. The child's appropriations of the word "liutenant" to demand for donations from Westerners was allegoric of the Chinese people's appropriation of Western technology and resources to use them against Western nations (126).

the criminal and systemic nature of the socio-economic inequalities experienced by rickshaw pullers in Chinese society: “una camorra di quattrocento milioni di uomini, d’una complicità che allarga le sue reti per mezza Asia” (25).⁷² However, Simoni swiftly distanced himself, as Westerner, from such phenomenon declining also any possible responsibility of the West in it. In other words, the social conditions of the rickshaw pullers, according to the librettist, were a Chinese phenomenon caused by Chinese society and willingly perpetuated by the Chinese themselves (*ibid.*). The alterity of China in such a dichotomic process and the author’s positional superiority were made even more explicit in Simoni’s description of the city of Wuxi, which was introduced to his readership as the “Venice of China.” The Italian librettist conceded that the Wuxi was a muggy, humid city of merchants and boaters built around a canal like Venice, but he remarked that the city had nothing European about it (95). Wuxi was depicted as a peculiar other-space completely different than Italy and, therefore, Chinese:

Sulle acque scure [di Wuxi] urla una vita assordante. Migliaia e migliaia di giunche e di sampan si intricano e si districano cozzando, facendosi largo a stento, mentre, su di esse, un popolo seminudo e bruciato, maneggiando gli uncini e i remi, si ingiuria, ride, piange, solleva cantando in cadenza, pesi enormi, portando seco le sue donne rugose, i suoi bambini, i suoi vecchi che sogguardano inebetiti dei boccaporti, le sue cucine negre e fetide, i suoi cenci distesi all’aria, sulle corde. (95–6)⁷³

It is precisely this grotesque image of the country that the author configured as the most vivid proof of the Chinese alterity; an image of the country that Simoni connected to the China he was familiar with since his childhood. Such a “China” is a textual image, whose reality is perceived

72 “A four-hundred million people *camorra* [mob] whose connivance extends over half of Asia” (Simoni 1929, 25).

73 “The dark waters of Wuxi resonate with deafening liveliness. Thousands and thousands of junks and sampan get entangled and disentangled by bumping into each other as they barely clear their paths. Meanwhile, onboard, half-naked, burned people curse, laugh, cry, sing and lift enormous loads following a rhythmic cadence. They bring with them their wrinkly women, children and elders looking open-mouthed and stunned at the hatchways. They bring with them their fetid, blackened cookware and their rags drying on wires in the fresh air” (Simoni 1929, 95–96).

by Simoni as more “real” than the country and its people themselves; and even as too good to be real (*ibid.*).

While not as notorious as Barzini’s narratives, Simoni’s depictions of the mid-1910s Chinese Republic, its people and civilization characterized by framing China as the negative opposite of Italy, anticipated the fascist rhetoric on the country developed from the 1920s, which is discussed in the next chapter.⁷⁴

Military Memoirs, Explorations, and Geographic Societies: Patriotic Accounts from Regia Marina Officers and Diplomats

At the turn of the century and during the first decade of the 1900s there was a wide circulation of travel narratives promoting the Italian military and economic presence in the Chinese empire that took the form of journal articles, diaries, reports, and conference proceedings from geographers, explorers, academics, and military officers with the support of geographic societies. Those narratives did not have the same popular resonance as the travel accounts produced by Luigi Barzini Sr. Nonetheless, they contributed to the dominant characterization of China as a backward agonizing civilization and promoted the establishment of an Italian commercial and industrial infrastructure in the Chinese empire. An overview of the processes of narration of China from a selection of such works provides a more detailed understanding of the systematic nature of the nationalist rhetoric characterizing Italian travel narratives on the country from the first paradigm.

74 Simoni’s negative narrativization of early republican China and his pessimistic views on Sun Yatsen appear even more interesting when compared with Luciano Magrini’s positive analysis the sociopolitical events characterizing China from the mid-1910s to the mid-1920s as well as his views on Sun Yatsen, described in the latter portion of the next chapter.

Exemplary of such narratives are the earlier accounts of the diplomat and sinologist Lodovico Nocentini, who had been appointed as an interpreter at the Italian consulate of Shanghai (1883–1888) and the Regia Legazione in Beijing (1893). Nocentini's publications focused on the historical events in China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in relation to the presence of Western countries in the empire. Nocentini advocated for a more active role in East Asia for the Kingdom of Italy, supported the request for Sanmen Bay by the Italian government and claimed that a colonialist strategy in Asia would encourage the industrial and commercial development of the Kingdom of Italy (De Angeli 2012, 83, and 2013, 42). He also aptly criticized the Italian government for its irresolute and opportunist strategy (De Angeli 2012, 74). Nocentini was deeply concerned that Italy would have been left out of “scramble for China” and undermined the possibility of having a “patria prosperosa e grande” (Nocentini in De Angeli 2012, 85).⁷⁵ While a diplomat and sinologist with a deep understanding of the Chinese civilization, Ludovico Nocentini was a man of his times and his consideration reflected the colonialist and patriotic discourse promoted in the *Regno* in those years. Significantly, his opinions were published in *Bollettino della Società geografica italiana*, *Nuova Antologia*, *Rivista degli studi geografici e coloniali*, *L'Italia Coloniale* among other prominent magazines of the time.⁷⁶

Geographic societies such as the *Società Geografica Italiana*, *Società di studi geografici e coloniali di Firenze* or *Società Italiana di esplorazioni geografiche e commerciali di Milano*, played a primary role in the promotion of a colonialist identity and development of imperialist policy-making, in spite of the unenthusiastic political scenario following the defeat of

75 “... prosperous, great fatherland” (Nocentini in De Angeli 2012, 85).

76 That was the case of the scientific and commercial exploration in China (1907–1908) organized by the Italian mathematician and sinologist Giovanni Vacca with the assistance of Nocentini. Vacca was not interested in such colonial and commercial purposes, but he had to comply with the intentions of his sponsors. Vacca's narratives on China represent an exception because of his compassionated and detailed description of the country, its culture and traditions. For a study on Vacca's expedition, see Lioi (2016), which also contains Vacca's previously unpublished diary of the expedition. For more details on Nocentini and his publications, see Bertuccioli (1991) and De Angeli (2012 and 2013).

Adwa in 1896 (Monina 2002). Such societies would sponsor geographical expeditions in partnership with chambers of commerce, ministries and military sections, and private investors because the exploration of little-known territories – such as South-Eastern China – and the analyses of the ethnographic information and economic and natural resources were important for the commercial and military interests of the Kingdom of Italy (Lucchesi 2014, 75–77). Founded in 1868, *Bollettino della Società geografica Italiana* was the first Italian geographic journal and the most prominent of the twentieth century. The BdSGI did not have readership as wide as that of *Corriere della Sera* or *La Tribuna* since it was not aimed at general audiences. Nonetheless, the BdSGI was an influential medium of information among politicians, educators, noblemen, and professionals. The years that have the most contributions on China in the BdSGI are concentrated between 1888 and 1909. This is in alignment with political and economic aims and geographical exploration of the time, and consistent with the increase of visibility that had China in Italian newspapers in those years as discussed earlier in this chapter. The years that featured the most articles on China were the 1899 (15) and 1888 (13), when the interest in Sanmen Bay was predominant (*ibid.*, 30–31).⁷⁷ In addition to Lodovico Nocentini (1887, 1890, 1891), the most interesting Italian contributors for the BdSGI who visited China were vessel lieutenants Lamberto Vannutelli (1899), Eugenio Chiminelli (1904), Luigi Giannitrapani (1905) and sub-lieutenant A. Bruazzi (1912), the adventurer Prince Scipione Borghese (1908), and Giovanni Vacca (1911).

The brief accounts on the excursions in the Chinese province of Zhejiang by Vannutelli in 1899 and in the Liaodong Peninsula by Giannitrapani in 1904 both show quite well the connection between *Regia marina*, geographical exploration, geographic societies, and colonial interests in China. The intention of Vannutelli was that of gathering first-hand data on the harbors of Xiangshan and Sanmen, south-east of Ningbo city (nowadays in Yin Zhou district), in order to determine which harbor was the most suitable communication

77 Many of those articles consisted of proceedings from conferences on China by Italian and foreign contributors from most prestigious European geographical societies, or articles on French, British, German, Russian, and Italian explorative journeys. See Lucchesi 2014 for more information on such aspect.

and commercial hub of the area (Vannutelli 1899, 408 and 418). The *Regia Marina* Captain Giovanni Roncagli, who was general secretary of the Società Geografica Italiana (1897–1914), emphasized that Vannutelli's excursion was done in a “momento opportunissimo” (Roncagli in Vannutelli 1899, 408).⁷⁸ As seen earlier on in this chapter, in those months the Kingdom of Italy had attempted to obtain a concession in Zhejiang for commercial purposes. Vannutelli gathered information on the transportation and commercial infrastructures in the region, agricultural products (silk, opium and tea), industrial activities (silk manufacture) and natural resources. Vannutelli also briefly depicted the Chinese people as untrustworthy, deceitful (411) and cowardly (414), but also productive and hardworking (411). While Giannitrapani did not refer negatively to China and the Chinese, his account aimed at providing an accurate geographic description of a portion of the maritime territory, focusing on the two areas that were at the center of the Sino-Japanese war in 1904–1905, the Liaodong Peninsula and the Northern Korean Region. Giannitrapani's account offered concise descriptions of the relative coastal areas, road and rail infrastructures, seaside routes and relative orographic and hydrography information, with special attention given to Port Arthur (afterwards renamed as Lushun, near Dalian), which was the fulcrum of the battle.⁷⁹

In addition to those of Vannutelli and Giannitrapani, the travel narratives produced by the lieutenant Eugenio Chiminelli for the GdSGI are of utmost interest because they also reveal the patriotic usefulness of the military presence of the *Esercito Regio*.⁸⁰ Chiminelli was invited to a conference at the *Società geografica Italiana* on March 13, 1904. The proceedings of the conference were published in the BdSGI in the same year as “Pechino e la Città Proibita” (“Beijing and the Forbidden City”). Chiminelli insisted on the decadent status of the Chinese civilization, its presumed immobility as well as its remoteness. He often emphasized the difference, distance, and

78 “... a most timely moment” (Roncagli in Vannutelli 1899, 408).

79 Italy's interest in those area was concrete since the late 1890s, when the *Regno* had offered to build a railroad in Northern China.

80 Chiminelli's lengthy accounts of the Italian military expedition in China were published later on in 1908 in a book entitled *Nel Paese dei Draghi e delle Chimere*. In that work, similarly to Valli, Chiminelli argued the relevance of the *Esercito Regio* in the Boxer War and the negative international reputation that Italy had acquired in relation to Adwa, Sanmen, and the Boxer War.

abstruseness of Beijing and his people, as well as of Chinese culture and history. Hyperbole, sarcasm, and grotesque were Chiminelli's most used rhetorical devices in his accounts of China. Beijing was regarded as different than Western capital cities, and it reminded the author of Nineveh, Babylon, and Tyro, in other words of "città morte sulle rovine di popoli scomparsi, e che solo la nostra fantasia tenta di ricostruire" (1904, 826).⁸¹ Beijing was also portrayed as the most superb and horrid creation of human intellect, the irrefutable proof of the lethargy and indolence of the Chinese (827), and as a dream-like space (828). Depicted as impressive and impenetrable gates that protect the millenarian Chinese civilization, the walls of Beijing were colossal, superb, and "gravi come un incubo" (828).⁸² While the remains of houses and courtyards were evidence of the hatred and depravity of the Chinese assailants, they were also reputed by Chiminelli to be the most tangible proof of the titanic capacity of resistance and exceptional character of a small army of Western soldiers able to withstand attacks by the entire Chinese people (831). This discourse eventually served to give more credit to the bravery of those Western troops that trespassed the walls of Beijing. Beyond the walls, such impressiveness gave way to the presumed farcical extravagance of Chinese culture. Symbolized by a small pagoda situated right next to the walls, the otherness of China took the shape of a multitude of bizarre divinities where, according to Ciminelli, the most-different races and languages of the world confusedly intersected (829). Echoing this image which resembled the myth of the Tower of Babel, Ciminelli described a chaotic multitude of Indian horsemen, Kazakhs, Mongols riding black camels, Chinese coolies, rickshaw pullers, street-sellers and mandarins, and Western soldiers, all crowding the capital city devastated by the fires and battles that occurred during the Boxer Uprising (830).

The geographer Flavio Lucchesi defined Chiminelli's descriptions of China and the Chinese as "naïve, if not superficial," and tainted by "an attitude of superiority with which the Italian approaches the culture of "others" (emphasis by the author)" (2014, 66). Chiminelli's approach is

81 "... dead cities leaving remains of extinguished peoples, which only our fantasy attempts to rebuild" (Chiminelli 1904, 826).

82 "... as heavy as a nightmare" (Chiminelli 1904, 828).

not simply naïve. The Italian lieutenant's positional superiority distorted features peculiar to the Chinese civilization and its people in order to praise the presumed greatness of the Italian race and history. As discussed in this chapter, such an approach was consistent with the discursive strategies visible in the most prominent early twentieth-century Italian travel narratives on China. Chiminelli's emphasis on the intrepid character of the *Regia Marina*, which he was part of, aimed at cleansing the negative image of the Italian troops diffused by the international press. In his views, the Italian navy soldiers engaged in the conflict were not second to anyone for their patriotism, courage, and sense of duty (*ibid.*). Ciminelli's reference to the courage of Italian navy soldiers was reinforced by his accusation of the presumed jealousy of foreign narrators – particularly, the *Times* correspondent Morrison – for the greatness of the Italian civilization, which according to the Italian author was the true motivation for the harsh tones seen in the international press (832).⁸³ More importantly, this strategy supported the patriotic discourse on Italy's role in the international anti-Boxer expedition, as well as Italy's place among the greatest and most powerful nations in the world, as seen earlier in this chapter. Ciminelli's praise of the contribution of the Italian troops is evident the citation below:

Nel ricostruire colla mente le scene spaventose di quei giorni di battaglia, si pensa con orgoglio che lì, sul più avanzato baluardo che sostenne l'urto più violento, sventolò bella e superba la nostra bandiera, fieramente difesa dagli intrepidi figli del nostro mare, e che su quei sassi frantumati dal cannone, il sangue italiano immolato alla comune salvezza, scrisse una pagina luminosa nella storia della patria nostra. (Chiminelli 1904, 831–832)⁸⁴

The patriotic aim was stated also in the travel narratives by the *Regia Marina* lieutenant Mario Valli, published as *Gli Avvenimenti in Cina nel*

83 Such an allusion is explicit in Chiminelli's memoir of the Boxer War (1909).

84 "When calling to mind the frightful scenes of battle from those days [during the Boxer War], everyone proudly recalls that our flag flew beautifully and superbly on the frontline. There, it withstood the hardest attacks and was defended by the intrepid sons of our [Mediterranean Sea]. On those rocks crushed by cannon balls, Italian blood shed for the common good, inscribed a bright page in the history of our land" (Chiminelli 1904, 831–832).

1900 e l'azione della R. Marina Italiana in 1905. Valli aimed at providing an “Italian” historical account of the Boxer war, an account, in other words, that would re-evaluate the role of Italian troops in the conflict, which, also according Valli, had been misrepresented in the works by authors from the other nations involved in the military expedition (1905, 1). As he sought to produce an independent, politically unbiased account of the events, the Italian lieutenant’s narrative was sober and made use of a conspicuous set of historical sources on the Boxer War, as well as on Chinese history, culture, and religion. In order to perform the task of the historian, Valli, however, claimed to draw from his “istinto e coscienza di uomo occidentale” (3),⁸⁵ which demarcated a deeper difference between himself, as an Italian and a “Western” author, and the Chinese and reinforced Italy’s place in the sun as a European nation. Valli’s narrative justified the involvement of the Western troops in the Boxer War, which he described as a heroic and epic conflict against Chinese hostility (2). His account was not spurious of xenophobic and racist connotations of the Chinese people, in spite of his intention to produce balanced considerations on the sociohistorical, political, and religious characteristics of the Chinese civilization (3).⁸⁶ The civilizing aspect of the expedition was judged ineffective since the Chinese had presumably resumed their superb and lethargic habits after the conflict (721). While praising the industriousness of the Chinese people, Valli also concluded that the derelict condition of the Chinese empire was to be blamed on its own millennia-old autocratic sociopolitical structure, as well as on the apathy of its people (724).

Valli’s opinion of the activities of the *Regia Marina* during the Boxer War was most favorable. The officer argued for the heroism of the Italian troops despite their scarce means and facilities, and the underdeveloped logistic and diplomatic Italian infrastructures in China (Valli 1905, 1 and 724). As proof of Italian heroism, Valli praised the composure and strength of the sub-lieutenant Ermanno Carlotto and eighteen more Italian soldiers who died in combat (730). Valli’s further arguments for the exceptional character and ingenuity of the Italian people regarded the contribution of

85 “... the instinct and knowledge of a Western man” (Valli 1905, 3).

86 See Valli’s Chapter I “Cenno Storico,” 7–50.

the *Regia Marina* officers to scientific expeditions, diplomatic assistance and improvement of the legation quarters, as well as to the establishment of a radiotelegraphic station in Beijing, thanks to Guglielmo Marconi's pioneering work on radio communication (727). Such arguments consolidated the "myth of Italian heroism" and aimed at promoting the international prestige deserved by the Kingdom of Italy and its people (726), fulfilling the country's ambitions for a "più grande Italia [...] tra le altre Nazioni," as well as establishing a "Patria al di là dei confini [nazionali]" (728).⁸⁷

Conclusion

The travel narratives analyzed in this chapter are consonant with the idea that the *Regno* had of itself, that of a young nation deserving to be among the greatest imperial powers of the time. The narratives on China patronized the central role of Italy in the diplomatic and economic relationship between Europe and East Asia and argued for Italy's possible future leading role in the geopolitical dynamics of the early twentieth century. They praised the heroic presence of the *Esercito Regio* in the Chinese empire during the Boxer War and in the consolidation of the Italian presence in the territory. They also sought to promote the historical global prominence of Italian past and present technological, scientific, geographic, and cultural achievements.⁸⁸

87 "... greater Italy among the other nations" and "... Fatherland beyond its [national] boundaries" (Valli 1905, 728). In such remarks it is also possible to read Valli's critique of the skepticism of part of the parliamentarian left for joining the military expedition against the Boxer (729).

88 Symbolized by Barzini's enthusiastic narrations of the Peking to Paris transcontinental automobile race led by the 35/45 hp *Itala* and Prince Borghese's team, the praise of technological innovation and modernization and Italy's cultural tradition at one time, echoed the development of the Futurist avant-garde movement, whose manifesto was published in February 1909 in the French newspaper *Le Figaro*. The emphasis on nationalistic tendencies promoting the renovation of Italian society and exceptionality of its civilization, as well as the functionality of

Patriotic fervor was the main feature characterizing the narration of Italy's presence in China. Such discourse fueled the consolidation of Italy's national identity as a progressive and modern nation and aimed at obliterating the years of sociopolitical turmoil it had been experiencing through the 1890s decade, as well as the failed attempts of building a colonial empire culminating with the defeat in Adwa and the Sanmen incident. The narratives also reinforced the myth of the exceptionally good nature of Italian colonialism and Italian soldiers, by emphasizing the positive deeds accomplished by the *Esercito Regio* in contrast to the cruelties perpetrated by the other armies during the Boxer War.

China as “not modern,” stagnant and abnormal, was a recurring trope characterizing the widespread yellow perilist rhetoric of the time. The discursive strategies underlying such rhetoric were structured by the positional superiority of the travelers and their assumed authority to speak for the Chinese. Such strategies are analogous to the Sinological-orientalism described by Vukovich (2012, 126). China was mostly categorized as a silent object of observation whose physical, cultural, sociopolitical, and philosophic features were defined in a binary opposition to Italy and its corresponding features. Italy represented modernity, freedom, progress, and heroism, while the Chinese empire stood for backwardness, despotism, immobility, and cowardice. This image of China was consolidated in the following decades, especially during the Fascist *Ventennio*. In such a period, characteristics as racial difference, cultural and military inferiority argued by most prominent journalists and intellectuals of the regime served to support the pro-imperialist fascist rhetoric. This shift in the representation is discussed in the next chapter.

The narratives produced during the liberal period continued to circulate during the *Ventennio*. Renato Simoni's travelogue *Cina e Giappone* was published by the “Istituto di Studi Politici Internazionali” (Institute for International Political Studies, ISPI) in 1942 to rekindle the attention

war for the national and international consolidation pre-empted the fascist rhetoric on *Italianità*. On the tension between modernity and tradition in Futurism as well as the relationship between the avant-garde movement and fascism, see Pierpaolo Antonello & Marja Härmänmaa “Introduction: Future Imperfect – Italian Futurism between Tradition and Modernity” (2009).

of the Italian readership in the East Asian region (De Giorgi 2010, 585). Barzini's travelogues were republished on several occasions even beyond the *Ventennio* as mentioned earlier. Luigi Barzini Sr., however, was a *sui generis* case in the years of fascist rule. By comparing him to the Australian reporter George Ernest Morrison, French argued that Barzini "has largely been lost to history" in spite of having written "excellent on the spot reports" (2004, 79). French arguably hinted at Barzini being "forgotten" because he was an "anti-war war correspondent" and the founder of the Italian-American newspaper *Corriere d'America* (1923), a renowned Italian-American newspaper whose importance declined in time (ibid.).⁸⁹ Such considerations on Barzini reflect a general *modus operandi* which frames Italian travel literature within American, British, and/or French historic, cultural, and academic milieus without considering the specificity of the Italy geopolitical and cultural scenario in the twentieth century. As discussed in this chapter, Barzini was not simply an anti-war war-correspondent. The patriotic stand of his narratives shows that Barzini was preoccupied for the prestige of the Kingdom of Italy as well as for his own reputation, which he kept well beyond the early twenties. In the years to follow, Barzini's public adherence to fascism was a major reason for the drastic loss of his international and national importance both during the Fascist *Ventennio* and in post-1945 Italy.⁹⁰ In spite of his unconditioned support of the regime, however, Barzini was at the margins of fascist intellectual life, his finances were modest, and he had lost the public stature acquired during the first

89 For more information on the *Corriere d'America*, Italian press in the United States and Italian-American migration, see Stefano Luconi, "The Italian-Language Press, Italian American Voters, and Political Intermediation in Pennsylvania in the Interwar Years" (1999).

90 Luigi Barzini Sr. had formally joined the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (National Fascist Party) on July 1, 1924, when he was still based in the United States (Magri 2008, 250). He was present at the *Convegno per la cultura fascista* (Conference of Fascist Culture) in Bologna, March 29, 1925, and he adhered to the *Manifesto degli intellettuali fascisti* (Manifesto of the Fascist Intellectuals) (ibid., 252–253). After returning from the United States, Barzini directed the newspaper *Mattino* (1931–1933), was nominated senator by the Dux (1934), and briefly directed the *Agenzia Stefani*. As a correspondent for Arnaldo Mussolini's *Popolo d'Italia* for nearly a decade (1934–1943), Barzini sent most of his articles directly to Benito Mussolini.

two decades of the twentieth century. He was disliked by many politically committed fascist intellectuals and criticized by Mussolini himself.⁹¹ Ironically, in post-1945 Italy, Barzini was officially persecuted as a collaborator of the Fascist regime and was completely discredited like many other intellectuals and writers who had supported the regime.

91 Mussolini criticized him and his style, “barzinismo”, in “La missione del giornalismo illustrata dal duce,” *Corriere della Sera*, October 11, 1928 (Margrì, 266). For more information on Barzini’s life and works during the Fascist Ventennio, see Magrì 2008 and Colarizi 2017. In addition, two of his sons suffered greatly under the dictatorship. In the 1940, Luigi Jr. was arrested for espionage and confined in a village until the end of the regime. Connected to the resistance movement, Ettore was captured by the Nazis and died in 1944 in a concentration camp in Mauthausen, Austria.

The Chinese Alterity: *Italianità* and Ideology in the Italian Travel Literature on China during the Fascist Ventennio (1922–1943)

The main pillar of Fascism is *Italianità*, that is, we are proud to be Italians, even if we go to Siberia, [and] we intend to yell out loud: We are Italians ... Now we are claiming the honor of being Italian, because in our marvelous and adorable peninsula, the most prodigious and wonderful history of the human race took place

– Mussolini quoted in Gentile 2009, 147

In the 1920s, Italy became increasingly sensitive to the study of the culture and society of foreign countries that symbolized different typologies of modernity, such as the Soviet Union, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and Japan, especially in relation to implementing a specifically fascist model of development.¹ China was certainly not among the countries regarded by Italian intellectuals as a model of development during the Fascist Ventennio (1922–1943). Nonetheless, China was a space of investigation and implementation of fascist identities, as well as reflection on a specifically Italian and fascist model of development.

While often symbolic of a heterogenous interest for the so-called oriental civilizations as well as the relationships between exoticism, distance and the Orient (Pedio 2013, 119–120), Italian travel writing on China reinforced the fascist rhetoric of the 1920s and 1930s Italian nation as a global power and direct inheritor of the geopolitical dominance of the Roman Empire in pre-modern times. Such rhetoric argued the necessity for Italy

1 See Ben-Ghiat (2000, 61–62). See also Gentile, “Fascism and the Ambivalent Image of the United States” (1993, 7–29); Burdett (2007, 182–214, 215–247); Pedio (2013, 149–200).

to claim the role of commercial and diplomatic prime mediator between the West and the East. Furthermore, Italian travel writing on China elaborated nation-making myths centered on historical and literary references to the century-long direct and indirect relationships that Italian merchants had with China and their travels of discovery during the Pax Mongolica in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as well as evangelical activity by the missionaries during Qing and Ming dynasties in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Such a discourse on Italy and China helped Italy to better articulate its identity and geopolitical relevance among major European colonial powers of the time.

In the first part of Chapter 3, I introduce the commercial and diplomatic ambitions of Fascist Italy in China in the 1920s and 1930s in relation to the production of travel narratives on the country. The second part argues the systematic and discursive characterization of China as the negative other by fascist writers and journalists, through the analysis of the travelogues written by Mario Appellius, Roberto Suster, Arnaldo Cipolla, and Raffaele Calzini, among others. In the third part, I explore the positive narrativization of early and mid-1920 China by the anti-fascist journalist and politician Luciano Magrini, who underscored deep political, economic, and social transformations in the Chinese society.

Travel writing on China during the Fascist Ventennio supported the regime. As Derek Duncan argued, the Italian writers and journalists reporting from abroad all shared a “discursive framework, or repertoire of imageries, in which to situate their perceptions,”² and most importantly, “the overall intention of the writer/traveler[s] was to stabilize and consolidate the meaning of Italy” (2002, 50).³ With the exception of the journalist and politician Luciano Magrini, the Italian writers and journalists reporting from China considered in this chapter all propagandized the fascist ideology and the regime’s attitude to foreign politics. At the same

2 Pedio underscores the relevance of the control of the press by the fascist regime. See Pedio (2013, 24–29).

3 See Derek Duncan, “Travel and Autobiography. Giovanni Comisso’s Memories of the War,” in Charles Burdett and Derek Duncan, eds., *Cultural Encounters. European Travel Writing in the 1930s*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002, 49–63.

time, as Burdett asserts, those Italian writers and journalists were also “involved in their journeys through fascism – through its cult of the nation, its demographic campaign, its imperial aspirations, and their instincts, inclinations and past affiliations led them through different paths” (2010, 250). In their travel narratives, well-known authors such as Mario Appelius, Roberto Suster, Arnaldo Cipolla, Raffaele Calzini, and Cesco Tomaselli regarded China as a “significant arena in which to articulate a nationalist discourse centered on the celebration of Italian genius and the emphasis of Italy’s historical mission to ‘civilize’” (De Giorgi 2010a, 575–576). Consequently, these authors juxtaposed to their representation of China the image of a great Italy rejuvenated by the World War I conflict and fascist ideology. They celebrated the uniqueness of the Italian civilization and race, and the prominence of Italian historical and cultural contributions to the development of Western civilization. Along with that, these authors explored the possible and reputedly imminent centrality of Italy’s future role in the development of diplomatic and economic relations with the Indian, Chinese, and Japanese civilizations. In such a process, believed to be providing Italy with a place among the great nations, this idea about being Italian was regarded as foundational. Being Italian became the exclusive cultural, social, and racial human condition – the myth symbolizing fascist superiority (Gentile 2009, 149–150). Enraptured by that “state of collective excitement” that generated fascism from the ashes of World War I (Gentile 2009, 147), these journalists and writers made a profession of spreading the fascist pride about being Italian, in order to yell their *Italianità* out loud.

The Commercial and Diplomatic Ambitions of Fascist Italy in the 1920s and 1930s China

Siamo arrivati a [Shanghai] ritti sull’attenti, con il braccio teso nel saluto romano, investiti e spruzzati da lontano dalle note gioiose di “Giovinezza” ... Nel crepuscolo della sera ... l’inno ci giunge come un bacio della Patria lontana, ed il tricolore,

sventolante a poppa, circondato dalle candide uniformi dei nostri ufficiali ci appare più che mai un lembo vivo dell'Italia stessa. (Suster 1928, 127)⁴

During the Fascist Ventennio there was a growing interest from the Italian government in the possibility for Italy to constitute and consolidate a network of commercial and economic relations in Asia. Among the consequences of such an interest was the promotion of the study of Asian cultures, principally India, eventually leading to the institution of the Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (Institute for the Study of the Middle and Far East, IsMEO), which was founded in 1933 by Giovanni Gentile and Giuseppe Tucci with the support of the Oriental Institute of Naples (Ferretti 1986, 781).⁵ The diplomatic relations between Italy and China were implemented through the formulation of the Treaty of Friendship and Commerce (November 27, 1928) with the Chinese Nationalist forces led by the general Chiang Kai-shek.⁶ Between 1931 and 1935, thanks to the diplomatic activity of Galeazzo Ciano, Italy and China established the basis for economic cooperation, focusing on the export of Italian industrial and military products, and hiring of Italian technicians by Chinese authorities.⁷

However, in spite of these initiatives and Benito Mussolini's plans for economic and political influence in Asia, China was never at the center of fascist international politics.⁸ The diplomatic and economic relations between Italy and China, in the decade 1922–1931, mainly followed the

4 “We arrived in Shanghai standing at attention with our arms held out straight in front of us for the Roman salute, while being sprayed and enveloped by the joyful notes of ‘Giovinezza’ ... At dawn, our anthem is a kiss from our far fatherland among the Chinese boatmen’s hysterical cries ... and the tricolour, a most lively extremity of Italy itself” (Suster 1928, 127). All the quotations from the travel narratives discussed here were translated by me from their original Italian versions.

5 See also Gherardo Gnoli, “Giovanni Gentile Founder and President of IsMEO,” *East and West* 44/2 (1994): 223–229.

6 For more details on the Treaty of Friendship and Commerce, see Samarani and De Giorgi (2011, 57–59).

7 For further details on Galeazzo Ciano in China, see Shirley Ann Smith (2013, 118–123).

8 See Borsa (1979, 381–419) and Samarani and De Giorgi (2011, 55–74).

guidelines of the League of Nations and were influenced by Great Britain. Italy complied with the naval and expansionistic limitations stipulated by the Washington Naval Treaty in 1922. Afterwards, as a consequence of Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in late 1935, and of China's compliance with the sanctions against Italy imposed by the League of Nations, bureaucratic and economic relations between Italy and China deteriorated, reaching a standstill after Italy signed the Anti-Comintern Pact on November 6, 1937.⁹

The increase of interest in East Asia by the fascist government entailed an increment in the production of travel narratives of the area by Italian writers and journalists. From the mid-1920s, the most influential travel narratives during the Fascist Ventennio were produced by well-known authors working as foreign correspondents for the Italian newspapers *Corriere della Sera*, *La Stampa* and, especially, *Popolo d'Italia*. The journalist Luciano Magrini (*La Cina d'oggi*, 1925; *In Cina e in Giappone*, 1927) traveled to China as a reporter for *Corriere della Sera* in 1923–1924 and *La Stampa* in 1926. The journalists Mario Appellius (*Cina*, 1926; *La Crisi di Buddha*, 1935; *Al di là della Grande Muraglia*, 1941) reported from China for *Popolo d'Italia* in 1925 and in the 1930s. The journalist Roberto Suster (*La Cina repubblica*, 1928) traveled to China in 1927 as a reporter for *Popolo d'Italia*. The novelist and journalist Arnaldo Cipolla (*Nella grande Asia rivoluzionaria*, 1931) visited China in 1921, 1923–1924 and 1930. In the 1930s, the writer and journalist Giovanni Comisso (*Cina-Giappone*, 1932) traveled to China and Japan via Eritrea, India and Ceylon as a reporter for *Corriere della Sera*.¹⁰ In the same years, Cesco Tomaselli (*Dalla terra dei draghi al paese dei soviet*, 1936), and Raffaele Calzini (*Agonia della Cina*, 1937) also reported from China for *Corriere della Sera*. These authors all initially published their travel narratives in the above-mentioned newspapers in the *terza pagina*, the Italian newspapers' literary and cultural section containing short stories, travel reports, and film and literary reviews. Later, the travel narratives were collated into books and published mainly by *Edizioni Alpes* and *Mondadori*, *Treves* or *Bompiani*.

9 For a more detailed outline of Sino-Italian relations in the mid- and late 1930s, see Guido Samarani (1993, 303–309).

10 Comisso also recalled his experiences in Asia in the novel *Amori d'Oriente*/Oriental loves (1948). See Duncan (2002, 49–63).

The travel narratives written by these writers are shaped by the interest of fascist intellectuals in the later historical developments in China. The promotion of fascist Italy's economic expansion into the Chinese market also supported the intention of the Italian government to amplify its economic presence in Asia, following the example of the colonial apparatus of Western countries, and the travel narratives often extolled the diplomatic channels as well as Mussolini's policies on China despite the absence of a substantial volume of commerce during those years. Roberto Suster (1928, 195) argued in 1927 that the fascist government had already laid the foundations for economic expansion into China. Arnaldo Cipolla (1931, 247) emphasized the need for Italy to take advantage of China's internal political fragility and lack of local industries, in order to expand and improve the Italian economic network in China, which he regarded as the world's future biggest market. Of course, the necessary condition for the success of the Italian economic expansion in China was adherence to fascist ideology: "È necessario che [gli italiani nuovi per la nuova Cina] siano animati dal più puro spirito fascista, cioè da un ardimento non comune congiunto alla coscienza della superiorità italiana nei confronti degli altri concorrenti" (Cipolla 1931, 250).¹¹

The other main areas of interest of these writers were the foreign presence in China, particularly the foreign economic and diplomatic networks, and the Protestant and Catholic missionary establishments and their active participation in twentieth-century Chinese society by means of educational, medical and philanthropic activities. Italian journalists and writers were also interested in the political and social turmoil that had been raging in China since the end of the Qing dynasty (1912). They paid particular attention to a series of key historical events, including the regional militarism and civil wars during the Warlord Era (1916–1928), the Nationalist rule during the Nanjing decade (1927–1937) and the Japanese aggression and occupation of China (1931–1949) culminating in the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1941), and the two decades of conflicts between the Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) culminating in the civil war

11 "It is necessary that the [new Italians settling in China] be invigorated by the purest fascist spirit, that is, by an extraordinary passion and the awareness of the Italian superiority compared to their opponents" (Cipolla 1931, 250).

that led to the proclamation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in October 1949. Italian journalists and writers reporting from China during the Fascist Ventennio also acknowledged the influence of Western science, politics, philosophy, and arts in the Chinese quest for modernity. At the same time, they observed with great interest the growing influence of the Soviet Union in the development of new political expressions of nationalism in China, which some of them considered a prelude to a Pan-Asian alliance against Western countries.

While chiefly interested in the sociopolitical and economic situation in China and in the promotion of the Italian commercial presence in China, the Italian travel narratives published in the 1920s and 1930s portrayed China as a country in turmoil and experiencing a deep moral and historical crisis (De Giorgi 2010a, 582). These authors represented China as a remote and exotic place that could never be fully defined or understood. They portrayed China as a relic of a great ancient civilization, dying from poverty, backwardness, overpopulation, and misery. In their narratives, the Chinese people were silent objects, unanimously regarded as dim-witted, silly, servile, gutless, and inferior to Western people. The Chinese culture was described as different from and largely incompatible with Italian culture, and, at times, even unintelligible to Western minds. Similarly, the Chinese natural and architectonic landscape was described as the expression of the irreconcilable differences between the West and China. The Western colonial architecture located in Hong Kong, Shanghai and, of course, the Italian concession in Tianjin were the sole exceptions to such a characterization, because they were regarded as symbols of Western economic, technological, and cultural primacy, as well as expressions of the Western colonial power and civilizing mission.¹²

12 Concerning the characterization of Tianjin as an example of “good colonialism,” see Marinelli (2007, 139–143).

The Chinese Alterity

The characterization of China as the Other in the Italian travel narratives of the 1920s and 1930s is exemplified by the portrayal of Canton depicted by Mario Appellius in his first Chinese reportage in 1925. In his travelogue, Appellius introduced the reader to a magnificent, carnivalesque vision of China, characterized by grotesque and sarcastic tirades that immediately reveal the standpoint of the author. In Appellius' narration, Canton is a dreamlike, magical *verminaio* (place teeming with worms), a crazy red, green, and orange chessboard, an ants' nest. Chinese people are a stream of yellow and light blue water, a multitude of crawling worms, or a crowd of puppet-like tiny, leaping men dressed in yellow and turquoise. Such description reaches a climax when Appellius asks himself the rhetorical question "Sono uomini questi? Sono uomini come noi?" (1933, 13),¹³ and providing the answer a few lines later:

Il formicolio della moltitudine dà la sensazione fastidiosa d'essere in un mondo di topi, d'api, di cavallette. Gli occhi che vi guardano non hanno personalità, sono tutti eguali e vitrei: occhi di pesci morti, occhi artificiali di pupazzi di stoppa colle palpebre imbastite ... L'immensità della Cina s'impone allo spirito fin dal primo contatto. Lacche, mandarini, giade e ventagli, stipetti dorati e Buddha dal ventre gonfio, tutto scompare di fronte all'enormità della colossale fungaia umana in fermentazione che appesta l'aria con i sentori della carne e schiaccia i monumenti con la strapotenza del numero. La Cina dei paraventi cede il posto ad un'altra Cina, la vera ... una moltitudine ... quattrocento milioni di omuncoli gialli che tumultuano nella loro gabbia millenaria e cercano d'irrompere per le vie del mondo. (1933, 17)¹⁴

13 "Are those men? Are they men like us?" (Appellius 1933, 13).

14 "The swarm [of people] gives the sensation of being in a world of mice, bees or grasshoppers. Their eyes, watching you, do not show any character. They are all alike and glassy: dead fish eyes, sock puppet artificial eyes with stitched eyebrows ... China's immensity overwhelms you at first contact. Lacquerware, jade, fans, golden cabinets, swollen-bellied Buddhas, they all vanish when compared with the enormity of the colossal human mushroom bed tainting the air with the stench of flesh, and flattening monuments with the mighty power of their numbers. The China of the screens is replaced by a different China, the true one ... a multitude ... four hundred million tumultuous yellow homunculi trying to break free from their millennial cage into the world" (Appellius 1933, 17).

Such emphasis on the differences between China, Chinese people, history and culture and Italy, Italian people, history and culture is a constant feature in the reportage on China by fascist Italian journalists and writers. According to Appelius, the origins of these differences are both racial and behavioral. Appelius arguably regarded Chinese civilization as the product of the continuous interaction between the Chinese “race” and the Chinese landscape through millennia [see Figure 5], in a self-contained environment immune to Western culture’s external stimuli and shaped in its unique form by autochthonous naturalist cults rather than by Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism (214–216, 245).¹⁵ Appelius believed that both the condition of development of Chinese civilization and the resilience of the Chinese race would make it impossible for Western countries to transplant Western models of development and social philosophies to China. Appelius, therefore, configured such differences as the alterity to Western civilization:

I gialli non hanno scoperto né il telegrafo senza fili né il motore a scoppio perché hanno una nozione di tempo diversa dalla nostra e perché hanno orientato verso altri obiettivi il travaglio della loro intelligenza. Appunto perché hanno camminato in un altro senso sono diversi da noi ... Siamo due umanità che hanno camminato ognuna per proprio conto, arrivando ognuna nel suo raggio d'azione a grandezze e a grandi profondità. (1933, 218)¹⁶

15 On the contrary, the three social religions have mutually converged into shaping the social, artistic, and philosophic development of Chinese society for millennia. Furthermore, Appelius characterized Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism in opposition to the precepts of Catholic Christianity, in light of the relevance of Christian religion in fascist ideology. Appelius disdainfully defined Chinese Buddhism as the “banale formalismo di una religione di Stato, codificata e gerarchizzata” / “... a banal formalism of a codified and hierarchized state religion” (150). Similarly, Appelius defined Taoism as a “dottrina terribile che noi occidentali appena possiamo concepire, tanto abbiamo nel sangue la febbre di fare, di dire, di pensare. Dottrina però che si adatta alla speciale anima degli asiatici” / “... a terrible doctrine that we Westerners can barely imagine, because in our blood there is a fervent will to act, talk and think. But it is a very suitable doctrine for the peculiar soul of Asian people” (181).

16 “Yellow people did not discover the telegraph or the steam engine because their idea of time is different from ours, and because they have directed their brainpower towards different objectives. They are different from us exactly because they have

Ben-Ghiat argued that in fascist Italy “la parola ‘razza’ era stata usata a lungo in italiano come sinonimo di ‘popolo,’ ‘nazione’ e ‘stirpe’ [emphasis of the author]. ... Lo slittamento tra i termini di razza e stirpe era particolarmente comune, dato che molti fascisti vedevano la razza come un’identità spirituale, basata su una comunità di sangue ...” (2000, 242).¹⁷ Appelius applied such a syncretistic notion of race as a coexistence of people, nation, and ancestry and embodying the same history, language, and tradition to his comparison of the Chinese and Italian civilizations. Consequently, he characterized Chinese civilization as completely opposite from Italian civilization and *Italianità*. Such an attitude recurs in all the travel narratives written by fascist intellectuals discussed here. Furthermore, Appelius used this resulting notion of Chinese civilization built on differences to explain the origin of Chinese people’s reputed xenophobia and hostility to Western people, particularly Christian missionaries:

La resistenza spontanea della razza genera quel nazionalismo cinese ... naturalmente xenofobo e tendenzialmente anticristiano. Esso non è altro che il mero accavallarsi delle forze originarie che hanno mantenuto intatta durante i secoli la personalità della Cina. (1933, 217)¹⁸

Appelius regarded rural China as the epitome of the Chinese alterity. In the second chapter of *Cina*, Appelius portrayed a two-faceted China, the Chinese colonial metropolises – enthusiastically described in the first chapter – and rural China. Appelius described rural China as a vast and immutable landscape that is totally “Chinese,” devoid of anything European,

been walking in a direction which is different from ours ... We are two [different] humanities, each progressing on its own, and both extending its radius to heights and great depths” (Appelius 1933, 218).

17 “The term race was used as a synonym of people, nation, ancestry ... The shift between the terms race and ancestry was particularly common; in fact, many fascists regarded race as a spiritual identity based on the community of history, language and traditions, rather than on the community of blood” (Ben-Ghiat 2000, 242).

18 “The spontaneous resistance of the [Chinese] race generates that ... naturally xenophobic and basically anti-Christian Chinese nationalism. Chinese nationalism is merely the slow and gigantic overlapping of the original forces that have preserved China’s character intact during the centuries” (Appelius 1933, 217).

where Chinese peasants worship the land and their ancestors, unaware of the existence of the Western world. According to the Italian journalist, the peculiarly “Chineseness” of rural China was tangible in the lifestyles of the Chinese peasants, as well as in their methods and techniques of agricultural cultivation and local architecture (pagodas, temples, peasants’ dwellings) [see Figures 7 and 8]. Appelius saw evidence of this “Chineseness” in the different landscape: endless yellow rice fields framed with bamboo, dotted with the light blue clothing of the peasants working in the fields. And, in Appelius’ view, rural China was also distant in time and culture. It was immutable and millennial, the sound of the gong the voice of its dead centuries:

Dalla terrazza della pagoda vediamo bonzi che guidano gli aratri dietro le coppie potenti dei buoi. E dai campi sale alla balaustra l’odore formidabile della terra umida, travagliata dal vomero profondo. Ma le biche ed i pagliai non rassomigliano ai nostri! Le linee curve e cornute della pagoda mettono l’impronta della razza sulle cose più semplici. La campagna che in tutti i paesi ha un aspetto quasi eguale, tanto che in certe province dell’India ci si crederebbe nella vallata del Po e viceversa, ha in Cina una fisionomia particolare fatta di tante piccole cose che ricordano ogni momento dove ci si trova. (Appelius, 1933, 53)¹⁹

Roberto Suster, in his reportages from China in 1925 published in *Popolo d’Italia* and collated in *La Cina Repubblica* in 1928, theorized such an alterity on historical and cultural grounds. While Appelius wrote extensively of his experiences around China, Suster minimized the biographical aspects of his trip. He wrote about his understanding of Chinese culture and the latest national and international political developments of contemporary Chinese society, particularly those concerning the nationalist

19 “From the terrace of the pagoda we see Buddhist monks directing their plows behind pairs of powerful oxen. The formidable scent of wet soil pierced by the ploughshare rises up to the balustrade. But those bundles of heaven and those barns are not like ours! The curved and horned lines of the pagoda leave the race’s impression even on the simplest things. The countryside has almost the same appearance everywhere, and in some provinces of India you might think of being in the Po Valley or vice versa. But in China it has a particular physiognomy, resulting from a number of little things that constantly remind you where you are” (Appelius 1933, 53).

movement in China. Suster also traced the historical relations between Italy and China, and he praised the active role of the fascist government toward improving such diplomatic and economic relations.

In disagreement with Appellius, Suster specified that the Chinese civilization, rather than a single racial monolith, was shaped by the millennial coexistence of different races (Suster 1928, 38). According to Suster, the source of the Chinese alterity was a particular idea of both spiritual and mundane life, founded on a different system of values reputedly common to all Asian peoples:

Differenza che non si limita al colore della pelle o alla forma degli occhi, che non consiste nella costituzione fisica e nella lingua, che non si riassume nell'educazione e nella mentalità, ma coinvolge e sostanzia tutti i particolari dell'esistenza, dai più grandi ai più piccoli, mantenendo le due personalità [dei bianchi e dei gialli], anche se vicine e collaboranti, sempre lontane ed ostili. (1928, 17–18)²⁰

Such a difference, according to Suster, is what makes fascist Italy and China irreconcilably far from and hostile to each other. In opposition to the myth of fascist society as anti-conservative, modern, and dynamic, Suster found the sociological origins of the difference in the fact that, for nearly two millennia, Chinese society was organized according to the Confucian doctrine, which Suster regarded as responsible for social immobility, rigorous perpetration of tradition and reluctance for social change in Chinese society (1928, 18–19). He also contrasted this idea of a static China with the progressive, modern, and technological nature of Western expansionism. Consequently, Suster argued that the irreconcilable clash between China and Western powers was a result of their different historical and cultural development rather than their racial difference. Suster saw in this clash one of the main incentives for strengthening the nationalist consciousness of the Chinese, as well as of their desire for social renewal (25–33).

20 “A difference that is not limited to the skin colour or the eye shape, and that does not consist in the physical complexion or in the language. A difference not subsumed to the education or the mentality. Such a difference involves and shapes each aspect of existence, from the smallest to the biggest, keeping the [white and the yellow races’] behaviours always far and hostile, even when near and collaborating” (Suster 1928, 17–18).

Suster found a second and more recent reason for enmity between the West and China in the conflictual promotion of pro-Chinese nationalism and humanitarian strategies, and colonial and economical strategies by the Western powers. Suster defined such a conflictual attitude as the “sentimentalismo femminista, questa mania pietista di non decidersi mai a piantare il coltello nella carne affrontando la bestia nella sua tana” (1928, 36).²¹ And he argued that the conflicting attitude of Western powers about China had caused a loss of prestige for all Western countries in China, by showing the Chinese that “tra i bianchi c'erano delle nazionalità che si potevano prendere a calci, ed altre che per il momento bisognava rispettare” (41).²²

As argued by De Giorgi (2010a), aside from that, Suster used such criticism of Western colonialism to reinforce the political ambitions of fascist Italy in the East Asian region.²³ And therefore, Suster argued that Western nations had mismanaged the handling of the “Chinese prey” by recognizing the right of Yuan Shikai's Republic of China to be represented in the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919–1920, as well as by granting the German concessions of Qingdao and Yantai to Japan instead of to Belgium and Italy (Suster, 1928, 41–42). Moreover, on the basis of the presumed Chinese difference and backwardness, Suster also justified the existence of the Unequal Treaties, which were imposed on China after it lost the Opium Wars (1839–1842 and 1856–1860) and the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901), and which granted Western countries a series of privileges, such as open ports, extraterritoriality and the presence of foreign missionaries in China. Suster maintained that those privileges were justified by the irreconcilable differences between the Western countries and China: “I trattati sono ineguali? Ammettiamo che lo siano a svantaggio dei cinesi, ma è possibile eguagliarli nel senso assoluto, quando non solo le razze sono ineguali, ma anche le morali sono antitetiche, le mentalità sono opposte, le civiltà sono

21 “... feminine sentimentalism, such a pietistic mania of lacking the resolution to stab the beast at its heart when facing it in its lair” (Suster 1928, 36).

22 “... among the white men, there were some nationalities that could be kicked around, while others were to be still respected” (Suster 1928, 41).

23 See De Giorgi (2010a, 580).

agli antipodi?” (173).²⁴ Suster concluded that the only possible path for the Chinese to be considered racially equal to Western peoples was for the Chinese to forfeit their belief in the centrality of Chinese civilization, modernize their society, and improve their education system and patriotic sentiment:

Per rivendicare il diritto di parità della razza, per pretendere l'equilibrio assoluto fra indigeni e stranieri, bisogna che i cinesi rinunzino a crederci i figli prediletti di Dio, bisogna che smorzino i loro ardori xenofobi, bisogna che aggiornino alle esigenze della civiltà moderna la loro organizzazione di Stato, e bisogna che alzino di parecchie spanne il livello medio della loro istruzione, della loro attività, e del loro patriottismo. (176)²⁵

The alterity and difference evinced in the portrait of Canton and the Cantonese by Mario Appelius also emerge in the Italian fascist writers' and journalists' descriptions of average Chinese men, regarded as subhuman figures unsympathetically shunned or even despised by the narrators. With the few exceptions of notorious generals, politicians, or personalities who were often interviewed by Italian fascist writers and journalists, Chinese people played a marginal and silent role in the travelogues about them. As argued by Burdett, fascist writers and journalists traveling in Africa and Asia had very few encounters with the inhabitants of these lands, and they often “project[ed] a stereotypical identity . . . onto the non-European other” (2010, 258). Reminiscent of Luigi Barzini Sr. and Renato Simoni's characterizations of Asian rickshaw pullers introduced in the previous chapter, the rickshaw puller described by Cesco Tomaselli is an exemplar of the gaze of these fascist intellectuals on Chinese men:

24 “The treaties are unequal? Let us admit that they are disadvantageous for the Chinese. Even so, how can it be possible to make them absolutely equal, when not only are the two races unequal, but their moral sense is antithetical, their way of thinking is opposite, and their civilizations are poles apart?” (Appelius 1933, 173).

25 “In order to claim their right to racial equality, in order to demand the absolute coexistence among natives and foreigners, the Chinese people need to forfeit their belief in being God's chosen people, and their xenophobia. They also need to improve their system of government according to the exigencies of modern civilization. Aside from that, they need to enhance significantly the quality of their education, productivity and patriotism” (Appelius 1933, 176).

Il galoppino non è un uomo, è un animale da sgobbo. Monti, gli dai un indirizzo, ti risponde “yes sir” e parte come un puledro, tossendo, sputando, emettendo grugniti animaleschi, soffiandosi il naso con le dita. Dove ti porta? Egli non lo sa. Corre in una direzione a caso e non si ferma se non quando cominci a gridare: “Stop, stop” perché si è accorto che sei fuori strada. Allora sorride di un riso ebete, poi si gira su sé stesso, curva la testa e va di carriera, per riportarti al punto di partenza. ... Dopo qualche giorno di contatto con questa carne da tiro si capisce come si possa affezionarsi a un animale il cui attaccamento all'uomo fa sospettare un barlume di intelligenza, difficilmente a un essere che sia disceso a livello di una bestia. (1936, 11-12)²⁶

If the stereotype of the Chinese man is the rickshaw puller, that of the Chinese woman is the prostitute. Chinese prostitutes are seen as the only Chinese women deserving of description by the fascist travelers, and they are regarded as symbolic of the utmost decline and desolation of Chinese civilization under the Western – British and American – imperialist stronghold. Cipolla labeled Chinese prostitutes as “diamanti” (diamonds), and described them as ethereal, gracious, well-dressed Madonna-like ladies, also distinguishing them from the more accessible Russian prostitutes (1931, 196). Cipolla ironically described the “diamanti” and the disgraced last emperor of China, Pu Yi, in the same chapter, making Pu Yi a “diamante” himself. Similarly, Raffaele Calzini characterized the Chinese prostitutes in Shanghai as tender, soft, imperfectly white “avorio umano” (human ivory) (Calzini 1937, 123). And Calzini hinted at the connivance of the Chinese women in their moral and cultural degradation, as they gladly accepted being the object of desire of Western men: “camminano in su e in giù,

26 “He is a coolie, not a man. He is a beast of burden. You get on the rickshaw, and give him an address. He answers, ‘Yes, sir,’ and takes off like a colt while coughing, spitting, uttering beastly sounds and blowing his nose with his fingers. And where does he take you? He simply does not know. He takes a random direction and runs. And he does not stop until you yell at him, ‘Stop! Stop!’ He knows that you are heading in the wrong direction. Then, he smiles at you with an imbecilic smile. He turns around. He bows his head and sprints forward again. And he brings you right back to your departure point. ... After some days in contact with such a draft beast, you see why man can be fond of any animal showing a spark of intelligence, and on the other hand, how difficult it is to be fond of such a being fallen back to the same level as a beast” (Tomaselli 1936, 11-12).

spiando il desiderio dell'europeo e sorridendogli per la fessura delicata e profonda degli occhietti obliqui" (130).²⁷

When identifying the rickshaw puller as the stereotypical Chinese, Calzini has well connected the abjection of the rickshaw puller directly to the derelict historical condition of his Chinese motherland. The rickshaw puller was portrayed by Calzini as a "uomo da tiro" (draft man) who ignores his origins, his country, his name, his family, even his birthday, and has no sense of nationhood and therefore supports his own oppressor [see Figure 6]. Calzini depicted him as a "schiavo che l'Oriente ha generato, che l'Occidente ignora, che Cristo non redime e la Repubblica non affranca" (246), thus emphasizing the complicity of both the Chinese people and the Western nations in the derelict historical condition of Chinese civilization.²⁸ Consequently, Calzini concluded, the rickshaw puller would find his freedom only when China, as a cohesive and modern nation, has turned the Chinese from social outcasts to citizens (247). Therefore, the necessary condition for the palingenesis of Chinese people and China was the achievement of a radical moral, social, and political regeneration, following the example of the political, sociocultural regeneration that gave birth to the "new Italian" – a regeneration that Italy had experienced in the decades preceding World War I, and that fascism had claimed as setting the foundations for the fascist mode of development.²⁹

On closer look, the characteristics of the Chinese difference as emphasized by Appellius, Suster, Cipolla, Calzini, and Tomaselli all appear to be defined in antithesis to the characteristics reputed to be fundamental in fascist Italy. This myth of *Italianità* and the consequential sense of the superiority of the Italian civilization and race, related to the idea of the conquest of modernity and the regeneration – national and social – of Italian

27 "... they stroll around, spying on the Western man's desire and smiling to him with their delicate, deep chinky eyes" (Calzini 1937, 130).

28 "... a slave generated by the East, ignored by the West, not redeemed by Christ and not set free by the Republic" (Calzini 1937, 246).

29 For an outline of the moral, social and political regeneration of post-World War I Italy claimed by fascist intellectuals, as well as of the relationship between modernity and fascism, see Emilio Gentile, "The Conquest of Modernity: From Modernist Nationalism to Fascism," 2003.

society after World War I, that fascism had inherited from the Risorgimento tradition and changed according to its own ideological principles (Gentile 2009, 144) is the main criterion of comparison that the Italian writers and journalists from the Fascist Ventennio, applied in all their narrations of China. Compared to the writers from liberal Italy discussed in the previous chapter, the fascist writers tied Italianità specifically to the justification of fascist ideology the diffusion of a vision of the world shaped by fascist rhetoric.

The narrativization of China by fascist intellectuals resulted, therefore, from a dichotomic process of identification consisting of two moments: the negative diversification of the Other – China – and the positive identification of the Self – fascist Italy. Data concerning China were presented to the Italian readership as reversed and inferior to data concerning Italy. As Charles Burdett demonstrated, such a binary process of self-identification defined on the basis of a positive Self and a negative Other is crucial in the description of the Other by the fascist traveling subjects, and it is structured by the dichotomy of fascist type versus “counter-type” elaborated by the historian George Mosse (Burdett, 16–17). In the description of China and the Chinese people, the categorization of the fascist ideal type is therefore structured in relation to a “counter-type,” in order to develop its positive value against the counter-type’s negative features as suggested by Mosse (2006, 249).

The characterization of China as a fascist counter-type, involving the negative diversification and irreconcilable difference of China in order to praise their fascist self, incorporated the denigration of political ideas contrary to fascism, particularly in their manifestations in Chinese society. Anti-bolshevism being a component of the fascist ideology since its origins, the Italian journalists and writers traveling in China expressed their negative views on Chinese socialism, and belittled or demonized the influence of the Soviet Union in China [see Figure 9]. Mario Appellius minimized the influence of Soviet socialism in the development of Chinese nationalism and described the Russian Comintern agent Mikhail Borodin, the head of a contingent of Russian advisers supporting Sun Yatsen, as a tubercular-looking, feminine, and ugly figure who was fascinating and repulsive at the same time (1933, 112). Roberto Suster described communism as a decaying

model of development and thus with no future in China, although he specified that “la Cina, per le caratteristiche della sua economia e per la mentalità del suo popolo, è tutt’altro che inclinata al comunismo” (1928, 51).³⁰ Cipolla’s ideas were far more pessimistic and propagandist. The author of *Per la Siberia in Cina e Giappone* (1928) also dismissed the possibility of the Chinese people adopting collectivism owing to their individualistic nature, as well as the extreme poverty afflicting the Chinese region (Cipolla 1931, 150). Cipolla denigrated the policy of the Soviet Union toward China, and he accused the Soviet government of fomenting xenophobia and belligerence against Western powers (150). Furthermore, Cipolla described the Chinese Communist troops as xenophobic bandits uninterested in gaining political control, and principally engaged in pillaging for their own material benefit (128).³¹ Cipolla allegedly concluded, therefore, that the term “communism” in China was being incorrectly used to designate all armed bands pillaging areas and massacring people (151).

Italian reporters paid particular attention to the Chinese nationalist movements and the Chinese civil wars and their protagonists, often comparing them to their Italian – or at times, European – counterparts and, consequently, belittling their nature and activities. In their narratives we find the glorification of the militarist, masculine, and violent character of the fascist ideology, as well as the supposedly redemptive role of war in the progress of a nation. Moreover, the attention paid to Chinese warfare and military techniques and technology, as well as the exaltation of war and the comparison with the Italian army, was also the consequence of the military past of most of these authors.³² According to Mario Appellius, the Chinese

30 “... China is definitely not prone to communism because of the characteristics of its economy and the mentality of its people” (Suster 1928, 51).

31 “[They] destroy the factories and government buildings administered by European, American or Japanese delegations. They break in to banks and wealthy people’s houses, [in order to] get all valuables ...” (Cipolla 1927, 138).

32 As a young man, Arnaldo Cipolla volunteered for military service in Africa. Giovanni Comisso fought in World War I and joined D’Annunzio in Fiume. Cesco Tomaselli volunteered in World War I in the *Alpini* corps, obtaining a bronze and a silver medal of honor. Raffaele Calzini was a lieutenant in World War I. Mario Appellius was the son of a military officer. And all of them except Roberto Suster

revolution would not be worth noticing, if it were not for those odd aspects of the Chinese wars that the author described as “tipici del paese e della razza” (1933, 220).³³ In his view, Chinese wars consisted of victories without defeats or battles, as they were incredibly slow and simply faded away after culminating in paralysis (222). Chinese generals were described as totally different from fascist generals, who were exalted as patriotic, self-sacrificing, glorious, valiant men (235). Their Chinese counterparts, in contrast, were cunning, tricky, unprincipled profiteers (228), and sophisticated feminine figures with parasols, bracelets, and fans (223–224):

La mano cadaverica agitava un piccolo ventaglio. Il polso aveva un braccialetto. Dinanzi al comandante del corpo d'armata di Ou-Ciang [Ou Jiang] c'era un tavolino di lacca gialla con un vasetto minuscolo – un gingillo – e dentro un fiore, uno solo. Un fiore e un ventaglio erano le armi del conquistatore. (Appelius 1933, 231)³⁴

Arnaldo Cipolla also ridiculed Chinese generals and their war strategies, comically asserting that he had witnessed a conflict between Chiang Kai-shek and Feng Yuxiang that ended by the arrival of rain, and caused the return of all Chinese soldiers to civilian life (1931, 169). Similarly, in the years immediately following the Chinese Communist troops' strategic retreat covering around 6,000 km in order to avoid the Guomindang's army – the Long March – Raffaele Calzini described the Chinese soldiers as “maschere gialle” (yellow masks), and as marching corpses “miserabili nel contrasto tra le divise e le armi europee e lo loro sagome asiatiche” (1937, 179–180).³⁵

Along with the negative diversification of China as the Other, as exemplified above, the travel narratives of Italian journalists and writers

were also war reporters either during the Spanish Civil War or during the military campaigns in Libya and Ethiopia.

33 “... the typical expression of the Chinese race and country” (Appelius 1933, 219).

34 “His deathly pale hand was waving a small fan. He wore a bracelet. In front of him – the general of Ou Jiang's army – there was a small, yellow-lacquered table with a tiny flowerpot, a knickknack containing only one flower. The conqueror's weapons: a flower and a fan” (Appelius 1933, 231).

35 “[They] are miserable when their Asian outlines are compared with European uniforms and weaponry” (Calzini 1937, 180).

reporting from China portrayed the positive identification of the Self – fascist Italy – in their representation of China. Italian journalist and writer intellectuals traveling to China during the Fascist Ventennio dedicated particular attention to the celebration of *Italianità* and Italy’s glorious past. Furthermore, they praised both some great historical figures such as Marco Polo and Christopher Columbus, and the Italian tradesmen, missionaries, and diplomats living in China in those years (De Giorgi 2010a, 578–579). When touring the Buddhist Hualin temple in Canton, at the time known as the Temple of the Five Hundred Genii, Appelius identified Marco Polo as a statue of a Buddha that seemed “più magro degli altri e più virile, col caratteristico abbigliamento italico del XVI secolo,” and which he considered a “Buddha d’Occidente” (Western Buddha), and an homage to the “potenti razze dell’Ovest” (1933, 130).³⁶ Appelius’s discovery culminated in nostalgic praise for the motherland: “Com’è bella la voce della patria quando parla al cuore dei figli lontani” (131).³⁷ Visibly, the profuse celebration of Marco Polo as the archetype of *Italianità* served well to glorify the greatness of Italian civilization, which Appelius described as the cradle of the Roman Empire and of Catholic religion, and the birthplace of the best explorers, artists and scientists (132). At the same time, Appelius described Marco Polo as Italy’s greatest ambassador, representing the mightiness of the Italian race in China and in the world (139), and therefore the perfect example of Italy’s supposed precursory and primary role in the mediation of the East with the West.

The use of Italian historical characters, and in particular of Marco Polo, as well as of Italian migrants in China for propaganda is also evident in the majority of the travel narratives on China: “Negli italiani che emigrarono, e contribuirono come pochissimi alla civilizzazione del mondo c’è sempre

36 “... thinner and manlier [sculpture], dressed according to the fashion of a sixteenth-century Italian man,” “... a Western Buddha” and “... the powerful races of the West” (Appelius 1933, 130). It is worth noting that Marco Polo traveled in China during the last three decades of the thirteenth century; therefore, either the Chinese characterization of the Italian merchant is anachronistic or, as is more likely, the author’s reference is inaccurate.

37 “How beautiful is the motherland’s voice, when singing to the hearts of her faraway sons!” (Appelius 1933, 131).

due terzi di spirito di Marco Polo e un terzo di Cristoforo Colombo” (Calzini 1937, 215).³⁸ As De Giorgi argues, the description of the stories of common Italian migrants in China serves mainly to emphasize the exceptional quality of Italian civilization and Italian people over the other Western (British, American, and French) migrants, especially because of the lack of a consolidated Italian governmental infrastructure in China (2010a, 579). Consequently, narratives such as Appelius’s lengthy interviews with a Cossack-looking Roman fur trapper, Matteo Ponti, and a Chinese-looking Neapolitan trader, Catiello Scognamiglio, serve to praise Mussolini’s leadership and propagandize the righteousness of Italy’s ambitions:

Se i mille e mille Matteo Ponti e Don Catiello ... non avessero avuto in fondo alla loro personalità italiana le doti eccezionali della razza – tenacia, sobrietà, potere d’adattamento, versatilità, resistenza fisica, spirito d’iniziativa, capacità magnifiche di lavoro – l’Italia avrebbe avuto per il mondo milioni e milioni di paria pezzenti ... / Solamente oggi l’emigrante è entrato ufficialmente nella vita politica e sociale dell’Italia. Dell’Italia fascista. Dell’Italia imperiale ... / Quando l’Italia chiede all’Europa il suo posto al sole, nell’oltre mare che spetta alle razze forti e prolifiche, l’Italia non esprime una ambizione. Rivendica semplicemente una giustizia. (1933, 258–259)³⁹

Another key point about the fascist characterization of China is the exaltation of the Christian religion, regarded as a postulate of fascist ideology, through the glorification of the Christian missions in China and a few missionary figures, and at times introducing their political views on fascism. Similar to the celebration of Italian historical characters and Italian migrants in China, the travel narratives discussed here place emphasis on

38 “There are always two-thirds of the spirit of Marco Polo and one-third of Christopher Columbus in the Italians that migrated and contributed like few others to the world’s civilisation” (Calzini 1937, 215).

39 “If the thousands and thousands of Matteo Pontis and Don Catiellos did not have the exceptional qualities of the [Italian] race in their personality, such as tenacity, sobriety, ability to adapt, versatility, physical endurance, enterprising spirit and extraordinary working skills, then Italy would only have had millions of derelict pariahs in the world ... / Only recently has the migrant become part of the political and social life of Italy. Of fascist Italy. Of Imperial Italy ... / When Italy asks Europe for its own place in the sun, in the prolific, strong nations’ sea, then Italy is not expressing its ambition. Italy is simply asking for justice” (Appelius 1933, 258–259).

the missionary activities of Jesuits, Franciscans, Salesians, and Canossians, in order to praise *Italianità*. On one hand, these narratives affirm Italy's central role in the mediation between China and the West thanks to the Italian ingenuity of great missionaries, such as the fourteenth-century Franciscan missionary Odoric of Pordenone and the sixteenth-century Italian Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Italian journalists and writers reporting from China underscored the exceptional quality of the Italian friars living in China in these years. The Italian friars were therefore praised for keeping Italian excellence alive in the sciences and humanities, spreading the Catholic religion among the Chinese and, of course, educating the Chinese in fascist ideology. Such an attitude is clear in the interview by Appelius with the Salesian Father Cucchiara, who proclaimed himself an enthusiast of the new Italy by being fascist, Roman and Catholic (Appelius 1933, 293), and even boasted that Mussolini, in his early years, was a student in a Salesian school in Faenza (295). In Appelius's narratives, the Salesian friar is described as an "apostolo di una grande idea romana, campione di una grande razza romana" (296–297).⁴¹ Appelius directly connected the evangelical mission in China with fascist Italy's international policies, praising Mussolini for funding the Italian Catholic missions abroad and thus restoring the Italian missionaries' leadership role in spreading Catholicism within China over centuries (295). He concluded by emphasizing the superiority of the Italian missionaries over the missionaries from other nations – particularly France and the United States – as well as the superiority of Roman imperialism against British imperialism (300–301), and, most importantly, the exclusive relationship between fascist Italy, *Italianità*, Imperial Rome and Catholicism, symbolizing the greatness of Western civilization:

Ovunque è una croce cattolica, là è sempre lo spirito di Roma che avanza o che resiste. Dove, come nelle missioni salesiane, il tricolore d'Italia aleggia intorno alla Croce di Cristo, il binomio Italia-Cattolicesimo è perfetto in tutto il suo storico

40 See Calzini (1937, 134) and Cipolla (1931, 226–230).

41 "... an apostle of a great Roman idea, a champion of the great Roman race," and "an anonymous soldier of the Western civilization, which is Roman and Catholic" (Appelius 1933, 296–297).

splendore. Nessun altro emblema simboleggia con pari efficacia la grandezza della Civiltà Occidentale. (Appelius 1933, 301)⁴²

Similarly, Calzini praised the industriousness of the missionaries, for being capable of building factories, churches, schools, orphanages and cinemas, and especially, for helping the Chinese to achieve *progresso*, and overcome the Chinese natural disposition to inactivity (1937, 144). In reference to a Salesian industrial school in Shanghai, the author even described the coexistence of the Chinese and Italian cultures as a “miracolo d’ogni giorno” (daily miracle) (146):

I bambini dell’istituto mi hanno accolto all’italiana, col canto di “Giovinezza,” ma poi hanno voluto festeggiarmi alla cinese. Le aule scolastiche si sono riempite di spari e lampi e, subito dopo, di fumo acre dentro il quale un nuvolo di cinesini rapati facevano, secondo l’ispirazione, il saluto romano o le capriole. (Calzini 1937, 146)⁴³

The narratives focusing on the missionaries in China also often represent the political standpoint of their authors; such an attitude is particularly prominent in discussions on the rights of patronage of the Catholic missions, managed by France until the end of the 1920s, and then granted to Italy by the Vatican as a result of the Lateran Treaty (February 11, 1929).⁴⁴ Cipolla, when introducing the attempts to reform the methods of Catholic

42 “Wherever there is a Catholic crucifix, there is always Rome’s spirit advancing or resisting. Wherever the Italian tricolour hovers over Christ’s crucifix, like in the Salesian missions, there the Italy-Catholicism binomial is perfect in its historical splendour. No other emblem can symbolize the greatness of Western civilization with the same efficacy” (Appelius 1933, 301).

43 “In the institute, children welcomed me in the Italian way – singing ‘Giovinezza,’ but then they also cheered me in the Chinese way. The classrooms were filled with thunder and lightning, and with an acrid smoke right after. Among the fumes a cloud of small Chinese with shaved heads performed either the Roman salute or somersaults at will” (Calzini 1937, 146).

44 Previously the patronage of Catholic missions was exerted by France as a result of the Beijing Treaty (October 25, 1860) ensuring the protection of the Catholic missions in China and their right to own land. See Fatica (2014, 96–98). Fatica also specifies that after the proclamation of the Italian Empire of Africa in 1936 (May 9), Father Maraviglia Crivelli set the new goals of the Catholic missions in China

evangelization in China, emphasized that “La Francia rappresenta in Cina la depositaria del più rigido conservatorismo in fatto di privilegi, di occupazioni territoriali, di capitolazioni, di protezione dei suoi soggetti, infine in difesa dei vecchi trattati” (1931, 230).⁴⁵ Similarly, Cipolla described the activities of the Italian Catholic missions as disinterested acts of Christian compassion, welcomed by the Chinese because of their disinterest in Chinese nationalistic issues. In contrast, the activities of the American Protestant missions in China, whose latter development is, according to Cipolla, “Yankee Methodism” (237), are described as a political tool for gaining influence over the Chinese, and therefore were disliked by the Chinese (224–243). Finally, Cipolla also praised the interest in China of Pope Pius XI (148, 225), who was a supporter of the fascist regime (Fatica 2014, 97).

The process of differentiation of fascist Italy from China was strengthened by the characterization of other Eastern Asian countries in relation to both China and fascist Italy, particularly Japan and Korea. The Japanese Empire was portrayed as a model of authoritarian modernity antithetical to France and England in the belief that modernity required new forms of authoritarianism (Gentile 2003, 6). The evolution of the diplomatic and cultural ties between fascist Italy and the Japanese Empire contributed greatly to the increase in interest in the latter that culminated in the 1930s. Korea, on the other hand, stood as an example of Asian civilization in decline because of the long-lasting sociopolitical, religious, cultural and artistic influence of Chinese civilization on the country and its people. In addition, Korea and the Manchurian region, both under control of the Japanese Empire during the 1930s, stood out as proof of the civilizing mission of the Japanese Empire in Asia. The narrativization of Korea as irreconcilably different from Fascist Italy and Japan as affine to the *Regno* resonated with analogous fascist discursive frameworks to those characterizing the portrayal of China. Such rhetoric also relied on *Italianità*, was

as anti-communist propaganda, pro-fascist-Italy propaganda, and diffusion of the Italian language.

45 “In China, France is the depositary of the most rigid conservatism concerning the privileges, land occupation, capitulations and protection of French subjects, and safeguarding of the old treaties” (Cipolla, 230).

functional to the consolidation of a fascist sense of national identity and promoted Italy's ambition to be recognized among the most powerful imperial nations in the world.⁴⁶

The Travel Narratives of Luciano Magrini: A Forgotten Anti-Fascist

Ostracized by the fascist government because of his uncompromising political and cultural activity, the journalist and politician Luciano Magrini is still a marginal character in current academic studies on both fascism and twentieth-century Sino-Italian diplomatic and cultural relationships. However, for a better understanding of the discursive production of information on Republican China in fascist Italy, the significance of Magrini's works cannot be underrated. The travel narratives of Magrini in the 1920s provided the Italian readership with non-propagandist data on the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural background of early and mid-twentieth-century China. Like the other Italian journalists and writers who visited the country in these years, Magrini was interested in the possibility of Italy constituting and consolidating a network of commercial and economic relations in East Asia, as he believed in the future prosperity of the country and the centrality of Chinese industry for foreign markets (Magrini 1933, 120–124). In his travels to China in 1924, 1925, and 1926, Magrini described the activities in China of the foreign diplomatic and economic establishments, as well as the missionary presence and participation in twentieth-century Chinese society. Along with that, Magrini analyzed in detail the key historical events occurring in China in the early and mid-1920s, discussing the phenomena of regional militarism and civil wars occurring during the Warlord Era (1916–1928). Magrini's portrait of China in the 1920s is, however, profoundly different from the

46 For more information on the process of narrativization of China, Japan, and Korea during the Fascist Ventennio, see Linetto Basilone "Through East Asia to the Sound of *Giovinazza*: Fascist Travel Literature on China, Korea and Japan" (2019a).

country and its people as described by other Italian journalists and writers during the Fascist Ventennio. The origin of such difference can be located in both the political orientation of the author and his disposition toward Chinese culture and the Chinese people.

As a republican, Magrini was greatly influenced by the political thought of the nineteenth-century Italian politician, journalist, and activist Giuseppe Mazzini. Magrini was devoted to the sociocultural analysis of the Italian lower classes. He gave particular attention to the Italian labor force, the causes of its unemployment, and its consequent migration to the American continent, which he described in a report on Italian migration to Brazil.⁴⁷ As a war reporter and foreign correspondent, Magrini was interested in global historical events symbolizing social change, democratization, and the political emancipation of the oppressed. On the occasion of the First Balkan War (1912–1913), Magrini narrated the conflict as a reporter for the Italian newspaper *Il Secolo*, and he also joined the fight for Greece's freedom. Magrini traveled to India to report on the quest for Indian independence led by the activist Mohandas K. Gandhi. In the same years, he reported from Morocco to narrate the war of independence of the Berber tribes on the Rif mountains from the Spanish colonial powers. During the Fascist Ventennio, Magrini's political orientation also greatly influenced his profession as a journalist. Because he felt that his liberal and republican ideas conflicted with the social and historical developments of Italian society in the 1920s, Magrini resigned from his position as a journalist for *Il Secolo* and moved to *Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa*. Following the increasing interference of the fascist government in the Italian publishing press, Magrini left the journal in 1927 and put his profession on hold until the mid-1940s. His uncompromisingly anti-fascist views and activism, as well as his connection to anti-fascist organizations, caused Magrini to be

47 See Luciano Magrini, *In Brasile*. Torino: Piero Gobetti Editore, 1926. On Magrini and Italian migration to Brazil, see Chiara Vangelista, "1924. Luciano Magrini e l'emigrazione italiana in Brasile" in *Eunomia* 2 (2016): 215–230.

monitored by the regime. For the same reasons, he was briefly imprisoned in the 1930s.⁴⁸

The overall portrait of China in Magrini's travel narratives is that of a decaying society with a millennial history of greatness and prosperity, whose symbol of such decay was the decadence and disarray of Beijing (Magrini 1925, 9–11). On one hand, because the author was deeply interested in the political and social turmoil that had been raging in China since the end of the Qing dynasty (1912), he described the regional militarism in those years, the corruption of the Chinese warlords and the widespread brigandage and piracy affecting both Chinese people and foreigners traveling around the country. On the other hand, Magrini saw the development of nationalist movements, in particular the Nationalist Revolution promoted by the Chinese intellectual Sun Yatsen. He also stated that the social, political, and economic crisis raging in the 1920s in China was not only not as deep as imagined (22) but the crisis itself was a catalyst for the social and political transformation of Chinese society (24, 76). Magrini saw the development of economic and industrial infrastructures by Chinese investors aiming to transform the artisanal industry into a modern industrial industry (117–118). He even forecasted the possibility of Chinese commodities conquering foreign markets, in part due to the abundance of natural resources and the competitiveness of the manpower (120–122).

Because Magrini was exceptionally skeptical about the way China was being described by foreigners living in China in those years, as well as about much of the information on China spread by Western journals, he voiced his dissatisfaction about the image of China presented during the early and mid-1920s to the Italian readership. As a result, Magrini consequently argued that the contradictory data disseminated about China by foreign residents depended on the residents' own political inclinations and feelings about China and Chinese culture (71). Magrini's different take on the political, economic, and social situations in mid-1920s China from that of the narrativizations of Italian journalists in line with the fascist regime

48 For more information on the biography and works of Luciano Magrini, see Riccardo Bauer, Gaetano De Martino and Edoardo Frigé, eds., *Luciano Magrini. Il pensiero e l'opera*. Milan: Tipografia Corbella, 1959.

who traveled to China in the same year is evident in the opening words of *In Cina e in Giappone*:

La laboriosa crisi cinese, che taluni, soffermandosi alla superficie della guerra civile e del caos amministrativo, interpretano come una crisi di decadenza e di dissolvimento, appare invece, a più acuti osservatori, che spingono le loro indagini sotto la scorza delle cose, come la crisi di rinnovamento e di trasformazione – crisi ricca di ancor latenti succhi ricostruttivi – che si svolge, col concorso preponderante della scuola e nel fervore della conquista della coscienza nazionale, nel seno di una civiltà millenaria. (1927, 9)⁴⁹

The political interference in both the data available and the subsequent narrativization of China was clear to the author in the contradicting news about the Nationalist Revolution, and the city of Canton (Magrini 1927, 15). As discussed earlier in this chapter, Appellius, in the same years, referred to Canton as a grotesque carnival whose inhabitants were sub-human, zoomorphic figures, and as a symbol of the decline of Chinese civilization. In contrast, in the portrait of the Chinese city by Magrini, Canton was described as the core of the social and political transformation of the country, the cradle of the Nationalist Revolution, and the headquarters of the Nationalist army led by Sun Yatsen (who died of lung cancer on March 12, 1925) and then by Chang Kai-shek. More importantly, Magrini aptly stated that Canton in those years was one of the most progressive Chinese cities, and the center of the skillful and refined local craft industry, although it was densely populated, chaotic, and polluted (1925, 161–162).

The difference in Magrini's political orientation from that of Appellius and Suster also emerges in his laudatory yet balanced synthesis of the biography of the republican leader Sun Yatsen – whom Magrini knew personally – and of his primary role in the Chinese political background of

49 “Some observers have interpreted the productiveness of the Chinese crisis as a crisis of decadence and decay under the light of a superficial understanding of the civil war and administrative chaos raging in China. To sharper observers who dig deep in their investigations, the Chinese crisis is, on the contrary, a crisis of renewal and transformation. A crisis that is happening at the heart of a millenary civilization through the modernization of the schooling system and the achievement of a national consciousness” (Magrini 1927, 9).

early twentieth-century China (1925, 169–173).⁵⁰ According to Magrini, the Nationalist Revolution led by Sun Yatsen deserved a place in history among the great revolutions, as it joined together the need for deep social, scholastic, economic, and industrial reforms following the example of the Japanese Empire, and the knowledge and experience of the historical political development of the European states (185). However, Magrini also emphasized the ineffectiveness of the strategies of the Chinese warlords, in terms of both internal and international policies, and the disinterest of the Chinese masses in the belligerent activities of the warlord (118).⁵¹ Magrini questioned the incapacity of the Chinese warlords to cope with and fully understand the process of renovation that the country was going through (146).

When describing Canton and the Nationalist Revolution to the Italian readership, Magrini also expressed his disappointment about the anti-Soviet propaganda enmeshed in the narrativization of China and particularly of Canton and the Nationalist party in those years. Magrini praised the political interference of the Soviet Union in China, as well as the economic, technological, and military assistance of the Soviet Union to the Nationalist Party, which he rather optimistically considered disinterested assistance and alliance (1927, 15–17). And he argued that the influence and efficacy of Soviet communist propaganda in China was to be found, on one hand, in the poor diplomatic strategies of the European powers and the noxious power struggles of the Chinese warlords and, on the other, in the need for peace and independence of the Chinese masses (56).

50 According to the Italian politician Edoardo Frigé, Magrini was directly involved in the Chinese anti-colonialist turmoil occurring in Canton in 1924–1925. Magrini personally assisted and supported Sun Yatsen on the occasion of the naval siege of Canton by the international military fleet. As a result, Magrini paraded in the streets of Canton side by side with the Chinese leader. See Bauer, De Martino, and Frigé (1959, 20–21).

It is also interesting to notice that Magrini's portrayal of Sun Yatsen is significantly different than Renato Simoni's characterization of the Chinese statesman introduced in the previous chapter.

51 See Magrini (1927, 104–121).

Similarly to other Italian journalists reporting from China, Magrini was critical of the colonial policies of the European nations actively involved in China. However, his aim was not to propagandize the ambitions of the fascist government to play a major diplomatic role in Asia. Magrini criticized the European nations (England, France, and Germany) and Japan, for being exclusively concerned about their own wealth and prestige, as well as for humiliating the Chinese people, instead of assisting China to develop into a modern society (17). Consequently, the author also gave voice to the dissatisfaction of some Chinese intellectuals and academics regarding the colonialist policies enacted by the European powers and Japan. He pointed out both the direct participation of those countries in activities destabilizing Chinese society, such as opium smuggling, banditry, and regionalist conflicts, and the consequent resentment of the Chinese people (Magrini 1927, 68–69). Concerning the colonial ambitions of the Japanese Empire in China, Magrini aptly remarked that the Japanese had already acquired a primary role in China in comparison with the Western powers. And he consequently warned that owing to the strong Japanese presence in Manchuria, the region was a *de facto* Japanese territory (301–303). Magrini also contextualized the Japanese colonial strategy as a “milder” approach after the failure of the direct approach of the “Twenty-One Demands” (295–297), which were presented in 1915 by the Japanese prime minister Okuma Shigenobu to the Chinese president Yuan Shikai in order to increase the Japanese territorial presence and economic and political influence in China. For the same reasons, in contrast with the anti-American propaganda disseminated during the Fascist Ventennio, Magrini praised the diplomatic and commercial strategies of the United States in China, as well as the evangelical and philanthropic activities of the American Protestant missionaries (1925, 24, 189–191).

The author’s criticisms of fascist Italy’s ambitions to play a central role in the handling of global policies in Asia and his call for better commercial strategies emerge in his description of the Italian concession in Tianjin as well. After joining the Eight-Nation Alliance against the Boxer Uprising in 1901, Italy had been granted the Tianjin concession, together with the authorization to maintain an Italian military garrison in the Beijing Legation Quarter and to use the international quarters in Shanghai and Xiamen.

These colonial privileges, while symbolically significant for the acquisition of national and international prestige, were not implemented even by the fascist government into a systematic structure for the development of Italian financial and commercial expansion into China. The Tianjin concession remained populated mainly by Chinese citizens – 4,025 Chinese citizens, 62 Italians, and 42 from other nationalities in 1922, and 6,500 Chinese citizens and 373 foreigners in 1937 – and served principally to diffuse the image of Italy as a “benign colonial” nation, as well as “a stage for the display of *Italianità* and as a model of modernity and hygiene” (Marinelli 2007, 139) through its Italian-inspired urban architecture.⁵² While emphasizing the commercial importance of the port of Tianjin and the architectural quality of the Italian concession, Magrini was dissatisfied with the management of the Italian concession, as well as with the inefficiency of Italian commercial initiatives in the country. Magrini pointed out that the concession contained the best hospital in Tianjin (50) but no Italian stores or commercial companies (51), or Italian schools (53), and he concluded that the Italian concession was most suitable for “villeggiatura” (relaxation) rather than for commercial purposes (53). He also pointed out that the 80 percent of the land of the Italian concession was, in fact, owned by Chinese people, making the Italian concession a place for the relaxation of wealthy Chinese (51).

When describing the Italian diplomatic, commercial, religious, and military presence in China in the 1920s, Magrini gave a compassionate account of the Italian presence in China, praising the initiatives and activities that were worthy of description, and generally calling for a more cohesive and better structured organization of the Italian commercial and cultural activities. Further on, Magrini explicitly dismissed the triumphalist and nationalist praises of *Italianità* by other Italian travel writers and

52 See Marinelli (2007, 124–125), Ferretti (1986, 779–819) and Gnoli (1994, 223–229). Concerning the discursive use of Tianjin as a space for the affirmation of fascist ideology and *Italianità*, as well as for the projection of the myth of the greatness of fascist Italy’s colonial empire, see also Marinelli, “Projecting Italianità on the Chinese Space: The Construction of the ‘Aristocratic’ Concession in Tanjing (1901–1947),” 2014, 1–25; and Marinelli, “Making Concessions in Tianjin: Heterotopia and Italian Colonialism in Mainland China,” 2009, 399–425.

their praising of the contemporary Italian tradesmen, missionaries, and diplomats, and historical figures such as the merchants Marco Polo and Christopher Columbus. Magrini ironically refuted Appellius's enthusiasm for the presence of a statue of Marco Polo among the 500 statues of persons believed to have attained nirvana, as well as the supposed veneration for Marco Polo by the Chinese people:

Sono andato alla ricerca di Marco Polo nel celebrato tempio buddista dei cinquecento geni; ho chiesto informazioni all'Università – a cominciare dal rettore – ed alla chiesa cattolica; devo melanconicamente deludere l'attesa dei lettori: una statua di Marco Polo, nei templi dei cinquecento geni che sorgono a Canton, ad Hang-ciao [Hangzhou] ed a Pechino, non è mai esistita! (Magrini 1927, 88)⁵³

In his reportage on the status of the Christian missionary activities in 1920s China, Magrini argued that, unlike the American Protestant missionaries, Catholic missionaries did not contribute to the social and cultural renewal of the country (266–267). In fact, according to the author, the Catholic evangelization in China was far from being in peaceful coexistence with the cultural, social, and religious behavior of the Chinese people that was described by Raffaele Calzini. Consequently, Magrini argued that the intransigence of some missionaries toward the cults and traditions already present in Chinese culture, and particularly against Confucianism, was a valid deterrent for the Catholic evangelization of the country (259). More importantly, Magrini aptly pointed out that the Catholic evangelization in China in the early twentieth century was felt by the Chinese as an instrument of Western political interference in Chinese society, rather than a purely spiritual doctrine (259).

Magrini also dismissed the claims from his fellow journalists that the Chinese people had xenophobic feelings toward Western visitors; in fact, he praised the tolerance and courtesy of the Chinese people (1925, 30; 1927, 50). In contrast to the dominant view of the Chinese people as

53 “I looked for Marco Polo in the famous Buddhist temple of the five hundred genii. I asked for information at the university, starting with the chancellor. I asked the Catholic Church. I regretfully have to frustrate the expectations of my readers. There has never been a statue of Marco Polo in the Buddhist temples of the five hundred genii in Canton, Hangzhou and Beijing!” (Magrini 1927, 88).

servile, gutless, dim-witted, greedy and, especially, racially inferior to the European peoples, Magrini was strongly opposed to the discrimination of Chinese on racial grounds, which he believed was among the causes of the hostility toward and misunderstanding of the Chinese country, its culture, and its future possibilities (1927, 143). Magrini praised the Chinese people, whom he admired for their physical and moral strength and endurance (1925, 23). Magrini also praised the attributes of the Chinese wage workers for their productivity, skillfulness, and smartness, attributes that Magrini considered superior to those of their Japanese and German counterparts (120–122). He praised the diligence of Chinese students as well as their capacity for memorization, also asserting that their lack of reasoning and critical thinking ability was the result of the traditional schooling system rather than racial deficiencies (192).

Magrini was sympathetic to the subordinate position of women in Chinese society and raised the social transformation of Chinese women as a symbol of the social renovation of Chinese society in the 1920s. In “*Emancipazione della donna*” (Magrini 1927, 228–248), the author described the marginal role of, and absence of consideration for, Chinese women in traditional Chinese society. Magrini criticized the widespread practice of arranged marriages without the consent of the bride, the noxious custom of foot binding, and the practice of abandoning new girls in the fields, as well as the practice of suicide among married Chinese women as their sole method of dissent. On the other hand, Magrini praised the positive impact that the Western-inspired social and scholastic reforms had on the country, as well as the activity of American missionaries in promoting the emancipation of Chinese women (343):

Le donne [cinesi] vanno emancipandosi dalla servitù maschile, si sono sciolte, in gran numero, le bende che comprimevano i piedi deformati, sono entrate nelle scuole superiori, partecipano al movimento intellettuale e politico del paese, frequentano le Università indigene ed estere ... (1927, 231)⁵⁴

54 “[Chinese] women are emancipating themselves from their role of servitude to men. They have untied the bindings compressing their deformed feet. They have gained access to high schools. They are participating in the intellectual and political renovation of the country. They are attending university in the country and abroad ...” (Magrini 1927, 231).

As a genuine admirer of Chinese cultural, artistic, and philosophical productions, Magrini showed deep interest in Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, the three social religions that have shaped Chinese society for millennia. Magrini aptly argued that Confucianism was a “simbolo della cultura, del sentimento nazionale e dalla continuità storica della Cina” (175),⁵⁵ but also that the Confucian emphasis on respect for social hierarchies in Chinese society and families may have inhibited the instances of individual freedom, progress, and modernization in Chinese society (181). Concerning Taoism and Chinese Buddhism, Magrini argued that the influence of those social religions and their monks in twentieth-century Chinese society was declining (226–227). Nonetheless, Magrini was fascinated by the cultural, philosophical, and historical significance of the three philosophical doctrines and their influence on Chinese art. On the occasion of a trip to the Longmen Grottoes, Magrini praised the artistic quality of the Buddhist statuary carved in stone that characterized the site, and he compared the artistic quality, refinement, and vision to those of both Ancient Greece and the Italian Renaissance (1925, 87–88).

Magrini’s passionate interest in Chinese culture developed over the decades. In the later years of his life, Magrini founded the cultural organization Istituto Culturale Italo-Cinese (Italian-Chinese Cultural Institute) in 1954, which he also directed until his death in 1957. In the same years, Magrini published a monographic work on Chinese Buddhism (*Il Buddismo in Cina*, 1956) and promoted the publication of the Taoist classic *Daodejing* (*Tao-te-king*, 1956), as well as the Confucian classic *Mengzi* (*Il libro di Mencio*, 1959), by the Istituto Culturale Italo-Cinese.⁵⁶ In spite of his relevance as an anti-fascist intellectual, a politician and a member of the Assemblea Costituente della Repubblica Italiana (Italian Constituent

55 “... symbol of the culture, sense of nationhood and historical continuity of China” (Magrini 1927, 175).

56 In the 1950s and 1960s, Magrini’s Istituto Culturale Italo-Cinese and the Centro per lo sviluppo delle relazioni economiche e culturali con la Cina (Center for the development of economic and cultural relations with China) founded by Ferruccio Parri were the main institutions for the development of economic and cultural relations between Italy and the PRC, as well as the study of Chinese culture, politics, history, philosophy and art. See Samarani and De Giorgi (2011, 107).

Assembly), as well as a sinologist, Luciano Magrini is a lost voice in the twentieth century.

Conclusion

Praise of the fascist ideology, exaltation of the Italian culture and race, promotion of the Italian economic expansion in China and denigration of ideals and policies reputed to be antagonistic to fascism were the dominant characteristics of Italian travel writing on China in those years. Those discursive frameworks were expressed through the negative representation of China, Chinese people and Chinese culture and society as part of the self-identification process of fascist Italian authors defining China as Italy's counter-type and causing the supposed racial and cultural superiority of the Italian people to stand out. The narrativization of China as a distant and hostile alterity, populated by a mob of xenophobic, subhuman, and zoomorphic individuals, was structured by positional superiority and generally implied the silence of the Chinese counterpart and served to create a sense of spatial and cultural distance from fascist Italy, along with a sense of antipathy for it in the Italian readership.

The emphasis on difference and Chinese civilization's lack of "modernity" and "normality" relied on a Euro-centric conceptualization of the world based on Western criteria of development, as argued by Dirlik (1996). At the same, such rhetoric was structured on specifically fascist discursive frameworks. The praise of patriotic fervor, war, and violence, as well as modernization and technological development, along with the celebration of the arguably global exceptionality of Italy, its people and civilization, all converge in the consolidation of a fascist sense of *Italianità* and its exalted sense of belonging. These narratives, therefore, reinforce the idea that the narrativization of China by those Italian journalists and writers was not only spiteful and unreliable but also discursive and textual at once, since fascist ideology was the determinant factor influencing the process of acquisition and narration of the data on China, Chinese people and Chinese culture, history, and politics.

Luciano Magrini's depiction of China, on the contrary, resonated with his liberal, republican views as well as his positive attitude toward the country and people, and admiration for the Chinese culture, art, and philosophy. The travel narratives by Luciano Magrini are characterized by his interest for the development of Chinese nationalist movements, the Chinese attempts for cultural, economic, and industrial transformation, as well as for the emancipation of the Chinese women. By denying the fascist interpretation of the country, Magrini's travel narratives on China expressed a desire for political commitment, in which the textual aspect supported precisely his anti-fascist views.

In the years following the Fascist Ventennio and the end of World War II, the fascist representation of China was gradually replaced by a new and totally opposite portrayal of the country, in which China was mainly regarded as a proximate, progressive, and culturally similar nation. Such a discursive practice, strongly connected to, even tailored on, fascist representation, implied a different kind of propaganda, operated by the left intelligentsia that had been tempered by the years of the Italian resistance.

Photographs

This gallery provides a set of photographs from the early 1908 to the mid-1980s. The photographs are organized in five sections in accordance with the chronological paradigms discussed in this book. The selected pictures were included in the original editions of the travel narratives that I have examined. They serve as a visual counterpart for each specific process of narrativization of China. I regard the pictures as symbolic of the positionality of the Italian narrators as well as of the relative discourses on China structuring each chronological paradigm. The photographs are complemented by the translations into English of their original captions.

Section I



Figure 1. “La partenza da Pechino” (“Departure from Beijing”) – Luigi Barzini Sr. (1908) – Public domain image.



Figure 2. “La Cina e il nostro pubblico” (“China and our audience”) – Luigi Barzini Sr. (1908) – Public domain image.



Figure 3. “Il mandarino governatore cinese della Mongolia e Luigi Barzini durante la visita ufficiale” (“Mongolia’s Chinese Mandarin Governor and Luigi Barzini during an official visit”) – Luigi Barzini Sr. (1908) – Public domain image.



Figure 4. “L’Itala scortata dai marinai italiani, sotto alle mura di Cha-tau-chung” (“Itala escorted by Italian navy soldiers, next to the Chadaocheng wall”) – Luigi Barzini Sr. (1908) – Public domain image.

Section II



Figure 5. “Cionking – portatori che salgono alla città” (“Coolies climbing up to the city of Chongqing”) – Mario Appelius (1935) – Public domain image.



Figure 6. “L'uomo cavallo e il suo veicolo” (“The Man-horse and his vehicle”) – Mario Appellius (1935) – Public domain image.



Figure 7. “Contadino mancese col suo aratro primitivo” (“Manchu farmer and his primitive plough”) – Mario Appellius (1935) – Public domain image.



Figure 8. “Uno dei tanti fradici villaggi sul Fiume Azzurro” (“One among the many soggy villages on the Yangze River”) – Mario Appelius (1935) – Public domain image.



Figure 9. “Soldati di Ciang-Kai-Shek durante la campagna contro i Rossi” (“Chang Kai-shek’s soldiers fighting against the ‘reds’ [communists troops]”) – Mario Appelius (1935) – Public domain image.

Section III



Figure 10. “Pechino, festa nazionale del 1° ottobre: la sfilata davanti alla Porta della Pace” (“Beijing, National Day of the People’s Republic of China, October 1st. The parade at the Gate of Heavenly Peace [Tiananmen Square]”) – *La Cina d’Oggi* (1956) – Reproduced with permission from *Il Ponte Editore*.



Figure 11. “Sala di ricreazione in una cooperativa agricola” (“Recreation room in an agricultural cooperative”) – *La Cina d'Oggi* (1956) – Reproduced with permission from *Il Ponte Editore*.



Figure 12. “Ora di ricreazione fra i lavoratori di una cooperativa agricola” (“Recreational hour among the workers in an agricultural cooperative”) – *La Cina d’Oggi* (1956) –
Reproduced with permission from *Il Ponte Editore*.



Figure 13. “Il generale d’Armata Ming Hon-yu, ex contadino, analfabeta, intervistato al Comando d’Armata della Shensi da Carlo Bernari” (“Army general Ming Hongyu, former farmer and illiterate. Interviewed by Carlo Bernari at the Shanxi Army Command”) – *La Cina d’Oggi* (1956) – Reproduced with permission from *Il Ponte Editore*.



Figure 14. “Famiglie di capitalisti inneggiano al presidente Mao – 21 gennaio 1956”
 (“Capitalist families praising president Mao Zedong – January 21, 1956”) – *La Cina
d’Oggi* (1956) – Reproduced with permission from *Il Ponte Editore*.



Figure 15. “Pechino, ottobre 1955: il direttore della nostra rivista in visita al Ponte Marco Polo” (“Beijing, October 1955: Our Editor-in-chief visits the Marco Polo Bridge”) – *La Cina d'Oggi* (1956) – Reproduced with permission from *Il Ponte Editore*.

Section IV



Figure 16. “Giovani e ragazze della ‘milizia popolare’ nella Brigata di Tachè” (“Young men and women from the ‘People’s Army’”) – *Turista in Cina* (1974).



Figure 17. “Ragazze di una fabbrica di Canton tengono una riunione di studio sul marciapiede” (“Women in a Canton factory having a study assembly on the sidewalk”) – *Turista in Cina* (1974).



Figure 18. “Operaie di Shanghai all’uscita da una fabbrica” (“Wage-workers leaving their factory in Shanghai”) – *Turista in Cina* (1974).



Figure 19. “Mao Tse-tung fra i contadini. Qui è ritratto durante una visita alla comune ‘Ottobre’ alla periferia di Pechino” (“Mao Zedong among Chinese peasants during a visit to the October commune in the outskirts of Beijing”) – *Turista in Cina* (1974).



Figure 20. “Nella comune Nuova Cina vicino a Canton, Maria Antonietta Macciocchi e Alberto Iacoviello insieme a una famiglia di contadini” (“At the New China commune near Canton, Maria Antonietta Macciocchi and Alberto Iacoviello with a family of farmers”) – *Dalla Cina* (1971).

Section V



Figure 21. “Un angolo della ‘casa del Mandarino’ a Shanghai” (“In a corner of the Mandarin’s house in Shanghai”) – Aldo De Jaco (1983).



Figure 22. “Io, mamma e tu sul laghetto, nei giardini di Canton” (“Me, your mum and you [Io, mamma e tu, Neapolitan song by Riccardo Pazzaglia and Domenico Modugno] at the lake, in the gardens of Canton”) – Aldo De Jaco (1983).



Figure 23. “Pagoda a Suzhou. “Non sembra la Torre di Pisa?” domanda il nostro interprete” (“Pagoda in Suzhou. “Doesn’t it look like the Leaning Tower of Pisa?” asks our interpreter”) – Aldo De Jaco (1983).



Figure 24. “De Jaco e Arbasino sulla Grande Muraglia” (“De Jaco and Arbasino at the Great Wall”) – Aldo De Jaco (1983).

Italian Leftist Intellectuals in the People's Republic of China: A Matter of Spiritual Affinity (1949–1960)

In the decades following the proclamation of the People's Republic of China (1949), an increasing number of prominent politicians, writers, academics, and journalists from the Italian leftist *Intelligentsia* traveled to the country. With the aim of narrating Maoist China to the Italian readership, Velio Spano, Piero Calamandrei, Franco Fortini, Carlo Cassola, Carlo Bernari, Enrico Emanuelli, Giancarlo Vigorelli, Carlo Levi, and others published their travel impressions in journals, essays, reportage, and diaries. As part of the generation of leftist intellectuals that had experienced fascist life in their youth and actively opposed the fascist regime afterwards, they sought to obliterate fascist ideology and aimed to produce a revolutionary counter-culture for Italy's post-World War II social renovation. Their narrations of Maoist China reflected both their political and social engagement and the geopolitical dynamics of the time, along with their experience of the Italian Resistance which they regarded as akin to the Chinese Communist Revolution.

The travel narratives written on Maoist China by Italian intellectuals have been often used as a “spazio discorsivo su cui proiettare preoccupazioni, speranze o riflessioni ancorate più nella realtà italiana che in quella cinese” (De Giorgi 2010b, 206).¹ Most especially, in the 1950s, the success of Maoism in China influenced the dynamics of Italy's internal politics, international policy-making and diplomacy (207). Along with that, the narrativization of the PRC by the Italian leftist intellectuals travelling to China in the 1950s is marked by the often nostalgic comparison between the Chinese

1 “... a discursive space representing [Italy's] own fears and expectations, and a reflection on Italian society rather than Chinese society” (De Giorgi 2010a, 106).

revolutionary experience and the Italian Resistance. This narrativization revolves around the intellectuals' malaise at the failure of the attempts at social renovation which terminated with the electoral defeat of Ferruccio Parri's Partito D'Azione/Action Party and decline of the party in 1946, as well as the non-primary role in the Italian government of the Partito Comunista Italiano/Italian Communist Party (PCI) since the post-World War II period of social and political reorganization in Italy (224). The contrast between the fascist and leftist representations of China exemplified by the comparison between the works of the journalist and writer Cesco Tomaselli and the politician and journalist Velio Spano, and later by those of the writer, journalist, and painter Virgilio Lilli and the doctor and writer Carlo Levi, proves to be a constant and primary aspect in the process of narrativization of China throughout the 1950s rather than a phenomenon specifically localized in 1949. Not only was such a discursive strategy deeply affected by the specific historical events happening in Italy, or in the People's Republic of China, or even globally during the 1950s, but it reshaped itself in direct relation to certain major historical events, such as Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech and the Hungarian Uprising (1956).

This chapter presents a comparative analysis of the travel narratives on the PRC written by Italian intellectuals in the 1950s, and the contextual circumstances that produced, directed, and motivated their travels. It discusses the significance of the political message at the basis of such cultural productions in terms of self-identification and the construction of a new and multifaceted, anti-fascist sense of national identity. The first section introduces the cultural contacts between the PRC and Italian leftist intelligentsia with regards to the diplomatic and political relations between China and Italy since the 1949 and the influence of Cold War geopolitical dynamics on the two countries. This section also emphasizes the importance the Italian Resistance as a revolutionary experience as well as the possibility of a specifically Italian way to socialism in the political agenda if the Italian intellectuals visiting the PRC.

The second section introduces the narrativization of the PRC from the 1949 to the 1956 as the "New China," as part of an anti-fascist, Marxist-inspired discursive rhetoric that emphasized the difference between pre- and post-revolutionary Chinese society. The third section describes how

international and national events such as Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech and Hungarian Uprising (1956) affected the representations of China produced in Italy in after 1956, causing the emergence of the idea Maoism as a "better" alternative to socialism in the Italian imaginary.

While drawing from contemporary academic sources on the topic and this specific time frame of 1949 to 1965 – such as De Giorgi (2010b, 2013, and 2017), Di Nucci (1988), Lombardi (2006, 2010 and 2007), and Polese Remaggi (2010) – I contextualize the relationship between the leftist intellectuals travelling to China, their active participation in the political arena, and as the influence of their ideological frameworks in their positive representation of the Maoist society. Furthermore, I analyze the essential role played by their participation in/resistance to trends in pre-World War II cultural and sociopolitical Italian society, as well as their active and conscious efforts to obliterate fascist ideology in post-World War II Italian society. Finally, I also draw attention to the use of travel literature for propaganda purposes in order to re-orient the Italian readership, and to the discursive, and therefore normative, content of such cultural productions.

Anti-Fascism, Communism, and China

Conosco perfettamente le obiezioni e le critiche che mi saranno mosse. La principale di esse mi è stata fatta preventivamente, alla frontiera italiana, mentre mi recavo in Cina, da una nostra esimia artista. "Lei è comunista, mi fu detto, quindi le sembrerà tutto roseo quello che succede laggiù." L'accusa di mancanza di obiettività mi sarà rinnovata adesso con maggior vigore e senza dubbio di fronte a queste pagine così piene di simpatia per il popolo cinese, per la Cina, per la Rivoluzione popolare. Ebbene, questa accusa è per me il migliore elogio possibile, è la prova più certa che ho compreso la Cina Nuova.

– Spano 1950, 7²

- 2 "I am perfectly aware of all the objections and critiques that people will offer me. An eminent artist of ours has already expressed a major objection when I was on my way to China at the Italian frontier: 'You are a communist; therefore, all that

The proclamation of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, did not bring any immediate official change in diplomatic and economic relations with republican Italy. A few months before the proclamation, in April, the Italian ambassador Sergio Fenoaltea signed an agreement with Chiang Kai-Shek's nationalist party, thus officially recognizing the Republic of China. Such a decision was an exemplar of Italy's alignment to the North Atlantic Treaty that had just been signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carlo Sforza, in the same month. As a result, Italy and the People's Republic of China established official diplomatic relations only in 1970, on the initiative of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Pietro Nenni. Since the early months of the existence of Maoist China, however, contact between Italy and China was developed by Italian intellectuals who directly interacted with the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign countries (CPAFFC). The narrative literature produced by several of them generated an increasing interest in Maoist China, and most importantly, provided for a new representation of China.

The first Italian leftist intellectual reporting – for *L'Unità* – from Maoist China was the politician and journalist Velio Spano (*Nella Cina di Mao Ze-Tun*, 1950). Spano traveled to China in 1949. He witnessed the proclamation of the People's Republic of China, and met Mao Zedong. A few years later, Gaetano Tumiati (*Buongiorno Cina*, 1954) and Felice Chilanti (*La Cina fa parte del mondo*, 1954) also reported from China, the former for *Avanti!*, the latter for *Paese Sera*. Apart from these individual acts of engagement, a conspicuous number of travel narratives was produced by intellectuals participating in formal delegations, such as the writer and literary critic Franco Fortini (*Asia Maggiore*, 1956), novelist and essayist Carlo Cassola (*Viaggio in Cina*, 1956), journalist Corrado Pizzinelli (*Dietro la grande muraglia*, 1956), writer Carlo Bernari (*Il gigante Cina*, 1957) and poet and essayist Franco Antonicelli (*Immagini del nuovo anno*, 1958); as well as the literary critic and journalist Giancarlo Vigorelli (*Domande e*

is happening over there will be rosy to you.' Most likely, this accusation of a lack of objectivity is going to be reasserted with more vigor because of the present work, which is full of sympathy for the Chinese people, China and the people's revolution. Well, I consider this accusation the best praise possible, and the most certain evidence that I have comprehended the New China" (Spano 1950, 7).

Risposte per la nuova Cina, 1958), and politician Leopoldo Picciardi (*Viaggio in Cina*, 1960). There were also a few solo travelers, such as the writer and journalist Enrico Emanuelli (*La Cina è vicina*, 1957), writer and diplomat Curzio Malaparte (*Io, in Russia e Cina*, 1958) and Carlo Levi.³

The majority of the above-mentioned Italian writers, journalists and politicians travelling to China were part of the generation of leftist intellectuals that had participated in fascist life (often as members of the Fascist Youth Organization and/or the Fascist Party), but who had distanced themselves from such activities as a consequence of Benedetto Croce's criticism of Mussolini, the fascist government and its ideological tenets. Some among them then joined the Communist Party of Italy (Partito Comunista d'Italia – PCd'I) led by Palmiro Togliatti (to become the Communist Party of Italy/Partito Comunista Italiano – PCI after 1944) – while others joined the Socialist Party led by Pietro Nenni (Ajello 1979, 43–44). All these leftist intellectuals, however, had eventually joined the Resistance to oppose the fascist regime, and identified themselves as communist, because “being communist meant above all being pro-soviet and anti-fascist, and these factors were welded together into the patriotic cause of the liberation of Italy” (Shore 1990, 59). As the Italian politician and partisan Paolo Bufalini remarks:

La passione antifascista spingeva a guardare con speranza, con simpatia e fiducia crescenti all'Unione Sovietica, al movimento comunista, agli operai ... Dopo Croce, si arrivò a leggere Antonio Labriola e Marx, ... e in Labriola, e in quello che si leggeva in Marx, e nelle cose che i comunisti, come Bruno Sanguinetti, ci dicevano, o come Giorgio Amendola e Pietro Grifone ci mandavano a dire dal confino, trovammo punti su cui si poteva far leva per criticare Croce dall'interno ... Così da prima ci trovammo a fianco dei comunisti nella lotta, entrammo nell'organizzazione comunista, ne accettammo le direttive di azione e di disciplina, poi, a poco a poco, attraverso una

3 Among the Italian intellectuals visiting the country in the early 1950s, there were also the philosopher Antonio Banfi (1952), the literary critic Francesco Flora (1953), and the journalist Piero Calamandrei who was sent to Beijing by the newspaper *Unità* as a resident correspondent in 1953. Flora was also involved in a diplomatic case – upon his return to Italy, the Italian police confiscated his passport, causing the Italian intellectuals to protest the government's decision (De Giorgi 2017, 175).

lunga ricerca e l'esperienza della lotta, diventammo marxisti e comunisti.⁴ (Bufalini quoted in Ajello 1979, 39)

After Italy's liberation, these writers, journalists, and politicians had witnessed the formation of a leftist government, by the non-Marxist, radical Party of Action led by Ferruccio Parri, and also its rapid collapse due to factionalism. They also experienced the consequences of the rapid deterioration of the international political scene leading to the polarization of Europe into two blocks, and Italy siding with the United States rather than with the Soviet Union, culminating in the Atlantic Pact. But above all, they had experienced the electoral defeat of the Democrazia Cristiana/Christian Democratic Party (DC) in 1948, and the ensuing anti-leftist upheaval which culminated in the failed assassination of Palmiro Togliatti, and which was followed by protests and disorder in several areas of Italy.⁵

In the early 1950s while the PSI had started to distance itself from communism, had agreed to the political consequences of the Atlantic Pact, and had sought an alliance with the Christian Democratic Party, the PCI continued to support the Soviet Union and its political line, even after the Italian intellectuals' diasporic movements following the PCI reaction in 1956 to Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech and to the Soviet Union's interference in the Hungarian Uprising, both of which are described in the second part of this chapter. Some of these writers, journalists and politicians also saw in the Soviet Union the reification of the values to which they would aspire, and the socialist society they longed for, particularly after the Soviet Union's triumph over Nazism during World War II. The

4 "Our anti-fascist passion led us to look at the Soviet Union, the communist movement and wage workers with a growing sympathy and trust ... After Croce, we read Antonio Labriola and Marx's writings ... It was in Marx and Labriola's writings as well as in the things that [Italian] communists such as Bruno Sanguinetti, Giorgio Amendola and Pietro Grifone wrote from exile, that we found the arguments to criticize Croce from within ... This way, we found ourselves side by side with the communists in the [anti-fascist] struggle. We joined the communist organization. We accepted their directives concerning action and discipline. And, little by little, we become Marxists and communists through long research and the experience of [anti-fascist] struggle" (Bufalini quoted in Ajello 1979, 39).

5 See De Grand (1989, 117–130), Sassoon (1997, 189–273), and Shore (1990, 27–38).

Italian historian and politician Paolo Spriano described the attitude of the Italian leftist intellectuals and politicians toward the Soviet Union in these terms: “L’identificazione della causa della rivoluzione socialista in Italia con la difesa e l’esaltazione dell’Urss è totale, proclamata. Si tratta di quel *legame di ferro* (emphasis of the original author) che Togliatti ha rivendicato orgogliosamente ancora in un celebre discorso del 1956” (Spriano 1979, 25).⁶

In addition to this, part of the Italian leftist elite sought a specifically Italian way for the establishment of a socialist society. Such a process would have to be in accordance with both their communist identity and the Italian parliamentary democracy – certainly at odds with the Leninist idea of a one-party workers’ state. It was also at odds with the social and economic changes that Italy was going through in the 1950s, rapidly shifting from an agricultural economy to an advanced industrial economy, and the consequent rapid expansion of the bourgeois class.⁷ Moreover, such a process was influenced by the particular condition of the PCI and the leftist intelligentsia in general, whereby they constituted themselves “primarily in relation to [their] principal rivals, fascism, the Church, and the Christian Democrats” (Shore 1990, 68), and, at the same time, aiming at creating a revolutionary counter-culture capable of influencing electoral politics and public opinion in accordance with Gramsci’s notion of cultural hegemony. As part of the process of creating a revolutionary counter-culture, the Italian leftist elite aimed at diffusing a proletarian-inspired world-view by means of a network of cultural institutions, the media, and regular party activities. Such a world-view was regarded as the expression of a consciousness-raised, politically aware, and reputedly intellectually superior, scientific knowledge that was inspired by Marxism. It implied an anti-capitalistic, cross-national sense of comradeship and solidarity among human beings.

- 6 “There is a total, explicit identification between the cause of the socialist revolution in Italy and the defense and exaltation of the Soviet Union. Togliatti proudly claimed it as an *iron bond* (emphasis of the original author) in one of his famous speeches of the 1956” (Spriano 1979, 25). Most likely, Spriano is referring to the interview with Togliatti in the Italian Review “Nuovi Argomenti” (May-June 1956).
- 7 In such a systemic contradiction lies the origin of many of the major cross-generational conflicts within the Leftist elite, including national and international political strategies yet to be enacted.

It also promoted the reinterpretation of historical events enhancing the prestige of the communist cause, its parties, leaders, and martyrs (Shore 1990, 52–69 and 70–87).

The narrativization of the People's Republic of China by many of the above-mentioned authors not only investigates Maoist China in relation to the idea of a specifically Italian way to a socialist society, but also presents the main aspects of the leftist world-view subsumed by the process of the creation of an Italian leftist revolutionary counter-culture. At the same time, travel literature focusing on Maoist China produced by Italian leftist intellectuals in the first half of the 1950s shared the aims espoused by the travel literature on Maoist China produced by French intellectuals from the *Esprit* group, namely to oppose anti-communism, and promote the European working classes (Polese Remaggi 2010). Italian and European intellectuals regarded Maoist China as a progressive and pacifist regime, which made limited use of coercive and violent measures to administer the country, and promoted international policies which aimed to engender peace and development in China's area of influence. The main historical events influencing the reception of Maoist China since 1949 among the Italian intellectuals were primarily those related to the international positioning of the PRC, such as the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance Agreement signed by Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin in February 1950; the Chinese intervention in the Korean War (1950–1903); and the participation of the PRC in the Bandung Conference (1955). The Bandung Conference, in particular, marked the opening of China to countries that were not formally aligned in the Western vs. Eastern-Block-policy during the Cold War, and therefore led many European and Italian intellectuals to regard the People's Republic of China as a new third pole capable of disrupting the Cold War's binary logic of the iron curtain (Polese Remaggi 2010, 56–58 and 72–73).

The Italian and European intellectuals were also greatly interested in a series of national reforms approved by the Maoist government since 1950, such as the New Marriage Law in May, which was seen as promoting the equalization of the rights and duties between Chinese women and men. This Law involved civil registry for legal marriages, made 18 years the legal age of marriage for women, enabled the abolition of marriage by proxy, and

necessitated the mutual consent of the husband and wife to be. The effect of this Law was to encourage Chinese women to actively participate in society. The Italian and European intellectuals were also interested in the Land Reform Law (1950–1953), which gradually abrogated landlord ownership and introduced shared land ownership for peasants; the approval of the Soviet-economy based First Five-year plan (1953–1957) and the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962) both of which targeted economic, industrial, and agricultural growth while establishing people's commune systems; and the Hundred Flowers Campaign (1956). However, the reception of the aforementioned national reforms as well as their consequences on the social, economic, and industrial structure of the country was largely based on the official data disseminated by the PRC. Therefore, the enthusiasm of the Italian intellectuals was influenced by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) propagandistic optimism, as well as by the CCP's deliberate omission of the more problematic aspects of the Maoist society and government, such as the purges following the anti-rightist campaign or the famine and high mortality rate experienced by the country in the late 1950s because of the failure of the above-mentioned reforms.

Italian Intellectuals Writing the “New China”

The representations of China produced by Italian leftist intellectuals moved directly from narratives written under the influence of fascist discourse from its first accounts, to a new aim of producing a new representation of China – of the People's Republic of China – unbiased by the same fascist discourse.⁸ Such change is already visible in the contrasting

8 The theoretical and ideological roots of the Italian intellectuals' interest in the PRC is consonant with their interest in the Soviet Union, as it resided in the anti-fascist nature of Italian Communism, as well as in the failure of attempts at social transformation of post-World War II Italy. As Joanne Lee has argued in the case of the narrativization of the Soviet Union in the 1950s by the Italian writers Sibilla Aleramo, Italo Calvino, and Renata Viganò, the travel narratives on Russia by leftist Italian intellectuals are the “result of a political and moral positioning as anti-fascist

narratives produced in 1949 by the fascist Cesco Tomaselli and the leftist Velio Spano.

During the months preceding and following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, in 1949, Cesco Tomaselli's newspaper articles for *Corriere della Sera* depicted a nostalgic portrait of colonial China. The articles vented his preoccupation for the potential communist threat, reflecting the fears of the Italian bourgeoisie of the early 1950s. Tomaselli belittled the achievements of the Chinese communist troops and gave emphasis to the role of the Nationalist Party in China. Tomaselli was apologetic of Chang Kai-Shek's leadership and to Japanese imperialism. Furthermore, the author was nostalgic for the Western colonial enterprise – which he justified on racial and nationalistic grounds – and expressed his dissatisfaction with the decline of the influence of the Western powers and their presence in China.⁹ In the same months, the foreign reporter in China for the Italian newspaper *Unità*, Velio Spano, praised the foundation of the PRC, defining it as an epochal event globally connected to the anti-fascist and anti-Nazi liberation movements, as well as underscoring the exemplary role of the People's Liberation Army (De Giorgi 2010b). Velio Spano's narration, in fact, inaugurated a new discourse on China, putting emphasis on the Chinese communist army of liberation and its victories. In his 1949 narrative on the foundation of the People's Republic of China, Spano depicted the victory of Mao's troops in China as a major, globally relevant historical event, directly connected to anti-fascism, and reminiscent of the Italian Resistance and the European anti-totalitarian movements:

[In Cina] sento vibrare dappertutto la stessa corda che vibrava in Spagna nel 1936; anche laggiù la gente sapeva perché si batteva e per chi si batteva ... Allora la

intellectuals at a watershed moment in Italian history, as the country sought to rebuild and redefine itself at the end of the Second World War" (Lee 2010, 382).

In relation to the narrativization of the Soviet Union in twentieth-century Italian travel literature, see also: Burdett (2010, 215–245), De Pascale (2001, 134–156), Di Nucci (1988, 621–677), and Pischedda (1995, 161–208).

9 The main characteristics of the Fascist discourse on China are still visible in Cesco Tomaselli's reportage from 1949, especially when compared to Tomaselli's past experiences and assessments of China, written during a trip to China and Russia in 1936, *Dalla terra dei draghi al paese dei soviet* (1936).

perdemmo, la guerra. Questa volta il proletariato cinese la vincerà, la ha già vinta; per sé stesso e per il popolo cinese intero e per i popoli della terra, per la pace e la libertà umana. (Spano 1950, 19–20)¹⁰

The new perspective on China inaugurated by leftist intellectuals is clear in Spano's narrative. Velio Spano (1950) dismissed the previous travelogues on China – which he defines as “bourgeois” – because they “evaluate[d] China while watching the Bund from a window of the Shanghai Club or listening to shallow music in nightclubs owned by Russian women” (8). On the contrary, Velio Spano aimed at describing China to the Italian readership from the standpoint of an Italian Communist experiencing Maoist China, and thus claiming a totally opposite space of observation than the one created by fascist intellectuals. At the same time, Spano situated his critique in contemporary Italy and connected post-World War II Italian political and diplomatic policies to those of the fascist government, by accusing the Christian Democratic government of Alcide De Gasperi of making a poor decision in signing a pact with the fleeing Chinese Nationalist Party in Nanjing on December 1, 1948. This decision had been authorized by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carlo Sforza (*ibid.*), former minister plenipotentiary in China between 1911 and 1915, during which Sforza had renegotiated the Tianjin concession.

In his travel narratives, Spano reported the Maoist foundational myth of the Chinese Revolution: Spano regarded the Chinese as comrades, partisans, and brothers (26), and, therefore, characterized them positively (37). He described profusely and in positive terms the Chinese protagonists in the civil war against the Nationalist Party (such as Mao Zedong, Lin Biao, Zhu De, Zhou Enlai, and others), as well as its most memorable historical moments and places, drawing analogies with the Italian partisans and the Italian Resistance. In the passage describing his interview with Mao Zedong, after characterizing Mao as the personification of the New China,

10 Everywhere [in China] I feel the same atmosphere I felt in Spain in 1936. There too the people knew why and for whom they were fighting ... On that occasion, we lost the war. But this time the Chinese proletarians are going to win it – they have already won it – for themselves and for all the Chinese people. For all the peoples on Earth, for peace and for human freedom (Spano 1950, 19–20).

Spano compared him directly to the Italian Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti: “[Mao Zedong] ti appare quale lo immagini pensando alla sua opera: calmo, sicuro, padrone dell’avvenire [della Cina] e per ciò stesso padrone del tempo. È meno vivace di Togliatti, ma altrettanto pronto . . .” (51).¹¹ Similarly, Spano compared the Chinese Nationalist Party and their actions to fascist Italian society, and characterized them negatively, as observed by De Giorgi (2010a). The affinity between the Italian Resistance and the Maoist revolution is a recurring theme in the narrativization of the People’s Republic of China. After Spano, Piero Calamandrei, Franco Fortini, Carlo Cassola, Giancarlo Vigorelli, and Carlo Levi all inscribe the Italian and Chinese resistance movements as part of a bigger, global historical event opposing imperialistic and totalitarian oppression and, at the same time, as a new *prise de conscience* of the oppressed people in the whole world.¹²

In the years following 1949, the leftist discourse on the New China was progressively constructed according to Spano’s travel narratives. The Italian anti-fascist journalist Felice Chilanti linked his travel narratives, collected in *La Cina fa parte del mondo*, directly to Spano’s, with the aim of providing more data on the People’s Republic of China and quantifying the nature of the social changes that Maoist society was reputed to have brought about. Chilanti traced the historical and sociological outlines of the Chinese revolution, emphasizing its genealogy, its main features, and its exceptionality. Furthermore, Chilanti investigated the special characteristics of post-revolutionary China, such as the leading role of the peasantry, the effectiveness of the agrarian reforms and the collectivization of the land. Most importantly, Chilanti profusely described the strategies of eradication of the social cancers that characterized the main negative representations

11 “[Mao] is just as one imagines him: calm, self-confident, master of [China’s] future, and therefore of [China’s] time. He is less lively than Togliatti, however he is as resolute as him” (ibid., 51).

12 As Piero Calamandrei argued, “this is the great secret of China: it is led by the same men who were politically and morally trained by the hardships of the Resistance” (64). See, Calamandrei “Guardare oltre la grande muraglia,” in *La Cina d’Oggi*. Firenze: Nuova Italia, 1956, 61–72.

of pre-revolutionary China, in order to emphasize the People's Republic of China's constant development into a better and more equalitarian society:

Avevo tratto le mie domande dal libro di Velio Spano *Nella Cina di Mao Tze-dun*. Spano era venuto a Canton nel novembre del '49, insieme con le truppe dell'Armata popolare. Allora, davanti alla stazione, vi era un cimitero di automobili bruciate, ora c'è un bel viale bene illuminato; allora il grande ponte girevole sul fiume delle Perle, orgoglio dei cantonesi, era in pezzi, ora è ricostruito, nuovo, e si apre al passaggio delle navi che vanno e vengono da Hong Kong e da Huan Po [Huangpu]. Spano raccontava anche nel suo libro che i fiumi e i canali della regione erano infestati da pirati: mi hanno detto subito che da tre anni almeno la pirateria è stata liquidata; egli ha visto allora una città sudicia e caotica: io ho visto invece una città pulita, tutta bianca ... (Chilanti 1954, 219–220)¹³

The leftist discourse on China was gradually implemented and perfected in the narratives produced as a consequence of the two most important official delegations to China of the 1950s, and destined to become renowned narratives of the period: one led by the lawyer Piero Calamandrei on September, 1955; and the other under the leadership of Ferruccio Parri, in November 1956. Both delegations resulted from the active collaboration between Ferruccio Parri's Centro studi per lo sviluppo relazioni economiche e culturali con la Cina/Research Centre for the Development of Economic and Cultural Relations with China, and the Chinese government's Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. Both delegations aimed at establishing cultural and economic relationships in the absence of any official diplomatic agreement between Italy and the People's

13 "I based my questions [for an interview to a local journalist] on Velio Spano's book *Nella Cina di Mao Tze-dun*. Spano reached Canton with the People's Liberation Army troops in November 1949. At that time, the station offered a cemetery of burned cars. Now it presents a gorgeous and well-lit boulevard. At that time, the great bridge stretching over the Pearl River that the Cantonese people were so proud of, had been reduced to a ruin. Now it has been rebuilt, like new, and opening the passage of the ships to or from Hong Kong or the Huangpu area. Spano also reported that the rivers and the water channels in the region were haunted by pirates. But I have been told that piracy was defeated years ago. The city that he saw was dirty and chaotic. The city that I have seen is clean, and all white ..." (Chilanti 1954, 219–220).

Republic of China.¹⁴ As underscored by De Giorgi, the ideological and political beliefs of Calamandrei's and Parri's delegates were heterogeneous, ranging from Catholic and Right Wing to the far Left and were only held together by an adherence to the human and moral values of the anti-fascist resistance. Consequently, the delegates from the two delegations read the PRC through the lens of their memory of the Italian Resistance (De Giorgi 2017), as Velio Spano had done in his portrayal of China in 1949.

As a result of the September 1955 delegation, the journal *Il Ponte*, directed by Piero Calamandrei, published a special issue called "La Cina d'Oggi"/Today's China. "La Cina d'Oggi" contained a selection of essays by Italian, Chinese, and international intellectuals, and aimed at providing the Italian readership with a new set of cultural, sociological, literary, juridical, and historical information regarding both pre- and post- revolutionary China.¹⁵ Moreover, in the following years, a number of Italian intellectuals who joined Calamandrei's or Parri's delegations published individual travelogues focusing on China, such as Fortini (1956), Cassola (1956), Pizzinelli (1956), Bernari (1957), Antonicelli (1958), Vigorelli (1958), and Picciardi (1960). The narratives of these authors set the basis for the widespread, canonical representation of the People's Republic of China until the mid-1960s.

14 The *Centro Studi per lo sviluppo relazioni economiche e culturali con la Cina* was founded in 1954, by the partisan and Leftist politician Ferruccio Parri, to promote new cultural and economic relations between Italy and the People's Republic of China, since the two countries had established no official diplomatic relationships. In the same period the anti-fascist journalist Luciano Magrini founded the *Istituto italo-cinese*, for analogous purposes. See Samarani and De Giorgi (2011, 107).

15 Among the members of the delegation there were the academics Piero Calamandrei and Norberto Bobbio, the writers and journalists Franco Antonicelli, Umberto Barbaro, Carlo Bernari, Rocco Cacopardo, Carlo Cassola, Franco Fortini, Corrado Pizzinelli, Antonello Trombadori, the sinologist Anna Maria Regis, and the painter Ernesto Treccani. *La Cina d'Oggi* is divided in eight sections, each of them describing a special aspect of Maoist China: (1) The Chinese Revolution; (2) China and the West; (3) Political and Social Problems; (4) Pictures from China; (5) Literary anthology; (6) Notes on Chinese Culture; (7) Official Documents; (8) Book reviews. Among the international contributors there are prominent intellectuals, writers, and journalists such as Owen Lattimore, Israel Epstein, Rewi Alley, Paul Ricoeur, Jean Marcel Bruller "Vercors," Lao She, Mao Dun, Ding Ling and Guo Moruo (*La Cina d'oggi* 1956, 14).

In these narratives, the obliteration of the main characteristics of the fascist discourse on China was achieved by emphasizing the radically opposite changes between pre- and post-revolutionary China: prostitution had been eradicated and prostitutes were being re-educated; opium was no longer available and drug dealers had been arrested and executed; the avidity of power and corruption among the military leaders had been subject to massive, public investigation; and xenophobia was proven anachronistic. Rather than the explicit condemnation of the previous narratives biased by fascist propaganda in favor of the new discourse, the refutation and obliteration of the fascist discourse was a gradual process. It was a gradual dichotomic process which re-evaluated China, where the features that had been presented as negative or problematic by fascist intellectuals were now described in the leftist discourse as positive or no longer present. This is evident in Calamandrei's passage below:

Per comprendere non solo il consenso, ma il fervore con cui il popolo cinese coopera coi suoi governanti d'oggi nella gigantesca opera intrapresa, bisogna ricordare quello che la Cina era fino a ieri: il feudatario crudele, il colonizzatore altezzoso, l'usuraio affamatore, il giudice corrotto, il funzionario che si arricchisce, le testa tagliate e esposte in gabbie sulle porte della città, la frusta, la prostituzione, il ricsciò, la mendicizia, l'oppio, le carestie, le pestilenze, la criminalità che rendeva impraticabili le strade della città nelle ore notturne, le mosche, i cani ... Tutto questo, che era la Cina d'ieri, oggi non c'è più ... (Calamandrei 1956, 65–66)¹⁶

When emphasizing the difference between pre- and post-revolutionary Chinese society, the Italian leftist intellectuals evaluated and quantified the changes that had occurred in China on the basis of the official information circulated by the Chinese government in English and French, and

16 In order to understand not only the Chinese people's consent, but most especially the Chinese people's fervor in cooperating with their leaders toward the majestic opus that both parties have undertaken, it is necessary to recall to mind what China was until yesterday: cruel landlords, haughty colonizers, greedy users, corrupt judges, officials aiming at getting rich, heads cut off and displayed in cages at the city's gates, whipping, prostitution, rickshaws, beggars, opium, shortages, pestilences, criminality making its roads impassable at night time, flies and dogs ... All of this was yesterday's China. And today none of this exists any longer (Calamandrei 1956, 65–66).

particularly the information provided by Chinese Chairman of the State Planning commission, Li Fuchun's "Report on the First Five-Year Plan for Development of the National Economy of People's Republic of China 1952–1957" issued for the First National People's Congress in July 5–6, 1955 (Polese Remaggi 2010, 75–76). As De Giorgi argues, the correspondence between Piero Calamandrei and his son and correspondent from Beijing for *Unità*, Franco Calamandrei, shows that in the making of the *La Cina d'Oggi*, there was a careful use of those sources, in order to provide the Italian readership with "non-questionable documentation" on the PRC and which therefore precluded the *Cina d'Oggi's* narrativization of the PRC from being labelled as "Communist propaganda" (177–178). However, as Polese Remaggi argued, while the data derived from the correspondence among the *Il Ponte* delegation members also shows that Italian intellectuals were, in fact, aware of the staged nature of some of their Chinese experiences during their travels, as well as of the "controlled nature" of the information provided to them during their trip, the visitors' awareness was overshadowed by their willingness to positively portray the People's Republic of China. As Polese Remaggi remarks, the tension between the "land of false appearances" and utopia is, all in all, one of the most interesting characteristics of the documentation inherited from China's visitors in the 1950s (Polese Remaggi 2010, 64).

Apart from following the before/after dichotomy characterizing pre-revolutionary society negatively and the post-revolutionary positively, the Italian leftist intellectuals provided the reader with detailed descriptions of precise social conditions and economic structures preceded by historical context, supporting their analysis with data and statistics. Such a mechanism is evident in Carlo Cassola's *Viaggio in Cina*, particularly in the chapter that focuses on the Chinese education system:¹⁷

Poche cifre basteranno a dare un'idea degli sforzi compiuti dal governo popolare in questo fondamentale settore della vita nazionale [sistema scolastico]. Prima della Liberazione, gli insegnanti elementari, medi e universitari erano in tutto 700 mila; oggi sono 2 milioni e 100 mila, cioè tre volte tanti. Prima della Liberazione gli allievi delle scuole elementari erano 23 milioni; oggi superano i 51 milioni. Prima della

17 See also De Pascale (2001, 164).

Liberazione la superficie dei fabbricati universitari era di 3,585,304 chilometri quadrati; dal '49 al '54 si è costruito per altri 4.890.960 metri quadri. Nel quinquennio '50-'54 i diplomati usciti dalle scuole cinesi sono stati 175 mila, contro i 210 mila dei trentasette anni precedenti. (Cassola 1956, 66)¹⁸

Moreover, the leftist discourse on the New China, viewed through a Marxist lens, also characterized as positive a whole set of traits, features, or achievements of the Chinese revolutionaries which had been depicted negatively in the fascist discourse [see Figure 10]. Along with the obvious re-evaluation of the role of Chinese Communist leaders and troops in the reunification of the country, post-revolutionary narratives accomplished a complete re-evaluation of Chinese people. In their representation of the New China, a detailed description of the experiences of wage workers and, most importantly peasants, is preeminent. The Chinese masses were no longer seen as the parasitic outgrowth of a decadent society; they were regarded as necessary to a modern social machine [see Figures 11, 12 and 13].

Ubiquitous in the narratives written by fascist intellectuals during the Fascist Ventennio, and often described as a zoomorphic, subhuman creature (horse-man), the rickshaw puller was symbolic of the racial inferiority, dull-wittedness, and even bestiality of the Chinese people. In Cassola, the presence of the rickshaw puller was symptomatic of a feeling of shame “as a white man” for the exploitation of the Chinese by Western colonialism, which he associated with the sight of a rickshaw: “Il bianco adagiato comodamente sulla portantina è un passato troppo recente per non suscitare in noi un sentimento di vergogna, e nei cinesi un sentimento

18 “A few statistics will suffice to give an idea of the popular government’s efforts to improve such a fundamental sector [the schooling system] in the nation’s life. Before the Liberation, elementary, intermediate, and university instructors were 700 thousand in total. Nowadays, there are 2 million, 100 thousand. Before the Liberation, there were 23 million elementary school students. Nowadays they are more than 51 million. Before the Liberation the total area occupied by university facilities was 3,585,304 square kilometers; between 1949 and 1954 more than 4,890,960 square meters of facilities were built. Between 1949 and 1954 the total number of Chinese students who obtained a graduation certificate was 175 thousand, while in the 37 years preceding the revolution only 210 thousand graduated” (Cassola 1956, 66).

di ostilità” (31).¹⁹ Cassola dismissed the racist dimensions of the fascist discourse on China by suggesting that the Chinese people, because of their Marxist education, had regarded their past experience of Western imperialism in terms of class struggle, and had not attributed any racist or xenophobic meanings to these interactions.

The New China discourse also re-evaluated the colonial experience of the European powers, with emphasis on the role of the United Kingdom. While fascist authors praised the extent of the British colonial infrastructure, symbolized by the cities of Shanghai and Hong Kong as seen in the preceding chapter, in the 1950s narratives on China, the presence of Western imperialism and capitalism was narrated as a humiliating parenthesis in Chinese history that Maoism has brought to an end, therefore eradicating all its perverting aspects – prostitution, gambling, opium addiction, “compradorism,”²⁰ to name a few – as emphasized in Calamandrei’s aforementioned passage. Consequently, Shanghai and Hong Kong were regarded by the Italian leftist intellectuals as different symbols of the Chinese noxious experience of Western colonialism and capitalism. Shanghai, in particular, was also regarded as the former British colony that Maoism had regenerated, though still leaving a few traces of the presence of British imperialism (De Giorgi 2014). Cassola synthesized such a drastic change with the image of the demolition of the Shanghai Racecourse, a hippodrome built in 1912, and the reuse of that area for the construction of the People’s Square (Cassola 1956, 81), an event symbolic of the anti-gambling strategies enacted in Maoist society. According to Cassola, Hong Kong, by comparison, was symbolic of the way Chinese society was before the PRC, and therefore, despite being connected ethnically and geographically to the Chinese region, Hong Kong, in fact had nothing in common with China anymore (104).

Along with the refutation of past social cancers, and the positive characterization of the Chinese revolution and of its leaders, the principal

19 “[The image of] the white man comfortably sitting on the rickshaw is such a recent memory, and it stirs feelings of shame in us and hostility in the Chinese” (Cassola 1956, 31).

20 *Compradores* were Chinese merchants assisting Western traders in China from the late eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century.

discursive device supporting the “New China” discourse in contrast to the fascist discourse is the total revision of the fascist approach to the interrelation between distance and alterity. In the leftist discourse, distance and alterity were used as positive, complementary terms of comparison in a dichotomist process of self-assertion of identity, which aimed to ignite empathy in the Italian readership. In particular, while distance was said to lead to self-recognition through a consciousness of diversity, difference was regarded as compatible with communist values, the internationalization of the communist cause and the Marxist criteria of social and historical analysis [see Figure 14].

In the 1950s, China was regarded by the majority of leftist intellectuals as a readily accessible location, especially conceptually. In the words of Enrico Emanuelli, author of the travelogue *La Cina è vicina* (1957), the new approach to China is explicit: “La Cina, oramai, è davvero vicina. Prima di tutto perché possiamo raggiungerla con sevizi aerei regolari nel giro di poche ore; e poi, cosa molto più importante, perché per la prima volta nella sua lunga e meravigliosa storia essa si rivolge ad una ideologia nata in occidente.” (Emanuelli, 11).²¹ This counters the fascist representation of China as unintelligible elsewhere, unbridgeable, and completely Other to Italy.

The strategy of re-evaluating and reducing the distance between Italy and China is particularly evident in the narrativization of China’s spatiality. New China’s landscapes were oftentimes described as reminiscent of Italian landscapes:²²

Il rapporto tra gli alberi e le case dei contadini, la pergola e il pozzo, la bicicletta e la viottola; il colore dei muri, dei visi umani, degli ortaggi; lo spirito dei campi, del granturco; i bambini sulle aie; i ciclisti operai che tornavano dalla città – tutto era un settembre italiano con i suoi fossi, l’ozio prima della cena, il fumo delle casupole,

21 “Nowadays China is regarded as truly at hand. Firstly, because it can be regularly reached by airplane in few hours. Secondly, and most importantly, because for the first time in its marvelous history, [China] has turned to an ideology conceived in the West.”

22 At the same time, Leftist intellectuals operated a complete re-evaluation of the most symbolic places and cities of China, rewriting the most notorious geographical tropes. See De Giorgi (2013).

le nubi danzanti di moscerini, la conversazione col casellante del passaggio a livello, il carro di fieno che ingombra la strada, e, diffusa con la luce, la presenza tiepida degli esseri umani per tutta la campagna. Sopra veniva un sobborgo, una fila di capre, una folla che cresceva ... (Fortini 1956, 42)²³

Along with the re-evaluation and reduction of distance, the leftist discourse on China operated a positional shift aiming to collocate both the subject and object of observation on the same level. Consequently, “New China” was depicted as akin to Italy. Not only was its political essence sympathetic and compatible with Italy’s but Chinese and Italian cultures were also portrayed as emerging from analogous evolutionary paths. Chinese and Italian cultures were regarded as *spiritually similar*:

Se vi è un popolo che nella sua storia e nel suo carattere ha ragioni di vicinanza con il popolo cinese, questo è il popolo italiano: in Cina e in Italia, una civiltà antica due millenni, maturata attraverso un susseguirsi ininterrotto di catastrofi e di rinascite, di oscure decadenze e improvvise rifioriture di artisti e di poeti: un flusso e riflusso di invasioni straniere e di generosi slanci per la riconquista della libertà ... Forse soltanto noi Italiani possiamo dall’Europa scambiare coi cinesi una conversazione fatta di millenni ... Marco Polo non è un’avventura isolata: è il simbolo di una somiglianza spirituale che lega tra loro, attraverso i continenti, due civiltà. (Calamandrei 1956, 72)²⁴

- 23 “The ratio between trees and peasants’ houses, pergolas and wells, bikes and paths, the colors of walls, human faces and vegetables; the distribution of fields, the maize; children in the farmyard, wage workers cycling back home from the city - It was all reminiscent of an Italian September day, the ditches, the idleness before dinner, the smoke coming out from small cottages, the dancing clouds of fleas, the conversation with a signalman passing-by, the presence of human beings throughout the countryside. A suburb approaching, and a line of goats, a growing mob ...” (Fortini 1956, 42).
- 24 “If there is a people whose history and character are akin to the Chinese people, such a people is the Italian people. China and Italy are two ancient civilizations born two millennia ago, and grown wiser through an interrupted succession of catastrophes and rebirths, obscure decadences and sudden new flowerings of artists and poets; a flux and reflux of foreign invasions and generous outbursts in order to regain freedom Probably, within Europe only we Italians can have a millennia-long debate with the Chinese Marco Polo is not an isolated adventure: he is the symbol of a spiritual similarity that intertwines our two civilizations across continents” (Calamandrei 1956, 72).

The leftist discourse on China and its *spiritual similarity* was often explicitly reminiscent of Italy's sociopolitical situation as already seen in Spano's representation of the PRC [see Figure 15]. In Cassola's narrative, the experiences of Chinese miners were not only regarded as akin to those of Italian miners; when describing the Fushun mines, Cassola reminisced about the tragic gas explosion at Ribolla in 1954. Apart from describing the improvement in the Chinese miners' working conditions in Maoist China, Cassola's aim was as much to give voice to the need of Italian miners for better working conditions and social security:²⁵

Il sistema di coltivazione è quello classico, a tagli ascendenti e a ripiena. Anche nella miniera di carbone di Ribolla si lavorò a ripiena fino al '51: poi venne adottato il metodo del franamento dal tetto. L'inchiesta giudiziaria sul disastro del 4 maggio 1954 dovrà tra l'altro appurare se il cambiamento del metodo di coltivazione sia stato una concausa del disastro.

È troppo vivo in me il ricordo di quella spaventosa sciagura perché al ritorno, quando posso finalmente parlare con il minatore che ci accompagna, non cerchi di saper qualcosa intorno alle misure di sicurezza adottate nella miniera di Lo Fon [Long Feng]. [...] "Oggi le condizioni di sicurezza sono assai migliori" ci risponde, "grazie soprattutto a un buon sistema di ventilazione" [...] "Quanti incidenti mortali sono avvenuti quest'anno? Uno soltanto, ci risponde. La causa? Distacco di roccia." (Cassola 1956, 64–65)²⁶

Similarly, Italy's sociopolitical situation is at the basis of Fortini's belief in the necessity of understanding and experiencing the Chinese revolution.

25 In the same years, Carlo Cassola and Luciano Bianciardi published an essay on the working conditions of Tuscan miners (1956).

26 "The coal extraction system was the classic one: bottom to top cutting and filling. In the Ribolla mines as well, miners followed the filling system until 1951, then the long wall mining system was introduced. The inquest on the disaster of May 4, 1954 will have to establish whether the change in the extraction system was a concurrent cause of the disaster. The memory of that frightening experience is still so vivid that, I have tried to gather some information of the security measures in use here in Long Feng whenever it was possible to talk a while with the miner accompanying us ..." "Nowadays, security measures are much better – said he – especially thanks to a good ventilation system" [...] "How many accidents have occurred this year? Only one – answered he. The cause? Rockslide" (Cassola 1956, 64–65).

Fortini asserted that when travelling to China, he had taken along with him “il suo paese, l’Italia, ed i problemi del suo paese [...] nei ventiseimila chilometri di viaggio che lo ha portato dalla Siberia alla Mongolia e alla Cina, e dalla Cina all’India” (Fortini, 29).²⁷ Consequently, his intent was not that of seeing some radical social innovation; he wanted to inspire change in his own society by means of the new knowledge acquired in Maoist China (31). Fortini argued that the Chinese revolution would serve as evidence for the possibility of Italy’s future social change. Thus, in the experience of the Chinese Revolution, Fortini saw a possible solution to the frustration of the Italian leftist intellectuals with the social development of post-World War II Italian society.²⁸

Perché quel che si era andati a cercare in Cina e quel che alcuni di noi vi hanno trovato era ... una novità di rapporti fra gli uomini ... Cominciano a delinearci colà, nel corpo sociale, rapporti che sono *diversi e migliori* [emphasis by the author] di quelli vigenti tra noi ... Noi abbiamo bisogno non solo di sapere se e come la società, cioè noi stessi, possa essere diversa, ma abbiamo bisogno che la società, cioè noi stessi *sia* diversa, nella storia, e possibilmente in quella a noi contemporanea Aggiungete che ognuno di noi ha avuto un’era durante la quale si è potuto credere di avere “il punto di partenza sotto i piedi”; intendo la Resistenza e l’immediato dopoguerra. Poi quell’età si è allontanata nelle delusioni, è divenuta mito, ha preso il colore della giovinezza come la rinuncia ha preso l’ipocrita e fatale colore della maturità. (Fortini 1956, 27–28)²⁹

27 “... his country, Italy, and his country’s problems for all the twenty-six thousand kilometers of travel that led him from Siberia to Mongolia, and from China to India” (Fortini, 29).

28 Piero Calamandrei had also made explicit the importance of the Chinese revolution as a possible way out from the frustration of the Italian leftist intellectuals (1956, 61–72).

29 “What we went to look for in China – and what some among us have found – ... is new social relations among men. There, in the social fabric, different and better social relations than those in Italy are being developed ... We need to know whether and how society – which is ourselves – can be different, but we need society – which is ourselves – to be different in history, and possibly in contemporary history ... Each one of us has gone through a time when he believed he had a ‘starting point beneath his feet’ – the Resistance and the immediate post-war period. Then, that era become distant because of delusion – it turned into a myth. It acquired the scent of youth, just as surrender acquired the hypocritical and fatal scent of maturity” (Fortini 1956, 27–28).

In *Asia Maggiore*, Franco Fortini alluded to the possibility of regarding the People's Republic of China as the embodiment of an alternative to the logic of the Cold War bipolar dynamics. For him, the PRC represented the possibility of the opening of a third pole, gathering together the Asian, African, and South American countries excluded in the logic of bipolarity. Among the Italian intellectuals with critical views toward the PCI's reputedly excessive pro-Soviet strategy, such as Franco Fortini and Renato Panzieri, the People's Republic of China became the opportunity for "freeing revolutionary Marxism from the tether of Stalinism" (Polese, Remaggi 2010, 68). This way of characterizing the PRC as a model of development in direct contrast to Stalinist Russia became the dominant approach in the years immediately following 1956, and culminated in the 1960s.

Narratives of the New China after the "Unforgettable 1956"³⁰

Noi europei abbiamo guardato sempre e soltanto a Mosca. Là è la sede politica del marxismo; ed anche gli avvenimenti di questi giorni possono autorizzarci a credere che le capitali politiche, se non altro, subiscono qualche scossa sismica. Ma Pechino, oggi ha tutta l'aria di diventare e già di essere la sede naturale, non solo di un operante nazional-comunismo, ma soprattutto di un neo-marxismo meno ideologico e pratico ancorato su ragioni e su forze meno passeggiere di quelle politiche. La Nuova Cina, domani, può avere sul mondo il peso dell'Antica Asia di qualche millennio fa: forse tocca a noi occidentali fare in modo che sia un peso benefico

– Vigorelli 1958, 60³¹

30 The term "Unforgettable 1956" is ascribed to the Italian leftist journalist and politician Pietro Ingrao (Ajello 1979, 359).

31 "We Europeans have always and only looked up to Moscow. In Moscow there is the political center of Marxism – and the events of these days authorize us to believe that political centers, nevertheless, get shaken. But today Beijing already seems – and most certainly is – the natural center, not only of a working national communism, but most especially of a less ideological and more practical neo-Marxism. A neo-Marxism rooted in less transient motivations and energies than the political ones. Tomorrow, the New China, can have the same influence as Ancient Asia

In 1956 Mao Zedong launched the Hundred Flowers Campaign across the People's Republic of China. In the same months, in Europe, two major events occurred which led to the reconfiguration of the leftist parties in Italy and Europe, undermining both the political guidelines and the theoretical approach of the Italian Communist Party. The first was the speech by Nikita Khrushchev at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in February 1956 documenting the purges, tortures, and staged trials during 1930s in Stalinist Russia.³² The second was the Hungarian Uprising in October 1956, culminating in the Soviet army crushing the new regime in November 1956, and the execution for treason of the Hungarian leader Imre Nagy in 1958.³³ Apart from a reduction in the membership of Italian Communist Party – a decrease of 200,000 members, 1/10 of its total membership (Shore 1990, 38–39) – the immediate consequences of these events among leftist intellectuals were a more problematic approach to their myths of the Soviet Union and to

millennia ago. And, probably, it is up to us to make sure that the influence of the New China will be beneficial" (Vigorelli, 60).

- 32 As part of a campaign to de-Stalinize the Soviet Union following Stalin's death in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech mainly promoted the reconsideration of Stalin's leadership and sought to rehabilitate Lenin and his political model. In the belief that Stalinist policy-making and methods had proven inefficient and even exaggerated, Khrushchev's speech criticized the practices of surveillance, purging and imprisonment exerted on both Soviet citizens and foreigners labelled as "enemies of the people," the latter being a Stalinist concept condemned by Khrushchev. The speech was delivered at a closed session of the twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and it was not officially made public until 1989. However, it had significant repercussions in terms of the reception of the Soviet Union in Europe and in terms of international relationships between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the European communist and socialist parties. See Dobson (2009, 79–105), and Sassoon (1997, 241–264).
- 33 There were two other events influencing the Italian people's political views in those years: the growing threat of a nuclear war and the consequential campaigns for nuclear disarmament; and the papacy of John XIII (autumn 1958) promoting the dialogue between Catholicism and Marxism (*Mater et Magistra*, 1961; and *Pacem in Terris*, 1963); and the success of the Italian Communist Party's campaign for land reform bringing new members among the Central Italy's peasantry. See Shore (1990, 40–41).

Stalin's leadership, which were no longer regarded as the spotless embodiment of a perfect socialist society and a charismatic leader. The reaction of the Italian leftist intellectual elite to the aforementioned events, and the repercussions for the PCI's national and international policies, were characterized by the proliferation of different, even conflicting, attitudes ranging from an apology for the Soviet Union's violent reaction to the Hungarian Uprising, to the resignation from the PCI and/or the retiring from political activism by many among them.

As a consequence of these events, the Maoist way to communism became the symbol of an alternative and reputedly untainted socialist society, regardless of the drastic results of the Maoist Anti-rightist Campaign (1957–1959) following the Hundred Flowers Campaign, and the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961). In fact, these two major events in Chinese contemporary history were not engaged with critically by the leftist Italian intellectual elite of the late 1950s, because minimal information about them reached Europe, and because of the deliberate silencing of the more unpleasant details relating to both events by the Maoist government. These unsavory details included the massive public discontent of the Chinese, starvation and death as a result of failed reforms aimed at the rapid industrialization and collectivization of the PRC; and the censorship, forced labor, and even execution of those labelled as “rightists” during the Anti-rightist Campaign.

Palmiro Togliatti and the PCI leadership initially tended to minimize the extent of the critiques of Stalin and his “cult of personality.” The PSI, on the other hand, as represented by Pietro Nenni, immediately sought to problematize the extent of the process of historical revision of post-Stalinist Russia as well as its preoccupation with the propagandistic use of Khrushchev's secret speech by the anti-leftist press. In the spring and summer of 1956, the Italian leftist intelligentsia was therefore engaged in self-criticism, and in finding new political strategies with which to face the repercussions in Europe of Soviet international policies after Stalin's death. Such debates, however, did not produce immediate solutions: the more tangible consequence of Khrushchev's secret speech was a general sense of malaise among the Italian leftist intellectuals and increasing discord (Ajello 1979, 358–396).

The discord among the Italian left increased further following the Hungarian Uprising. Motivated both by the actual military intervention of the Soviet Union to put down the revolt (and thus taking an anti-libertarian and anti-popular stand), and the intransigent attitude of the PCI leaders supporting the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), many intellectuals (Italo Calvino, Franco Fortini, Carlo Levi, Paolo Spriano, Alberto Asor Rosa, Renzo De Felice, among others) expressed their disbelief in the use of violence against the Hungarian people, and their criticism of Togliatti's decision to side with the Soviet position. The Italian intellectuals' dilemma was also in line with the malaise of other European leftist elites, and in particular with that of the French leftist intellectuals such as J. P. Sartre who broke with the French Communist Party (PCF), interrupted contact with Russian intellectuals, and was subsequently condemned by the PCF. Sartre's sentiments replicated those of another French writer, Vercors – Jean Marcel Bruller, who had accused the Soviet Union of making use of their armored tanks against the people rather than against the oppressors. In Italy, such disaffection took many directions: Ugo La Malfa campaigned against the “killing of Togliatti's Communist Party” (Ajello 1979, 420) and consequently created another party; Fortini, Levi, and Pratolini expressed their anti-Stalinism as well as their solidarity with the Russian people. In contrast, Marchesi promoted Stalinism, while many others, like Sapegno, Trombatore, Calvino, Muscetta, and Giolitti resigned from the PCI.³⁴ Finally, the intellectuals' disagreement with the PCI, as well as internal factionalism, compromised the vision of the symbiotic relationship between the role of the intellectual in society and his/her political activism that had characterized the previous years. Similarly, after the Hungarian Uprising, many influential Italian intellectuals seeking more literary autonomy (such as Moravia, Vittorini, Pratolini, and Calvino),

34 The contrasts between leftist intellectuals reflect on the changes in the editorial world. Feltrinelli breaks its ties with the party by publishing Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* in 1957, similarly, the majority of the literary magazines akin to the PCI, such as *Società* and *Contemporaneo*, go through a reorganization. On the other hand, new literary magazines are founded by the intellectuals who left the PCI, such as *Corrispondenza socialista*, *Passato e presente* and *Tempi moderni* (Ajello 1979, 443–448).

disagreed with the socialist realism formulated by Andrei Zhdanov and re-endorsed by Nikita Khrushchev (Ajello 1978, 429–452).

The consequences of the Hungarian Uprising in the months following October 1956 were, for the PCI, “cementare il patriottismo del partito [PCI] utilizzando a rovescio l'ondata di anticomunismo che si leva dal paese, ... epurare il partito dagli esponenti della generazione cominternista ... e premiare quella parte delle nuove leve che s'è rivelata fedele” (Ajello 1978, 427).³⁵ The growing discontent among the Italian Left following Khrushchev's secret speech and the resulting critiques of Soviet Russia, allowed Togliatti and the PCI some leverage to promote their own Italian way of socialism by distancing themselves from Stalinism. The issue of the Italian way of socialism would remain an open issue for the next decades among leftist intellectuals. As discussed in the next chapter, this period is characterized by the proliferation of small leftist parties as alternatives to the Italian Communist Party and the consolidation of extra-parliamentary leftist organizations.

The major travel literature on the PRC in the second half of the 1950s reflects more on the turbulent consequences of Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech, and the Hungarian Uprising on the Italian intellectuals, as well as the intellectuals' opinions on the PCI and PSI directives in relation to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, than it does on the problematic outcomes of crucial events in the Chinese history, such as the Hundred Flowers Campaign (1956), the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957–1959), and the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962). The recurrent claim of the authenticity of the Chinese way of socialism by Italian leftist intellectuals is also a direct consequence of the Italian leftist intellectuals' shared desire to legitimize their experience of Maoist society, distinguishing it from their past idealization of the Soviet Union. However, at the same time, in the post-1956 travel narratives on the PRC, there is a persistent reference to the construction of a leftist counter-culture that refutes the lingering elements of fascist ideology in Italian society. Furthermore, the different, often

35 For further information on the reception of the Hungarian Uprising by the Italian Leftist intelligentsia, see Nello Ajello “I fatti di Ungheria” (397–428), and “Il dopo-Ungheria e la diaspora” (Ajello 1979, 429–452).

conflicting, points of view on the validity of the People's Republic of China as a model for development by Enrico Emanuelli, Carlo Bernari, Giancarlo Vigorelli, Curzo Malaparte, and Carlo Levi, all reflect the ongoing dialogue within the intellectual left on the topics animating the Italian political arena in those years. These myriad views express the discord and internal factionalism both within the leftist intelligentsia, and also in relation to the national and international guidelines of the PCI and PSI.

A particularly robust critique of Maoism reflecting post-1956 intellectual discontent, is that of the Catholic socialist journalist and writer Enrico Emanuelli, who toured the People's Republic of China individually in 1956 as a free-lance reporter for *Il Secolo sera* and *La Stampa*. Emanuelli related his experience of the PRC to the major issues that Khrushchev had attributed to a Stalinist Soviet Union. These issues included the totalitarian and repressive nature of the Stalinist leadership, the practice of the personality cult of Stalin, the ideological control over the Russian people, the persecution and purging of political dissenters and ethnic minorities, as well as the employment of techniques of information control and staged reality on Western visitors to China. The image of China described by Emanuelli conveyed the proximity of the Russian and Chinese socialist countries, emphasizing the repressive and all-controlling nature of Maoist society as well as the use of a propagandistic discourse legitimizing the power of the Maoist government (the before/after logic), the governmental control of the private and emotional life of the Chinese people (Emanuelli 1957, 72), as well as the absence of freedom of speech, print, assembly, and public demonstration in Maoist society (265). Emanuelli emphasized the subjugation of Chinese intellectuals to the Communist Party's guidelines concerning artistic production and the propagandistic role of the arts in the PRC, exemplified by the detention of the Chinese writer Hu Feng for disagreeing with the guidelines of the CCP on the use of realist art in Maoist society (149).

A major aspect of Emanuelli's narrativization of the PRC is his complaint regarding information control over Western intellectuals, as well as the complicity of those Western intellectuals sympathizing with Maoism. Emanuelli argued against hospitality strategies, such as those of bringing foreign tourists to the same spots, and repeating the same stories

to hundreds of visitors (203). Emanuelli cast doubt on the truthfulness of the things or the places he had seen, at times appearing to him as staged (214) or implausible (216). He also referred to the existence of crucial areas for the PRC's development that no foreigner is allowed to visit. Moreover, Emanuelli vented his disbelief regarding the authenticity of the information acquired during interviews and roundtables with Chinese cadres, wageworkers and peasants, and other Chinese interlocutors, stating that the "realità [cinese] si presenta sempre contraddittoria, e forse direi meglio ambivalente; l'una, infatti è quella che [i cinesi] mostrano; l'altra è quella che nascondono o tacciono in maniera persino ingenua" (189).³⁶ Emanuelli also critiqued the excessive optimism, and ideologically biased narration of the leftist intellectuals because they "sconfinano presto nell'adulazione, nell'esagerazione, nell'iperbole; e con troppa facilità giustificano ogni cosa" (189).³⁷ Therefore, Emanuelli put the "New China" discourse on the same level as the old-styled, orientalist rhetoric on China that he had defined as obsolete and worthless in the introduction to his diary, precisely for the too enthusiastic description of the Maoist society characterizing the New China discourse. And, consequently, the author exhorted future historians to regard China with new and unbiased eyes, in order to produce a "quadro realistico e non fantasioso del continente asiatico" (270).³⁸ The joke that Emanuelli quoted from an anonymous traveler to sarcastically dismiss the discursive strategy of celebrating the PRC's achievements in contrast with pre-PRC society is exemplary of his disbelief:

"Stamattina ho chiesto a un dirigente di Sciangai [Shanghai] come nascessero i bambini. E sapete che cosa mi ha risposto? Semplicemente: 'Prima della

36 "Chinese reality is always presented as contradictory, or ... ambivalent. There is a side that [Chinese people] show; and another side that they even naively hide or are silent about" (Emanuelli 1957, 189).

37 "[they] quickly abide in adulation, exaggeration, hyperbole; and justify[ing] anything too easily" (ibid, 207).

38 "... a realistic, rather than fantastic portrait of the Asian continent" (Emanuelli 1957, 270).

Liberazione,' al che io l'interruppi dicendogli: 'Bene, amico caro, simili storie le conosco anch'io.'” (197)³⁹

Enrico Emanuelli's critique of the PRC during the years of the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Great Leap Forward is, however, far from universally accepted by other intellectuals. The narrativization of Maoist Society by the Italian Communist journalist and writer Carlo Bernari published in 1957 as *Il Gigante Cina* (1957) sought to discredit the critical portrait of the People's Republic of China described by Emanuelli in *La Cina è vicina*. Bernari sought to dismiss Emanuelli's criticism of China as a contradictory reality, which Bernari regarded as the expression of the dialectic process. In doing so, he reinforced the validity of Marxist ideology as a means of analyzing the People's Republic of China (Bernari 1957, 15).⁴⁰ By combining the data acquired during his travels around the PRC with notions extrapolated from renowned works by contemporary academics and authors with expertise in Chinese society, politics and literature, Bernari reiterated the affinity between the PRC and Italy.⁴¹ This was in line with the other travel narratives from the *Il Ponte* delegation, which he had joined in 1955.⁴² Bernari reiterated the idealized vision of the PRC as a model of development for Italian society in spite of the political difficulties encountered after 1956. Bernari praised the agrarian reform (94–101), the active role of Chinese women in society (337–338); and the living conditions of

39 “This morning I asked how children are born to a party cadre from Shanghai. And you know what he answered? He simply said: ‘Before the revolution ...’ and I interrupted him by replying: ‘Well, my dear friend, I already know such stories’” (Emanuelli 1957, 197).

40 It is also worth noticing that Bernari justified such supposed dialectical processes operating in Chinese society by forcefully connecting it directly to Taoism, which he vaguely envisioned as a “rough, elementary dialectical conception [of yin and yang], probably already denoting the contradictory nature of [China]” (Bernari 1957, 19).

41 Bernari quoted many contemporary academics and authors experts in Chinese society, politics, and literature such as Lin Yutang, Lu Xun, Marcel Granet, Georges Maspero, J. J. Brieux, Claude Roy, W. Eberhard, L. Lanciotti, Pasquale D'Elia, Luigi Balconi, and Luigi Vannicelli.

42 Arriving in the People's Republic of China in November 1955 as a member of the Calamandrei delegation, Carlo Bernari spent a few more months in the country.

wageworkers and peasants. He referred to Maoist troops as partisans and emphasized their greatness, their absolute values, and their role as defenders of the poor and oppressed (157–158). Furthermore, he lauded the efforts of the Chinese government at combating illiteracy, promoting higher education (288–289), and reducing the index of mortality (315). The main argument of Bernari's *Il gigante Cina* was, in sum, that Maoist society was able to grant the Chinese people the possibility of living a new social life unconstrained by Western Imperialism (27), which the author regarded as the precondition for the development of the Chinese socialist society.

The description of the PRC by Christian socialist, journalist, writer and literary critic, Giancarlo Vigorelli, aimed, on the other hand, to promote cultural and political cooperation between the two countries. Vigorelli's portrayal asserted the relevance of the People's Republic of China and Maoism for Italy and all the West, while marking its difference from the Stalinist Soviet Union. Vigorelli connected his experiences in China narrated in *Domande e risposte per la Nuova Cina* (1958) directly to his travels in the United States and Russia during the "Unforgettable 1956," emphasizing the direct relationship between the contemporary geopolitical order, the logic of the two blocks, the repercussions for Italian society, and the narrativization of the PRC.⁴³ At the same time, Vigorelli claimed that Khrushchev's process of de-Stalinization did not affect the PRC, and praised the development of the Maoist society, particularly its sanitarian, scholastic and cultural reforms such as the Marriage Law, the Agrarian revolution, the simplification of the Chinese script, and the right to education (1958, 26 and 37–38). In Vigorelli's accounts, the PRC was often compared to the Soviet Union and described as non-totalitarian, void of alienation, and embodying progressive, Marxist-Leninist (not Stalinist) ideology; Chinese communism is described as "specifically Chinese" (30), "pacifist,

43 Published as, *Domande e Risposte per la Nuova Cina/Questions and Answers for the New China*, in 1958, Vigorelli's account of his Chinese journey is a memoir written a few months after his return to Italy, between November and December 1956, as a sum of miscellaneous materials, containing a series of essays, articles, conference proceedings, and translations, partially published previously, in 1957 for the weekly magazine *Tempo* and written as a consequence of participation in the Parri delegation in 1955.

tolerant and patient” (32) while Chinese communists are presented as non-fanatic, non-dogmatic, and free to express their own ideas (31). Moreover, Vigorelli stated that the PRC, unlike the Soviet Union, did not feed foreign visitors propagandistic accounts of itself (24), and underlined the genuine nature of the places, interviews, and gatherings that he had attended in the PRC, as well as of the information provided by Chinese cadres. Vigorelli also reinforced the message of Maoism as a valid model for Italian communism: “l’esperienza cinese, in non pochi aspetti coincidente a talune fasi delle esperienze italiane, sarebbe l’unica via d’uscita del comunismo italiano, ora soprattutto che Mosca è tornata a riaccendere la polemica con Tito” (68–69).⁴⁴ Vigorelli argued the necessity of re-evaluating the relationships between Italy and the PRC based on mutual political and diplomatic recognition by the two countries, and a reciprocal deeper understanding of their cultural affinities and differences (84).

Unlike Emanuelli and Bernari, Vigorelli dismissed the validity of the Marxist analysis – of which Vigorelli was rather skeptical (11) – and supported his considerations of the PRC with Christian doctrine. Vigorelli portrayed the Chinese people as actively and consciously taking part in the “lotta comune per le sorti dell’uomo” (10), and praised their proactive attitude of “speranza nell’umanità” / “having hope in humanity” (11), as a moral, Catholic disposition rather than a “gioco politico” / “political game” (ibid.).⁴⁵ While acknowledging that Maoism had merit in freeing the Chinese from “due o tre secoli d’imbastardimento colonialistico e, più ancora, da un lungo letargo millenario che pareva invincibile” (13),⁴⁶ Vigorelli claimed that the PRC was not founded on the “collective participation” of millions of Chinese eagerly working for their mother country but on the possibility that each and every Chinese man and woman was an individual. This idea,

44 “... The Chinese experience, in many aspects coinciding with some phases of the Italian experience, is the only way out for Italian communism, especially now that Moscow is again polemical with Tito” (Vigorelli 1958, 68–69).

45 “... communal struggle for the destiny of humanity” (Vigorelli 195, 10).

46 “... two or three centuries of colonialist bastardization, and more than that a seemingly invincible millenarian lethargy” (Vigorelli 1958, 13).

however, contrasts the non-individualistic nature of a society patterned on Confucian values for more than two millennia.⁴⁷

The ideological use of this representation of China is even clearer when Vigorelli presents Maoist China as a warning for Italian society against the “identifica[zione] [de]l progresso sociale soltanto col benessere economico” (13).⁴⁸ Post-World War II economic wealth and progress, according to Vigorelli, had resulted limiting the freedom of the Italian people, as well as generating an “individualismo decomponente che si giustifica ... attraverso un intellettualismo già decomposto” (14).⁴⁹ Vigorelli advocates the necessity of a collaboration between socialism and Christianity in Italian society because “una società Cristiana, nelle sue strutture e nei suoi rapporti, somiglia più a una società effettivamente socialista, che non a una cittadella liberale” (15).⁵⁰ He also emphasizes the necessity for Italian society to be a truthful and genuine modern Christian society. At the same time, he asserts that socialism can only be a partial ideology because Italian society needed to be truly Christian, arguing that the true crisis of Western societies resides in the loss of such a faith (17).

The different political stand of the three authors, and the influence of their respective political inclinations in the process of narrativizing the PRC is also visible in the recurring references to the exacerbation of the complex relationship between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China, officially interrupted since 1951. Emanuelli, Bernari, and Vigorelli gave chief attention to the forceful submission of all the religious orders in mainland China to the direction of the Chinese Communist Party. They also acknowledged the resulting institution of the Chinese Patriotic

47 The subordination of the individual for the collective good, is in fact one of the cornerstones of Confucianism-based imperial ideology, as well as of Maoist ideology, the latter privileging the importance of the masses and punishing any human activity not in conformity with the guidelines of the CCP. Such actions were deemed by the CCP as noxious “individualism.”

48 “... identification of social progress only with economic wealth” (Vigorelli 1958, 13).

49 “... a decomposing individualism ... justified by an already decomposed intellectualism” (Vigorelli 1958, 14).

50 “... the structures and advantages of Christian society are more similar to an effectively socialist society than a liberal one” (Vigorelli 1958, 15).

Catholic Church by the Chinese Communist Party. The authors focused on the disputes which followed the confiscation of possessions owned by the various religious orders, as well as the eventual persecution and imprisonment of priests and missionaries who refused to submit to the direction of the PRC.⁵¹

In his description of changes in Shanghai after 1949, Enrico Emanuelli debated the expulsion and/or incarceration of Catholic missionaries after the foundation of the PRC, placing special emphasis on the Chinese Government's interference in Chinese people's right to profess their Christianity and on the conflict-ridden relationship between the PRC and the Vatican. In contrast, Bernari connected the control of Christian and Protestant missions in the PRC directly to the Chinese people's struggle to overcome the interference of Western powers in China:

Io credo che il vero pericolo corso dalla Chiesa cattolica in Cina non sia costituito tanto nelle persecuzioni, fondate o no che fossero, giacché il vero, l'unico fondamento alle persecuzioni di religiosi occidentali in Cina è quello che affonda le sue radici nelle tradizionali lotte che il popolo cinese ha dovuto da secoli sostenere per difendere con le armi in pugno la propria sovranità dall'ingerenza straniera, che spesso si è presentata alle porta della Cina con la spada in una mano e la Croce nell'altra. (Bernari 1957, 204–205)⁵²

Bernari also wrote a brief overview of the development of Christian missionary activities since the thirteenth century and concluded that the persecution of Christians in China is a recursive aspect of evangelical activity and not a specific characteristic of the PRC.⁵³ Vigorelli, like Bernari,

51 Some of the authors also connected this issue with that of the imprisonment and execution of an Italian military man, Antonio Riva, who was accused of organizing the assassination of Mao Zedong in 1951.

52 "I believe that the real danger for the Catholic church in China is not, real or fictitious, persecutions. In fact, the sole motivation for persecuting Western religious men and women in China lies in the traditional struggles that Chinese people have had to face for centuries, weapons in hand, to safeguard their sovereignty from the pressure of the foreign powers. Foreign powers that often arrived in China holding a sword in one hand and a cross in the other" (Bernari 1957, 204–205).

53 According to Bernari, such antagonism originates from the different nature of the Chinese religions-philosophies, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism and their coexistence in Chinese society. However, Bernari argues that this coexistence is

linked Catholicism to the missionaries and their role in introducing colonialism in pre-Maoist China (Vigorelli 1958, 57). Vigorelli, on the other hand, asserted that the nature of the problematic relation between the Catholic Church and the PRC was due primarily to the difficulty for the Holy See to consent totally to a regime [PRC] practically materialistic and atheist (58–59).⁵⁴

The narratives by these three authors also continue the revision of the fascist conception of the interrelationship between distance and alterity. Emanuelli, Bernari, and Vigorelli, as well as Curzio Malaparte and Carlo Levi, used distance as a positive term of comparison in a dichotomist process of self-assertion, and national identity. At the same time, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, the compatibility of communist values proved problematic, as did the use of Marxism to achieve an objective sociological and historical analysis of the PRC. In the case of Emanuelli's narrative, his introduction to *La Cina è vicina* emphasized the logistical and ideological proximity of the PRC. However, Emanuelli's first impression of the PRC while crossing the border between British Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China – which he referred to as the bamboo curtain – was that of a silent, swift, and dream-like experience (Emanuelli 1957, 18). His arrival

impossible with Catholicism since he conceives of it as an absolutist, all-pervading system in which its liturgy and active evangelical mission make it sectarian in Chinese society (Bernari 1957, 186). Bernari also emphasizes that Western missionaries always sought the patronage of the dynasties in power, and the patronage of Western powers, and suffered the consequences of this strategy.

54 He also synthesizes the main causes of discord between the Vatican and PRC: firstly, the Catholic Church cannot come to a compromise with Marxism; secondly, the impossibility of the Vatican's acceptance of the PRC's treatment of its missionaries stationed in China; thirdly, that freedom of religion in the PRC is, according to the Vatican, merely a temporary tolerance for such a freedom. Curzio Malaparte also acknowledged his interest in the complex relations between the Holy See and the PRC. During a private audience with Chairman Mao Zedong, Malaparte attempted to end the diplomatic strife with the Holy See, reverently asking Mao Zedong to set free the foreign Christian missionaries and thus, appealing to human goodwill. However, Mao declined his request. With respect to the presence of Catholicism in China, Malaparte dismissed the possibility of a wider consent among the Chinese people, arguing that the Chinese are profoundly rational and non-religious, making Catholicism totally alien to them (Malaparte 1968, 194).

in Beijing was at first characterized by malaise and lonesomeness (27), as well as a sense of distance and difference between himself and the Chinese. The Chinese capital, moreover, was described as a secret, labyrinthine, and silent city, made of self-contained houses inaccessible to the intruder's gaze, and small streets populated by inhabitants whose commotion reminded him of ants (28–29); and of unintelligible monuments (32). Conversely, Carlo Bernari expressed his perplexity at Emanuelli's observation of China as a civilization close at hand. Bernari claimed that when approaching China, the Western traveler should bridge the distance with honesty, since a rationalization of Chinese alterity does not grant the Western traveler any proximity to China (Bernari 1957, 9). Bernari delineated the two major, opposing approaches to the narrativization of the PRC by Italian intellectuals in the 1950s. He aptly situated the distance in the observer's eye and in the ideological standpoint of the Western traveler observing China:

Esistono due modi per abordarre la Cina: predisporci a trovarvi qualcosa di positivo, in un quadro generale negativo; e predisporci a trovarvi qualcosa di negativo, in un quadro d'insieme positivo. [...] E a nessuno viene il sospetto che la favola possiamo essere noi, e che la distanza in cui geograficamente si colloca la Cina rispetto a noi, è pari alla distanza in cui noi geograficamente ci collochiamo rispetto alla Cina. (Bernari 1957, 13–14)⁵⁵

Vigorelli, on the other hand, supported Emanuelli's notorious motto "La Cina è vicina" and turned Emanuelli's criticism into a positive process of evaluating Maoist society (1958, 97). Vigorelli reinforced the novelty and proximity of the New China. He suggested that, apart from the reduction of the travel time and the supposedly common ideology, China was reputedly "close" – and similar – to Italy, most importantly, because China was engaged in solving the same social issues that Italy was facing in the late 1950s (90). Thus, according to Vigorelli, China could serve as

55 "There are two methods of approaching China: Looking forward to finding something positive in a generally negative framework; or looking forward to finding something negative in a generally positive framework ... And nobody suspects that the fable is us, and that the distance in which China is geographically located when related to us, is equivalent to how distantly we locate ourselves when relating to China" (Bernari 1957, 13–14).

an example for Italy to “uscire da una sterile conservazione ... [e] prendere finalmente la strada delle innovazioni, delle riforme, del progresso” (94).⁵⁶

The re-evaluation of distance and alterity is also followed by a reference to anti-fascism, and the comparison between the experiences of the Italian Resistance and the foundation of the People's Republic of China. Emanuelli characterized his experience of the PRC in terms of self-identification, equating the heritage and influence of the Japanese occupation of China to the experience of the fascist occupation of Ethiopia. Emanuelli intended to re-evaluate the experience of fascism in Italy and its significance in post-World War II Italy, referring also to the fascist narrativization of China. After visiting the factories in Mukden, Foshan, and Anshan, Emanuelli remarked that the Japanese occupation of Manchuria was analogous to the Italian occupation of Ethiopia. He emphasized the problematic nature of the fascist inheritance in Italian society and culture, and asked for a careful evaluation and discussion of the phenomenon, rather than for its obliteration:

Dopo le fabbriche di Harbin e i Changchun ho visto quelle di Mukden, di Foshan e di Anshan. Sono tutte località della Manciuuria, ribattezzata Provincia del Nord-Est. Le Ruhr di Foshan e Ai Anshan sono proprio una specie di tarle, senza però dire che gran parte di quel che si vede è stato fatto dai giapponesi conquistatori temporanei, proprio come noi lo fummo in Etiopia in tempo necessario per costruire belle strade e poi abbandonarle; e se mi si concede un'aggiunta, dirò: lezione salutare, con la speranza che serva, a noi e agli altri, d'esempio. (Emanuelli 1957, 106)⁵⁷

Vigorelli also continued the process of re-evaluating the fascist experience, and compared the proclamation of the PRC to the “cacciata degli

56 “... abandon unproductive conservatism ... and take the route of innovation, reforms and progress” (Vigorelli 1958, 94).

57 “After the factories in Harbin and Changchun I have seen those in Mukden, Foshan and Anshan. These areas are all located in Manchuria, nowadays called the North-Eastern Province. The *Ruhr*-like areas of Foshan and Aishan are just like quarries, but no one says that most of what you can see there was made by the Japanese, as temporary conquerors. Just like us in Ethiopia. We stayed [in Ethiopia] just long enough to build beautiful streets and abandon them. And if I may add some final considerations, I will say that it taught us a good lesson, and hopefully it will serve as an example for us and for anybody else” (Emanuelli 1957, 106).

stranieri dal suolo patrio, con una guerra partigiana di liberazione, e con una presa di coscienza dei valori nazionali,” (29).⁵⁸ Moreover, Vigorelli asserted the inadequacy of the fascist narrativization of both pre-Maoist and Maoist China, as well as the anti-communist narratives written by the European missionaries exiled by Mao Zedong after the foundation of the PRC:

Mentre, sinora, la maggior parte di quel che è stato scritto sulla Cina antica e dell'altroieri (a parte certe opere capitali) era quasi tutta roba di maniera, affidata a un esotismo che finiva a sfociare nell'erotismo- si ricordi anche da noi il pur bel libro di Comisso, Cina-Giappone del '32, al quale fa da appendice fatale Amori d'oriente- quel che si è venuto scrivendo in questi ultimi dieci anni è, a dir poco, frutto di cose viste. Cose viste, non soltanto perché sono libri scritti dopo un viaggio e un soggiorno in Cina, ma perché Sartre ha capito e spiegato bene come è mutato, mutato sostanzialmente, l'occhio di chi viene a contatto con la Cina odierna: la Cina d'Oggi, lo ha detto Sartre, è una *verità obiettiva* [emphasis of the author]. (Vigorelli 1958, 87–88)⁵⁹

Vigorelli's literary review of the bibliographical material on the PRC available in the late 1950s aimed to give works by the Italian leftist intelligentsia (Spano, Chilanti, Pizzinelli, Fortini, Cassola, Emanuelli, Bernari, and himself) a position in the international cultural production of knowledge on the topic. Vigorelli emphasized the supposedly exceptional quality of such works in relation to other Western bibliographical productions on the topic, particularly those produced by French and British intellectuals (94). He praised the clear and impartial critical analysis of 1950s Italian

58 “The expulsion of foreign invaders from the motherland through a partisan war of liberation, which as the expression of a new nationalist consciousness” (Vigorelli 1958, 29).

59 “In Italy, our information [on China] was biased by fascist propaganda ... Until recently, the great majority of what had been written about ancient China or the day-before-yesterday's China ... was almost entirely artefact, and guided by an exoticism merging into eroticism. On the other hand, the narratives written in the last ten years are, at least, the result of things seen. Things seen not only because they were written after travelling and staying in China. Things seen because, as Sartre has well understood and explained it, the eye of the person who gets in contacts with China has changed substantially. As Sartre said, Today's China is an objective truth” (Vigorelli 1958, 87–88).

intellectuals, as well as their promptness in recognizing the innovative nature of the Chinese reality, despite the presumed initial position of disadvantage of Italian intellectuals in comparison to their French and British counterparts. Such a disadvantage was due, according to Vigorelli, to the paucity of earlier works on China and Italy that were not biased by fascist propaganda. Vigorelli attributed the unique capacity of Italian intellectuals to recognize the relevance of the Chinese millenary civilization as the necessary basis for the Chinese revolution (94). This capacity was based on the presumed deeper understanding the cultural and historical stratifications characterizing both Italian and Chinese civilizations.

The process of re-evaluating the Fascist experience is also a preoccupation of Curzio Malaparte's portrayals of the PRC (*Io in Russia e Cina*, 1958). Malaparte had traveled to China as a reporter for the weekly magazine *Vie Nuove* (connected to the PCI and directed by Maria Antonietta Macciocchi [1956–1961]) in spite of his past – and probably present existence – as a Fascist intellectual. Although initially denied publication, Malaparte's narratives on the PRC were published a few months after his death,⁶⁰ with a preface by Giancarlo Vigorelli, who also edited the final version of Malaparte's reports and who chose the book's title.⁶¹ As stated in Vigorelli's preface to *Io, in Russia e Cina*, the trip to the People's Republic of China focuses on Malaparte's human and artistic revolution both as a man and as a writer as a consequence of his Chinese trip. Rather than a mere political change of heart, Vigorelli interpreted Malaparte's radical change as an act of recognition by a major figure from the Fascist past of the superior moral order in the PRC. According to Vigorelli, the PRC's objective validity led to Malaparte's recognition and acceptance of this

60 While in China, Malaparte's health rapidly deteriorated. He was forced to return to Italy without completing his itinerary – and his reportages. A few months after Malaparte's death from lung cancer (July 19, 1957), his Capri villa was gifted to the People's Republic of China.

61 Malaparte's articles were initially denied publication after a delegation of intellectuals (Calvino, Moravia, Ada Gobetti, Paolo Spriano, and others) remonstrated to Palmiro Togliatti that Malaparte, a prominent though controversial figure of Italian fascism, could not be allowed to write for a communist-oriented journal. Macciocchi, "L'Europa scopre l'Arcitaliano", *Corriere della Sera*, March 21, 1958.

“fact.” As with other prominent Italian intellectuals visiting the PRC in the same period,⁶² Malaparte’s travels had made him a “new man”:

Malaparte in Cina – e in Cina, più che in Russia – ha scoperto qualcosa di più di una misura politica. Né è stato il solo a farvi questa scoperta. Anche soltanto restando ai nomi degli scrittori che in questi ultimi anni hanno visitato la Cina, da Emanuelli a Bernari, da Fortini ad Antonicelli, da Flora a Cassola, tutti concordano a dire che la trasformazione in atto nella Nuova Cina, se va fatta risalire ai valori del Comunismo, tuttavia non va identificata e dogmatizzata, proprio perché è una febbrile, minuta, gloriosa vittoria dell’*uomo* sull’*uomo politico* (emphasis by the original author), quella che ci è offerta esemplarmente in quel paese; e anch’io, come ho tentato nel mio libretto, *Domanda e risposte sulla Nuova Cina*, ho potuto aprire un discorso sull’intera speranza dell’uomo. Più che non sulle parziali speranze (e i pro e contro) di una dottrina o di un metodo. È questa – e non altra – la “novità” di Malaparte, dell’uomo e dello scrittore. (Malaparte 1968, 9)⁶³

The voyage to China by Curzio Malaparte and his conversion to socialism are interpreted by Vigorelli as symbolic of the complex process of obliterating the fascist rhetoric on China, which is part of the process of refuting fascist ideology in post-fascist Italy. The major change that occurred in Malaparte is, according to Vigorelli, his introspection: rather than analyzing and judging the Chinese people, Malaparte brings himself – his “I”

62 Vigorelli reinforced his idea of the validity of the PRC as an example for Italy, not only as a justification of the Marxist doctrine, but to exemplify a moral, Catholic disposition: the “faith in humanity,” which Vigorelli had suggested in his own work (Malaparte 1968, 9).

63 “In China – rather than in Russia – Malaparte discovered more than a political perspective. And he was not the only one to make such a discovery. Even if we just consider the Italian writers who toured China in recent years, Emanuelli and Bernari, Fortini and Antonicelli, Flora and Cassola, all agree on the transformation taking place in China. Such a transformation might be due to communism; however, it is not to be identified and dogmatized, because it is the result of a feverish, meticulous and glorious victory of *man* over the *political man* (emphasis by the original author). Such a victory was to be experienced in the country in an exemplary way. In my booklet *Domande e risposte per la Nuova Cina*, I, too, have tried to open up discussion on the entire hope of man, rather than on the partial hopes – and on their pros and cons – of a specific doctrine or method. The ‘novelty’ of Malaparte as a man and as a writer [after visiting China] is exactly like this” (Malaparte 1968, 9).

[io] – into question; he “examines his own conscience” and returns to Italy as a different, “better” man (11). Thus, Vigorelli situates all of Malaparte’s previous literary production and political activism in a preceding and less “mature” phase that he could finally transcend by means of the necessary experience of the “New China” (20–21). Such a change is visible in one particular instance: Malaparte’s narrativization of Chinese workers. While visiting the rural areas in the vicinities of Chongqing, Malaparte revisits the image of the man-horse and speculates on the Chinese peasants’ “condizione di bestie da soma” [condition of [being] beasts of burden] (169), an image that the leftist discourse on the PRC had dismissed because of its strong racist and colonial connotation. However, by reintroducing such a strong image, Malaparte specifies that the Chinese peasants accepted such a condition in order to transcend it and become wage workers, thanks to the outcome of the First Five-Year Plan (169). Thus, unlike the fascist intellectuals from the Fascist Ventennio, Malaparte sympathizes with the peasants’ condition; he is willing to assume part of the blame for facilitating and/or perpetrating imperialist strategies, filling up China, Asia and the world with “beasts of burden” (169). Most importantly, Malaparte believes that the efforts of the Chinese peasants to build a new socialist society constitute an act that redeems himself, Italian readers (addressed directly in the text), Italian culture, and the condition of Italian intellectuals in general (170–171).⁶⁴

64 As mentioned earlier, another major aspect worth considering in Malaparte’s diary is his private meeting with the PRC’s chairman, Mao Zedong, during the 90th anniversary of Sun Yatsen’s death. Ironically, among all the Leftist intellectuals visiting China in the 1950s, Mao Zedong only accepted Curzio Malaparte’s request to meet – a request from an intellectual with a fascist past reporting for a communist magazine, as Moravia and others had remonstrated to Macciocchi. Malaparte described Mao Zedong as a quasi-mythical figure – resolute, peaceful and serene, taller than average, with broad shoulders and forehead, well moulded nose, slate-like, shining black teeth! (Malaparte 1968, 97). Apart from the diplomatic strife between the Hole See and the PRC, the conversation between Malaparte and Mao Zedong consists of a comparison between the political situation in Italy and China. Mao Zedong enquired about the possibility of a fascist outburst in post-World War II Italy, which Malaparte immediately dismissed. Subsequently the Chinese leader enquired on Italy’s two Leftist political leaders, Pietro Nenni and Palmiro Togliatti,

In the late 1950s, a few other travel narratives were published which both consolidated and criticized the discourse on the New China. Among them are the travel narratives of Carlo Levi and Virgilio Lilli, which echo those of Velio Spano and Cesco Tomaselli in 1949. Like their two predecessors, Levi and Lilli provide two antithetical representations of the PRC: embodying both belief/disbelief in the achievements of Maoism, justifying/demonizing colonial China, and expressing the anti-fascist/fascist nostalgia that still characterized the late 1950s.

The prominent Italian anti-fascist writer, journalist, painter, and politician, and author of *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli* (1945), Carlo Levi, traveled to China in 1959. Published mainly in *La Stampa* and *Vie Nuove*, his articles reiterated the leftist discourse on the New China, giving chief attention to the Chinese peasants, as an analogous to his vivid memory of his exile in Lucania in 1936–1937, described in *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli*.⁶⁵ His narratives sum up the main characteristics of the leftist discourse on the New China over a span of a decade: Levi connected himself directly to Emanuelli's strategy of reducing the distance between China and Italy, and, in accord with Bernari, he stated that the new travel possibilities do not help to understand and explain the PRC (Levi 2003, 99). In the author's narrative, Marco Polo and the Marco Polo Bridge represented the Chinese Resistance against the Japanese: "Il ponte cosiddetto di Marco Polo, o Lu Ku Ciao [Lugou Qiao], che Marco Polo descrisse: di qui i giapponesi iniziarono, il 7 luglio 1937, l'attacco alla Cina: il suo nome rappresenta per i cinesi l'inizio della Resistenza."⁶⁶ Carlo Levi saw the centrality of the cult

and concluded with a rather ambiguous, almost tautological sentence: "Togliatti è un uomo che pensa" / "Togliatti is a man who thinks" (Malaparte 1968, 98).

65 Carlo Levi's articles are collected in two anthologies both published in the twenty-first century: *Il Pianeta Senza Confini* (2003) and *Buongiorno, Oriente* (2014). For the present study I analyzed both, although this reference is from the latter source. In relation to *Buongiorno, Oriente*, I question Mario Calabresi's introductory essay for failing to take into account the Italian political background underlying Carlo Levi's report on China. I believe this led Calabresi to regard Levi's report in a partial and even patronizing manner.

66 Here [at the Marco Polo bridge], on the 7th July, 1937, the Japanese troops started their attack to China: his [Marco Polo's] name stands as the commencement of Resistance for the Chinese" (Levi 2003, 105).

of the land in Chinese civilization and he argued that Maoism succeeded in China precisely because it recognized that centrality. Levi also connected the importance given to agrarian reform in the PRC to the attempts at agrarian reform in Italy, hinting at the need for those reforms particularly in the Southern regions (2003, 111–112).

Along with the prominence of the relationship between the land and the Chinese people, Levi also described the PRC's unavoidable industrial, technical, and educational development (2003, 143–144) and its harmony with China's millennial past (148), which he admired in his visit to Xi'an and which reinforced Bernari's idea of a continuity between the millenarian civilization and its Maoist development (154). For Levi, Shanghai's British colonial buildings, the remnants of the Western colonial past have the "l'aspetto orrendo delle cose arbitrarie," and it is among these buildings in Shanghai that he first noticed the presence of famine in Chinese society "come in un sobborgo dickensiano di Londra" (2003, 160).⁶⁷ However, Levi also stated that pre-revolutionary social cancers, and particularly prostitution, had been defeated by the Maoist government (166), and he praised the new role of Chinese women, for embodying the fundamental characteristics of the new Chinese society (167). When listening to the stories of the abuses perpetrated by Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist troops, Levi felt sympathetic and portrayed them as analogous to the abuses perpetrated during the fascist regime in Italy (2003, 176). Finally, Levi reinforced both the originality and uniqueness of the Chinese way to socialism, as well as its validity as a model for Italy in spite of the radically different social, artistic, and cultural evolution of its millennial civilization (2003, 224–225).

Virgilio Lilli's 1960 portrait of the People's Republic of China in the late 1950s, on the other hand, recalls Cesco Tomaselli's nostalgic portrait of Western colonialism in China, the use of racial theories to characterize Chinese alterity, and the belittling of Maoist social, educational and industrial efforts in the PRC. Like Tomaselli, Lilli compared the 1960s Maoist China with the pre-Maoist society that he had the opportunity to see in 1948 when he traveled in Thailand, Japan, Korea, and China as a reporter

67 "... the horrific resemblance of [some] arbitrary things;" and "... just like the Dickensian suburbs of London" (Levi 2003, 160).

for *Corriere della Sera*.⁶⁸ Lilli characterized China as a totalitarian, repressive country, allowing no freedom to the Chinese people (1961, 32–34), and making use of techniques of information and ideological control over them, and on all foreign visitors (21 and 194). More importantly, Lilli viewed the “New China” discourse as false, not only because of the excessive optimism of the leftist intellectuals writing them, but because Lilli believed that the data provided by the Chinese government were in fact inconsistent and propagandistic (1961, 18–19). Lilli similarly dismissed the rhetoric of the before/after the establishment of the PRC, which was used to emphasize the supposed achievements of the Maoist regime (81).

Pre-Maoist China was, according to Lilli, a “colossale necropoli” [colossal necropolis] oppressed by its millenarian civilization; the Chinese were its “resti umani” [human remains], which therefore implied that the colonial exploitation of China could not be regarded as a shameful act, nor could Westerners validly sympathize with the Chinese (1961, 15). On the other hand, the Maoist revolution rejuvenated the country by completely eradicating the millenarian past of the Chinese civilization. However, by doing so, it had annihilated the Chinese as human beings (Lilli 1961, 16). In Lilli’s narrative, Chinese people are described as subhuman (16) and lacking individualism (26), and as the “uomo-cavallo dello stato” [draught animal of the [Chinese] state] (75), thus emphasizing a continuity between the pre-Maoist and Maoist societies. Chinese women are seen as “uomini più piccoli” [smaller men] or “maschi-femmina” [manly-women] (26). Therefore, the social reforms had failed to free Chinese women; instead, they had been turned into men so that they could work (37). The idea of Chinese men and women as cogs in a social machine is, according to Lilli, a negative image emphasizing the absence of freewill as well as total ideological control (1961, 29 and 50). Lilli also characterized Chinese diversity on racial grounds, as well as the affinities among Asian peoples, especially with Imperial Japan (163–164). Lilli emphasized the subalternity of the

68 Among the most influential reporters of the *Corriere della Sera* since the 1930s, and famous for his war reportages from Ethiopia in 1935 and Spain in 1939, the liberal Italian writer, journalist and painter, Virgilio Lilli, traveled to the People’s Republic of China in 1960, and published his impressions of Maoist society in the book *Dentro la Cina Rossa* in 1961.

“yellow race” (104) and hints at the eventuality of pan-Asianism (164) – discursive aspects that clearly echo those of the Fascist Ventennio.

Lilli criticized the Great Leap Forward (1961, 52–53 and 58), the reformation of the educational system (124) and the Hundred Flowers Campaign (162, 172), which he judged as inconsistent propaganda failing to accomplish the industrial, cultural, and artistic development of the People's Republic of China. The author also criticized the interference of the Chinese government in Christian missionary work. He posited the theoretical and religious incompatibilities of Chinese Catholic priests supporting the PRC, for being both Catholic and Marxist at once, and for not recognizing the authority of the Holy See (142). In his concluding remarks, Lilli dismissed the validity of the PRC as a model of development for Italian society – and for all Western capitalistic societies – stating that while Maoism and the Maoist revolution enabled China to achieve better living standards for the Chinese people, they would be useless in Italian society because the living standards of the Italian people were much higher. According to Lilli, the PRC model would only cause social and developmental regression in Italian and other Western societies (212–213). Lilli re-inscribed the spatial, cultural, and even evolutionary distance separating the People's Republic of China from Italy and emphasized its fictitious, dream-like nature when presented to Western visitors:

Uscendo dalla Cina comunista si registra la sensazione assolutamente sbalorditiva che ci si è lasciati dietro un mondo abitato da una razza animale la quale non ha nulla a che vedere con la razza umana. Ci si sente reduce da qualche cosa come un Paese di Gulliver, un Paese allo stesso tempo esotico e teorico, esemplare e utopistico, quanto lo sarebbe il paese dei saggi cavalli immaginati da Swift. Di colpo ci si domanda se tutte quelle migliaia di chilometri si siano percorsi durante settimane e settimane; se quei milioni di esseri che si sono sfiorati; se quelle centinaia di villaggi e paesi, se quelle città, se quelle campagne, se quelle officine, quei teatri, quelle scuole; quelle bandiere, quei gesti, quei sorrisi, quelle sofferenze, siano davvero cose e fatti reali o non piuttosto i panorami d'un sogno. (206)⁶⁹

69 “When leaving communist China you have the astonishing sensation that you have left behind a world inhabited by an animal race which has nothing to do with the human race. And you feel as if you have been through some Gulliver's country. A country exotic and theoretical, exemplary and utopian at the same time, just like the country of the wise horses imagined by Swift. All of a sudden, you ask yourself

The Unpublishable China of Edoarda Masi

In the summer of 1957, Edoarda Masi was among the first Italian citizens, along with Renata Pisu and Filippo Coccia, to receive a scholarship from the Chinese government for a three-year language course at Peking University, thanks to the diplomatic work of Ferruccio Parri's Centro Studi per lo sviluppo relazioni economiche e culturali con la Cina.⁷⁰ This new type of relationship was the starting point for a different approach to China and facilitated a more in depth understanding of its society and culture. It provided an alternative means of information to that diffused by the travelling delegations of Italian leftist intellectuals. In doing so, images of China deriving from this avenue were in sharp contrast with those portrayed by Italian leftist intellectuals (De Giorgi and Samarani 2011, 111).⁷¹

Masi kept a diary of her stay in China and sent it to Einaudi for publication after her return to Italy the following year. As a member of the Einaudi press publishing committee, Franco Fortini tried without success to promote the publication of Masi's Chinese diary between November 1960 and April 1961. However, the committee, and particularly Renato Solmi, opposed its publication because Masi's book, a harsh critique of Maoist China, would have undermined the dominant rhetoric on the PRC by the leftist intelligentsia. Masi's diary was eventually published by Feltrinelli in 1994 with the title *Ritorno a Pechino*, in the series *Il Tempo Ritrovato*. For

whether you have really traveled all those thousands of kilometers for all those weeks. You ask yourself whether the millions of beings that you have crossed, the hundreds of villages and towns, cities and countryside areas, workshops, theaters, schools, and flags, as well as the gestures, smiles, and suffering [you have seen] were real, or if they were the landscapes of a dream" (Lilli, 206).

70 At the time of her stay Edoarda Masi was a librarian at the Biblioteca Statale in Rome and a very active member Italian Communist Party. In her early 30s, Masi had a degree in Law, a diploma in Chinese and Russian at the ISMEO, and a past as a leftist activist in the Federazione Giovanile Comunisti Italiani (FGCI). In the years to come, Masi would become an internationally renowned sinologist and essayist, and an expert in Chinese politics, history, culture, and literature.

71 See De Giorgi and Samarani (2011, 111 and 120); and Pini (2011, 94 and 116).

the occasion, Edoarda Masi wrote a preface, which focused on her latter travels in China in the 1990s, when she again visited Beijing and the other places she had lived in 1957. Compared to the majority of the Italian intellectuals visiting the PRC, Masi had an in depth understanding of both of the theoretical and political issues relating to the PCI, and considerable knowledge of the events occurring in Maoist China in the second half of the 1950s. This knowledge was enriched by her proficiency in the language, culture and history of China, as well as her direct experiences as a student in the People's Republic of China.⁷²

Edoarda Masi's narrative employs a third person narration, and the use of pseudonyms (Lia/Edoarda, Luciana/Renata, Ignazio/Filippo, etc ...), which are opposite to the self-assertive Malapartian "io." Such a stylistic strategy creates a sense of detachment from the diary's first pages, and operates a reassessment of the distance between China and Italy as promoted by the 1950's leftist discourse on the PRC (*la Cina è vicina*); a distance which is also ideological, as seen in Masi's rejection of a pushing testimonial by an Italian journalist "V",⁷³ of Malaparte's experience of China as they dined together on her first day in Beijing. Masi depicts China as that of an "lontanissim[o] e ancora mut[o], terreno essenziale e sconosciuto" (Masi 1993, 93) to the Western traveler.⁷⁴ As a land that is not fully comprehensible through the lens of Western knowledge and Marxist theory, China, according to Masi, would compel western travelers "[a] cominciare a conoscere tutto da capo [perché] il loro terreno culturale non valeva più come convenzione generalmente accettata; poteva solo, ad ogni passo,

72 Increasing attention has been given to Masi and her diary in recent years. Some excerpts of the text were selected and published in a recent work on twentieth-century Italian travel literature on China (Soscia 2010). A remarkable short essay by Irene Mordiglia argued that the refusal to publish Masi's diary exposes the limits of Pierre Bourdieu's theory on the process of selecting publishable material within publishing press (Mordiglia 2009). However, a consistent comparative analysis of the diary and the published travelogues on New China, is still wanting.

73 The Italian journalist Emilio Sarzi Amadé, who was the only Italian reporter based in the PRC in those years, reporting for *Unità* from 1957 to 1961.

74 "... essential and unknown land, still so far and mute" (Masi 1993, 93).

venir sottoposto alla prova e al confronto” (45).⁷⁵ Masi also questioned the “involucro di protezione del turista spettatore dei fatti altrui” as well as his/her “condizione privilegiata dello straniero” that Western travelers would enjoy – even now – in the PRC (31).⁷⁶

When comparing Italy to the People’s Republic of China, Edoarda Masi saw no trace of a true, revolutionary sense of freedom in either the Italian or Chinese contemporary societies. In Italy, freedom would always be perceived as the “ansia di un bene mai raggiunto” of owning commodities or being granted privileges, coveted even by the proletarian class (73).⁷⁷ In China, on the other hand, freedom would be perceived as the lightness of not possessing anything but one’s own body, not even one’s own will; in a society where “tutti erano diretti da fili invisibili” (74).⁷⁸ However, in her last weeks in Beijing, Masi speculated how, after spending almost a year in Beijing, Italy would appear pleasantly different to her:

*L’Italia le appariva come una terra calda e luminosa, traboccante di bellezza. Camminare per certe strade, che nessuno si interessi di te, che tu possa essere da sola a casa tua, dire forte all’aperto, a chiunque quello che ti passa per la testa, essere piena di colpe liberamente, a tuo rischio con gioia e dolore. (191)*⁷⁹

Edoarda Masi openly expressed her skepticism for Maoist social and cultural policies, especially the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the Re-education through Labor Campaign, and the Great Leap Forward. To her, Maoism had not changed Chinese society, because, until famine was overcome, Maoism did not have the potential to create a new and truly communist

75 “... learn all over again [because their] cultural background was no longer a generally valid conventional knowledge, but a knowledge to be tested and compared step by step” (Masi 1993, 45).

76 “... protective shell of the tourist witnessing other’s [sic] people’s matters;” “... privileged condition of being a foreigner” (Masi 1993, 31).

77 “... anxiety of a never achieved right” (Masi 1993, 73).

78 “... everybody was managed by means of invisible wires” (Masi 1993,74).

79 “She thought of Italy as of a warm, bright land bursting with beauty. You can walk in the street and no one is interested in you. You can be alone at home. You can speak loudly to anyone when outdoors and say whatever crosses your mind. You can be free to be full of guilt, joyfully or painfully, at your own risk” (Masi 1993, 191).

Chinese culture. For Masi, famine is the major difference between Italian and Chinese societies, a difference which she believed could not be neatly accounted for in terms of revolutionary achievements. Consequently, Masi drew a contrast between the official parades in the streets of Beijing promoting the Great Leap Forward and the increasing famine perceived as a “dolore elementare,”⁸⁰ symbolized by the extreme poverty of the Chinese peasants forced to live on sprouts (166).

Masi also noticed that the working and living conditions of the Chinese people remained substantially unchanged in Maoist society. She therefore implicitly asserted the persistence of the social cancers that had been attributed to traditional and pre-revolutionary China within the “New China” discourse. During a visit to a dam construction site in the outskirts of Beijing near the Ming tombs, she described the Chinese people working at the dam as “centinaia di uomini (o migliaia?) dall’alto come formiche – per la terra, per collinette e ponti di legno rincorrersi continuo febbrile ... in un’armonia organizzata come i penitenti del purgatorio, gli schiavi delle piramidi o i costruttori della Grande Muraglia.”⁸¹ Moreover, in her narrative, Masi also hinted at the Chinese people’s nostalgia for both pre-Maoist culture and capitalism, which in the author’s account are embodied by the two Chinese students from Shanghai that she calls Pierre and Matteo. The two Shanghainese students nostalgically sang songs from colonial times, which were forbidden in the People’s Republic of China (77), and wore elegant, woolen or silk clothes instead of Maoist uniforms (106).

The author’s direct experience of being a foreign student in Maoist China during the 1950s also proved that any attempt at active participation in Maoist society by foreigners was, in fact, in vain. The restrictions and rigid control imposed on Chinese people and foreigners by the Maoist government made impossible any real interaction with the locals. According to Masi, the foreigners living in the PRC were all considered bourgeois (98) and, therefore, they were subject to constant control by incognito Chinese

80 “... [an] elementary pain” (Masi 1993, 166).

81 “Hundreds (or thousands?) of men [and women] like ants in the land, on hills and wooden bridges feverishly, continuously running after each other ... in an organized harmony like penitents in purgatory, the slaves that built the Pyramids or the builders of the Great Wall” (Masi 1993, 187).

Communist Party members, such as the student assistants [fudao] or interpreters: “chi entrava, chi usciva, dove andavi, tutto aveva l’aspetto di una cosa pubblica e non più tua” (53).⁸² Those who tried to escape these controlling measures were regarded as subversives and were gradually isolated from both the locals and other foreigners. The reactions of the foreigners living in the PRC to such an impasse were, according to the author, paralysis, self-isolation, and nostalgia for Western culture. In this isolated situation, Masi recalled her adolescence in Italy and the contrasting experience of freedom and comradeship during the last years of World War II. She recalled the experience of the Resistance that she, however, in those years, had already regarded pessimistically as the splendid end of an era (100).

During her conversations with the Austrian student Ludwig, Edoarda Masi reported the difficulty of going beyond the discursive representation of China circulated by the Chinese Communist Party to obtain real information on Maoist China. She described the Party’s practice of rearranging reality ad hoc (by means of staged scenes and human props as Hollander argues) as a hospitality technique to propagandize the greatness of Maoist society to incoming delegations of foreigners during the PRC’s eighth anniversary (40–41).⁸³ Most importantly, Masi reported that Western intellectuals in delegations were generally unaware of what was really happening in the People’s Republic of China. She remarked that, ironically, most of these intellectuals, if told of the artificiality of their Chinese experience, would probably have been disbelieving. Furthermore, Masi dismissed the political tours of the Western intellectuals as artificial, the knowledge they acquired as partial, and their impressions as affected by positional superiority. She synthesized the Italian intellectuals’ consolidated practice of political tourism as a farcical experience:

Allegri e incoscienti, trascinati alle feste e agli spettacoli, a visitare cooperative agricole e miniere, ben curati negli ospedali, accompagnati su e giù per la Cina, migliaia di chilometri, dopo un mese con la testa che gira erano rientrati in patria convinti

82 “Whoever went out, whoever came in, everything seemed to become a public matter. A matter which was not your own any longer” (Masi 1993, 53).

83 Concerning the practices of staging and rearranging reality in socialist societies, see Hollander (2014, 373).

di aver capito tutto, e nei loro scritti i pregiudizi di superiorità dell'occidente e le conoscenze *ad usum Delphini* [emphasis of the author] loro impartite dai burocrati accompagnatori si sarebbero fusi in un'unica benevolenza sorridente per la rivoluzione all'acqua di rose. (Masi 1993, 87)⁸⁴

In sum, Masi's narration invalidated not only the specific features that the leftist discourse on the People's Republic of China had extolled, but the very practice of reporting from the PRC when visiting the country on formal delegation tours. In addition, Masi did not omit any undesirable features of Maoist society, such as the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Re-education through Labor Campaign. These aspects had been omitted by most Western leftist intellectuals visiting the PRC in the 1950s and silenced by the Maoist authorities at the time of Masi's stay in Beijing. The uncompromising nature of her considerations on the PRC challenged the leftist intellectuals' dominant view of Maoist China in the 1950s, as well as their ideological use of these travel narratives, and therefore it was not possible for Einaudi to publish Edoarda Masi's Chinese diary. The works on China published by Einaudi during the second half of the 1950s were Franco Fortini's *Asia Maggiore* (1956) and Enrica Collotti Pischel's *Le origini ideologiche della rivoluzione cinese* (1958). The former, as discussed above, was an account of Fortini's trip to China in October 1955; the latter was a historical and sociological analysis of China's twentieth century in Marxist terms, published to provide the ideological foundation to Fortini's travelogue *Asia Maggiore* (Mordiglia 2009, 4). Both these publications were in line with the New China discourse promoted by the Italian leftist intelligentsia.

84 "Merry and clueless, [the visitors in delegations are] brought to parties and shows, agricultural cooperatives and mine fields. They are well taken care of in hospitals. They are taken on tours everywhere in China for thousands of kilometers. After a month, while their heads are still spinning, they go back home convinced that they have understood it all. In their writings, their prejudicial superiority of the West and the blue-penciled knowledge acquired from the bureaucrats who hosted them, blend into a cheerful benevolence for a wishy-washy revolution" (Masi 1993, 87).

Conclusion

The major Italian narratives describing China after 1949 were produced by prominent leftist intellectuals, anti-fascists, and former members of the Italian Resistance (Piero Calamandrei, Velio Spano, Felice Chilanti, Gaetano Tumiati, Franco Fortini, Carlo Cassola, Carlo Bernari, and Carlo Levi). These intellectuals actively produced a counter-discourse to the fascist representation of China, with the intent of obliterating it and the ideological substratum supporting it. Although they provided the Italian readership with information concerning China, Chinese culture, history and politics, the major aim of the 1950s leftist intellectuals was to support their respective ideological ambitions. Textuality and referentiality occur simultaneously in the “New China” rhetoric diffused in the travel narratives analyzed in this chapter. The country is, therefore, narrated as a political text where to construct the sociocultural, political, and ideological dimension of the People’s Republic of China while questioning Italy’s fascist and post-fascist society. The intent of these intellectuals was that of opening up to possible – different – strategies of development for Italy’s own social renovation.

The fascist and 1950s leftist rhetoric on China used different parameters of analysis of Chinese reality, as Fascist and 1950s leftist intellectuals situated themselves antithetically in relation to their objects of observation – China. Fascist intellectuals portrayed China as a distant and hostile alterity, populated by a mob of xenophobic and slow-witted individuals, so as to create a spatial and cultural distance from fascist Italy. Leftist intellectuals, on the other hand, portrayed China as a spiritually similar civilization, populated by Chinese comrades, partisans and brothers, and aimed at reducing the spatial and cultural distance from post-fascist Italy. The intellectuals from the two groups did, however, use analogous methods of investigation that promoted self-identification, based on the construction of China as the Other through its difference from the Self, and on the functional use of space and distance for the creation of empathy (sympathy/antipathy) for China in the Italian readership.

The narratives discussed in this chapter also express a privileged relationship between Italian travelers and Maoist China. The majority of those intellectuals were chosen by the Chinese authorities as they were political-committed and in favor of the PRC. They were invited to visit the country to produce favorable reports on Maoist society, in exchange of popularity and material benefits (Brady 2003). Being a reporter from the PRC also implied active collaboration with the political parties of both China (CCP) and Italy (PCI, PSI); adherence, at least to a certain degree, to the guidelines and ideological views expressed by those political parties and related leftist intelligentsias; and, possibly, information control from both parts. Such collaboration, therefore, was structured on the active participation of the Chinese government and people, implying a different positional stand of the Italian narrators rooted in the acceptance in the society of the Other rather than on claiming full authority to narrate the “silent” China characterizing the Fascist narratives on the country analyzed in the previous chapter. This type of relationship continued also in the narratives produced during the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), which is discussed in the next chapter.

The Italian narratives describing China after 1949 also show that there is a continuous tension between positive portrayals of Maoist society, and critiques of its nature and operating principles. Einaudi's refusal to publish Edoarda Masi's China diary exemplifies this tension, and demonstrates that the leftist intelligentsia narrating the PRC in the 1950s primarily aimed at building a discourse rather than informing the Italian readership about the events that characterized the first decade in Maoist China.

In Search of Chinese Purity: Italian Leftist Intellectuals in Maoist China during and after the Cultural Revolution (1966–1975)

Un popolo dai piedi leggeri si muove con ardore verso il futuro: sono essi, forse, la nuova civiltà del mondo. Il raffronto che posso fare, dopo sedici anni, è che la Cina ha percorso un'avanzata senza precedenti nella storia. E mi dico che sono fortunata, immensamente fortunata: non solo ho oltrepassato quelle montagne, ma ho vissuto *nella pelle* di questo paese, ho sentito il battito “del cuore rosso” di migliaia di uomini semplici d'oggi, “questi fanatici,” “questi asceti,” “questi eroi,” questi simboli di una nuova tensione rivoluzionaria, che stanno riscrivendo la storia del loro paese e, per tutti i versi, del mondo. Ma il modo migliore di comprenderli, e di amarli, è tornare a noi, al mondo di cui siamo figli e protagonisti, per cambiarlo.

– Macciocchi 1971, 468¹

Between 1966 and 1975, the People's Republic of China rapidly became a popular and particular space in the imaginary of 1960s and 1970s Italian society, a space where conflicting political ideas among the Italian Left

- 1 “This people may be the incarnation of the new civilization of the world. I can only say that China has made an unprecedented leap into history. I tell myself that I am fortunate, very fortunate. Not only have I crossed those mountains, I have lived inside the skin of this country, I have felt the beating ‘red hearts’ of a million simple people, ordinary people, ‘fanatics,’ ‘ascetics,’ and ‘heroes,’ symbols of the new revolutionary intensity, who are rewriting the history of their country and, in many ways, the very history of the world. What is the best way to understand and love them? Is it not to return to our own countries, to the world of which we are the children and the protagonists, and change it?” (Macciocchi 1972, 466). The translation in English of the quotes from Macciocchi's *Dalla Cina* (1971) are from the original English version of the book (Macciocchi 1972). Similarly, the translations in English from Moravia's *La Rivoluzione Culturale in Cina* (1967), are from the original English version of the book (Moravia 1973). The quotations in Italian from other works were translated by me.

were juxtaposed and interacted. In the same years, many well-known leftist Italian writers, journalists, and politicians, such as Goffredo Parise, Alberto Moravia, Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, Alberto Iacoviello, Luca Pavolini, and Gianni Rodari, toured the People's Republic of China (PRC). By portraying China as a utopian society these travel narratives argued the significance of the Cultural Revolution and the supposedly unique nature of Maoist society. The first section of this chapter outlines the reception of the PRC and political uses of Maoism in Italian society by parliamentary and extra-parliamentary leftist organizations between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s, as well as in relation to geopolitical dynamics. The second section analyzes the representations of China by two prominent Italian writers, Goffredo Parise and Alberto Moravia. Parise and Moravia's narratives are representative of a change of attitude toward Maoist China by part of the Italian intelligentsia connected to, and justified by, the fragmentation of the Italian left and other context-specific dynamics of Italian society in the mid-1960s. The third section discusses the depictions of the PRC produced by the Maoist politicians Maria Antonietta Macciocchi and Alberto Iacoviello, which illustrated the conflictual stand of the Italian Communist Party toward the Italian pro-Maoist leftist intelligentsia. In this section I also compare Macciocchi's portrayal of China with the depictions produced by the writers and journalists Luca Pavolini and Gianni Rodari, who were members of the Italian Communist Party. The fourth and final section introduces the portrayal of China as a literary hypertext produced by the disengaged writer Giorgio Manganelli, which anticipated the attitude of the 1980s Italian intellectuals discussed in Chapter 6.

In his appendix to the Italian translation of Paul Hollander's *Political Pilgrims*, the political scientist Di Nucci Loreto concluded that the interest of Italian intellectuals visiting Maoist China in the 1960s and 1970s, and generally visiting any socialist country in the twentieth century, resided in their discontent for their own society, and responded to the same attitude of all Western leftist intellectuals (Di Nucci 1988, 674). Similarly, the historian Daniele Perotti, on the one hand, argued that during the 1960s and 1970s, Maoist China and the Cultural Revolution were in fact perceived as a utopian space as a consequence of the general dissatisfaction for the

sociopolitical institutions of those years (Perotti 1981, 276). On the other hand, Perotti argued that in the mid-1960s and early 1970s Maoist China was also perceived as a “rifugio abbastanza remoto da esorcizzare qualsiasi pericolo di riferimento realistico alla situazione europea ed italiana” (Perotti 1981, 224).² While supporting the idea that leftist Italian intellectuals perceived Maoist China as an idealistic alternative to Italian society, this chapter points out that the discontent of the Italian leftist intelligentsia originated from specific sociohistorical events characterizing Italian society, in relation to fundamental international historical events, such as the Sino-Soviet split.

The historian Paolo Spriano asserted that, a specific group among the leftist intellectuals from *Il Manifesto* (Aldo Natoli, Rossana Rossanda, Lisa Foa, and others), regarded the PRC as a “real alternative” to the over-bureaucratization and the “autarchism” of the Soviet Union. Spriano’s argument proves to be valid for the majority of the leftist intelligentsia, especially those who were dissatisfied by the Italian communist and socialist parties. Spriano also specified that those intellectuals were somehow oblivious of their post-1956 disillusion for the Soviet Union when providing a mythicized, enthusiastic, and “acritical” view of the PRC and the Cultural Revolution, which they interpreted as a radical and libertarian act (1982, 63). The travel narratives discussed in this chapter, however, show that leftist intellectuals shaped different ideas on Maoist China in contrast with their pessimistic views on the Soviet society and system of development that followed the secret Speech of Nikita Khrushchev.

The select travel narratives on China written in the 1960s and 1970s were also symbolic of the heterogeneous political debate ongoing in Italy among the Italian intelligentsia of the time. This was inflected by the geopolitical dynamics of the Cold War and the international debate on Communism which raged among the European Communist Parties, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In this chapter, therefore, I argue that the fragmentation of the Italian Left into an archipelago of political parties in conflict with each

2 “A shelter that was so remote to dispel any real reference to the Italian and European [socio-political] situation” (Perotti 1981, 224).

other, as well as the formation of extra-parliamentarian leftist cultural and political organizations, actively enacted a cultural shift through the publication of literary and political journals. These sociopolitical factors all contributed to the multiplication of divergent interpretations of the PRC, the Chinese Revolution, Mao Zedong, Maoist ideology, and their validity for Italian society. In addition, I argue that some of these authors produced “sugar-coated” depictions of the People’s Republic of China because of their own various political stances. They produced idealized representations of Mao Zedong, the Cultural Revolution, and the Chinese society. They played down violent revolutionary episodes, as well as power struggles among the party cadres and the leadership. They overlooked practices of coercion and censorship among in Chinese intellectuals and people. While such depictions might have been also influenced by the authors’ partial understanding of the complexity of the Maoist society in the 1960s and 1970s, the travel narratives produced in this chronological paradigm indicate the authors’ collective awareness of the practices of information control and persuasion that the Chinese Communist Party operated on all official and unofficial Western visitors.

Maoism and Political Activism in Italian Society

Between the late 1950s and early 1960s Italy went through a fast-paced process of modernization that brought the largely rural country among the most industrialized nations of the world. Such radical economic, social, cultural, and political transformation changed the traditional ideas of family and gender roles. It triggered demographic growth and South to North migratory movements, causing the development of a mass proletariat. It also established the myth of economic progress and the development of a consumer-based economy based on the “American way of life.” On the other hand, the rapid modernization of the country generated sociopolitical imbalance, economic recession, and inflation, as well as the discontent among the working classes. Eventually, such

widespread unease resulted in the outburst of social demonstrations and strikes leading to the *Autunno Caldo*/Hot Autumn in the late 1960s.

During the early 1960s the political coalition between the Partito Socialista Italiano/Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and Democrazia Cristiana/Christian Democratic Party (DC), was initially perceived as an opportunity for social reform, in the latter years these expectations were gradually frustrated. Yet the PCI was perceived by a portion of leftist electors as static and irresolute, and even incapable of coping with the economic, social, cultural, and political transformations which shaped the 1960s and 1970s Italy. Directly connected to the malaise of the leftist intellectual intelligentsia originated in the Unbearable 1956, such feeling of general discontent among the institutional lefts caused groups of intellectuals, politicians, and student circles to investigate alternative forms of political participation, resulting in the proliferation of independent political journals, the strikes of the wage-working class, and the occupation of Italian universities. While the institutional media of communication were controlled by the government and by the major political parties (DC, PSI, and PCI), the political investigation occurred by means of new political and literary journals which were in fact the major vehicles of development of an innovative and heterogeneous left – Nuova Sinistra (The New Left), developing new interpretations of socialism based on *operaismo* (workerism), and critical of the PCI, PSI, and the trade unions – defined in contrast as the *Vecchia Sinistra* (Old Left) – for their bureaucratic and centralized nature.³ The most relevant journals were *Problemi del Socialismo*, founded by the politician and journalist Lelio Basso in 1958; *Quaderni Rossi*, founded by the politician and writer Renato Panzieri in 1961; *Classe Operaia*, directed by the philosopher and politician Mario Tronti in 1964; *Quaderni Piacentini*, directed by Paolo Bellocchio and politically active after the 1967.⁴

Among these journals, *Quaderni Rossi* and *Quaderni Piacentini* played a major role in the diffusion of information on the People's Republic of

3 The Italian New Left's theoretical basis and aims did not correspond to those of the American New Left, albeit the latter influenced the former in part.

4 For a study on the interdependence between the political events occurred in the 1960s and the proliferation of political and literary journals, see: Attilio Mangano and Antonio Schina, *Le Culture del Sessantotto*, Bolsena: R. Massari Editore, 1998.

China and Maoism to the Italian readership, most especially by means of the contributions written by the sinologist Edoarda Masi.⁵ In addition to those journals, there were the publishing press Edizioni Oriente and its journal *Vento dell'Est*/ Eastern Wind, which echoed Mao Zedong's renowned quote "the East wind prevails over the West Wind," and were directed by the economist Giuseppe Regis and his wife, the sinologist Maria Arena.⁶ Those journals published articles on the People's Republic of China, Maoism, and the Cultural Revolution in Italy and, investigated their importance in terms of geopolitical dynamics. They characterized the PRC, Mao Zedong and Maoist society in opposition to the Soviet Union, Stalin and Soviet society in accordance to the feeling of discontent for the Soviet Union perceived by many leftist Italian intellectuals. In addition to that, they described China as a most advanced country and connected the Maoist China to the Cuban Revolution and to the Vietnam War.⁷

The fascination for Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution, the interest in the People's Republic of China and its geopolitical collocation, as well as the relations between the CCP, PCSU, and PCI, all contributed in the later 1960s to the proliferation of a number of pro-Maoist political organizations (Samarani, De Giorgi 2011, 122). Concerning the mobilization of student circles, the image of Maoist China and the Cultural Revolution diffused in Italy became symbolic of the necessity for the students to mobilize the masses to criticize the political system in Italy, as well as the necessity to dissent with the political strategies of the institutional Left in Italy, particularly in regards with the PCI (ibid., 123). The interest in China and Maoism by the students and leaders of those extra-parliamentarian organizations, however, did not have the same solid theoretical, linguistic,

5 The most significant essays of Edoarda Masi published on Quaderni Rossi and Quaderni Piacentini were collected in a volume edited by Einaudi. See, Edoarda Masi, *La contestazione cinese*. Torino: Einaudi, 1968.

6 There were also the journal *La Cina*, published in Italian by the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing provided for the Italian readership drawing directly from Chinese sources; and an Italian version of the US socialist magazine *Monthly Review* directed by the US economist Paul Sweezy and published in Italy by Edizioni Dedalo.

7 For the importance of the above-mentioned journals for the diffusion of information on Maoist China, see Niccolai (1998a, 21–64).

and historical basis evidenced by the contributors of the above-mentioned Italian journals.⁸ As Perotti pointed out:

[Gli] studenti e [i] giovani del '68, ... videro nelle celebri frasi di Mao *bombardare il quartier generale e ribellarsi è giusto, ribellarsi è possibile*, le parole d'ordine suggestive e l'incitamento a lottare contro l'autorità, per cambiare la società ed abbattere il dominio borghese. Per essi Mao e la Cina divennero modelli, l'alternativa ideale e la giustificazione per una rivolta contro il sistema, vennero usati non per ciò che realmente furono ma per come li si immaginava, in polemica con la società occidentale, i suoi costumi, i suoi ideali. (Perotti 1981, 276)⁹

The use of violent strategies of contestation by the Italian university student movements eventually led to the progressive radicalization of the reactionary fringes, turning their political activism into criminal actions designed to attack their opponents, as well as into terrorist activities against the police, magistrates, industrial businessmen, and politicians. Such phenomenon reached its climax in the 1978 with the kidnapping and assassination of the Italian DC leader Aldo Moro, and that had deep consequences for the cultural, political, and social history of the Italian Republic in the whole 1970s and 1980s.¹⁰

The pro-Maoist political organizations and student movements and the PCI had mixed feeling with regards to the PRC and the Cultural Revolution. The internal and international policy of the PCI largely

8 For a comprehensive analysis of the different interpretations of PRC and Mao Zedong by the Italian Left in the 1960s see Niccolai (1998a, 1998b) and Perotti (1981).

9 "In the 1968, students and young men and women regarded the words of Mao Zedong as suggestive watchwords. In these words, they found a motivation to fight against the authorities and the bourgeois power, using slogans such as 'bombard the headquarter,' or 'it is right to rebel,' and 'it is possible to rebel.' Mao and China become their models, their idealistic alternative [to Italian society], as well as their justification to rebel against the system. Mao and China were, however, used by them not as real and factual things, but as products of their imagination, and in contrast with western society, habits and ideals" (Perotti 1981, 276).

10 See: Jan Kurtz and Marica Tolomelli "Italy," and Dorothea Houser "Terrorism," in Martin Klimke, and Joachim Scharloth. *1968 in Europe. A history of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillian, 2008.

depended on the progressive deterioration of both the relations between the PRC and the Soviet Union, as well as between the PCI and the CCP, both of which were having significant impact on the whole spectrum of the Italian leftist intelligentsia. The PCI in particular, while taking the side of the Soviet Union, also tried to situate itself in an intermediate position and promote dialogue between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China in order to gain more importance internationally. On the one hand, the PCI sought to preserve its autonomy from the PCSU's guidelines as well as the ideological stand of the CCP. On the other hand, the PCI promoted the political strategy of the PCI historical figure Palmiro Togliatti, whose main aims were the polycentrism among the communist parties of the world, their autonomy of action in terms of national affairs and their cooperation in terms of international policies. Therefore, while disapproving of violent means of solving the "internal contradiction" in the Chinese society and defining the Cultural Revolution as the exasperation of the anti-pacifist and sectarian policies of the CCP, key characters of the PCI such as Enrico Berlinguer, Luigi Longo, and Achille Occhetto praised both the originality of Maoism as a sociopolitical discipline seeking the solution for the social unrest and underdevelopment of mid-twentieth-century China (Bordone 1979, 308). The peculiar positioning of the PCI in regard to both Maoist China and the Soviet Union, resulted into the political standstill between the PCI and the CCP which lasted for nearly two decades. The official relationship between PCI and PCP was resumed only in 1980 when the PCI leader Enrico Berlinguer visited the PRC (Samarani, De Giorgi 2011, 122).¹¹ Such a situation greatly affected the way China was represented in the official institutional media of communication controlled by the PCI, particularly *Unità*, by those intellectuals who were close to the PCI such as the writers and journalists Luca Pavolini and Gianni Rodari which will be discussed in this chapter. This even caused the ostracization of other intellectuals in the ranks of the PCI for being too enthusiastic about Maoism, such as the journalists and politicians Maria Antonietta Macciocchi and her husband Alberto Iacoviello.

11 See also Höbel (2005, 515–572).

The list of Italian writers, journalists, and politicians visiting the country in the 1960s and 1970s is longer than that of the Italian intellectuals visiting the country in the previous decade, regardless of the tense relationship between the official Italian and Chinese political organizations, and the absence of official diplomatic ties between the two countries in this period. Accompanied by the feminist writer Dacia Maraini, the novelist and journalist Alberto Moravia traveled to the People's Republic of China in 1967 as a correspondent of *Corriere della Sera*. Partially published by *Corriere della Sera*, his narratives, were collated as a book and entitled *La Rivoluzione Culturale in Cina, ovvero il convitato di pietra* (1967). One year earlier, the writer and journalist Goffredo Parise reported from the PRC for *Corriere della Sera*. His narratives are published in the book *Cara Cina* (1966). The Neoavanguardia writer, journalist and translator Giorgio Manganelli (*Cina e altri orienti*, 1974) toured China in 1972 as a reporter for the newspaper *Il Giorno*. The writer and journalist Gianni Rodari (*Turista in Cina*, 1974) visited China in September and October 1971 and published his considerations on the PRC on *Unità* and *Paese Sera*. The journalist and politician Luca Pavolini (*Due Viaggi in Cina*, 1973) traveled to the PRC a reporter for *Unità* in 1971 and 1973. The journalist Alberto Jacoviello and his wife, the feminist writer, journalist, and politician Maria Antonietta Macciocchi visited the country together in 1970 and 1972, in a formal delegation – and they are the first members of the PCI to be officially accepted in China after the PCI-CCP standstill. Macciocchi published *Dalla Cina* in 1971 and a revised edition in 1974 with Feltrinelli Editore, and Jacoviello, *Capire la Cina* (1972) and in *Cina due anni dopo* (1973). Among the Italian artists, intellectuals, and politicians visiting the country there was also the movie director Michelangelo Antonioni. Invited by the Chinese government to visit the country to produce a documentary on Maoist China in 1972, *Chung Kuo, Cina*, Antonioni was at the center of a political debate in the PRC, as his documentary was harshly criticized by the CCP. Antonioni's documentary was banned from screening in China until 2004.¹²

12 On the topic, see Xin Liu, "China's Reception of Michelangelo Antonioni's *Chung Kuo*" in *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies* 2(1), 2014, 23–40; and Stefano Bona, "Italian Film-Makers in China and Changing Cultural

In comparison with the triumphalist narrativization of PRC from the preceding decade characterized by the analogy to the Resistance in Italy with the anti-nationalist and anti-Japanese wars in China, as well as the emphasis on the common cause of anti-fascism, the narratives of the 1960s follow a different pattern. The travel narratives on China analyzed in this chapter were still influenced by the anti-fascist struggle and the myth of the Italian Resistance, and shaped the way many authors approached and depicted Maoist China. At the same time, after the Sino-Soviet split, the majority of the Italian writers, journalists, and politicians investigated the supposed specificity of Maoism as an instrument of ideological analysis and political action alternative to Soviet socialism, thus diffusing valuable though ideologically oriented information of the PRC among the Italian readership (Samarani and De Giorgi 2011, 120). Maoist China was perceived both as anti-Stalinist and anti-American; third-worldist and anti-imperialist; as well as “anti-revisionist” and anti-hierarchical. Compared to the representation and narrativization of China in the 1950s, there was a change in the analysis of the significance of Maoist society in theoretical terms. The “theoretical” shift from a Marxist historicism toward the scientific and sociological analysis of the relations of production in Maoist society, is clearly visible in the different language used to describe Maoist society, both drawing from Marxist theory and the theoretical concepts circulating in the spheres of international communism and relative to the latter developments of Soviet Union (such as revisionism, cult of the personality, and others). In such a context, the comparison between Italian and Chinese societies shifted to a subliminal level, implying also the re-assessment of the distance between the Italy and China. While the two countries were still regarded as spiritually similar, China was elevated to the level of an exemplary and utopian society.

More importantly, unlike the narrativization of the PRC from the preceding decade by leftist intellectuals, the depictions of China from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, were rather heterogeneous, even contradictory,

Perceptions: Comparing Chung Kuo–China (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1972) and *La Stella che non c'è* (Gianni Amelio, 2006) in *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies* 2(1), 2014, 41–58.

since they expressed the politics and ideology of their authors and their stand in relation to the leftist political organizations of the time. The narratives by the non-aligned Alberto Moravia and Goffredo Parise were rather pessimistic in comparison with those of the pro-Maoist Maria Antonietta Macciocchi. At the same time, the narratives from the three authors all differed from those produced by Luca Pavolini and Gianni Rodari, who wrote for two PCI newspapers, *Unità* and *Paese Sera*. Finally, the impressions of Maoist China by Giorgio Manganelli are totally opposite to those of the above-mentioned authors as they express Manganelli's political disengagement. Nonetheless, the depictions of China from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s did not lose their functionality as textual spaces for shaping distinct Italian political identities.

The Purity of Poverty, or Maoism as a Religion

Tutto sommato sono pretini e monachine fasciste, per dirla in breve fanatici e militaristi. Vedi un po' tu che allegria!

– Parise 1989, 1654¹³

Goffredo Parise and Alberto Moravia both traveled to China during the early phase of the Cultural Revolution. They both traveled as “unofficial” visitors because of the deteriorating relations between the CCP and the Italian leftist intelligentsia. Their travels were still organized by the China Travel Agency, the Party's agency that managed every aspect of all foreigners touring the People's Republic of China since 1949, and combined a series of scheduled activities and interviews and interaction with selected Chinese people, wage workers, peasants, writers, and cadres, guided by local interpreters. Their itineraries and scheduled

13 “All in all, they are like tiny fascist priests and nuns. In brief, they are fanatics and militarists. Just imagine how fun it all can be!” (Parise 1989, 1654) Parise wrote this comment in a private letter to Giosetta Fioroni from Nanjing, dated May 3, 1966.

activities largely corresponded to those of other Italian intellectuals who had visited the country in the preceding decade. However, the attitude of both Parise and Moravia is quite different from that of their predecessors. Parise and Moravia seldom justified the official discourse on the greatness of post-independence Chinese society, as well as the before/after rhetoric. Instead, they emphasized the strong ideological and even propagandistic nature of the Maoist society. On some occasions, they were skeptical of the reality presented to them and even refer to information control. More importantly, while they were animated by Chinese historical events, the portraits of Maoist China proposed by Parise and Moravia also reflected their ideas of political activism, as well as their relationships with the official Italian leftist organizations of the time. Finally, their depictions of China reveal their skepticism for both the United States and the Soviet Union, and their, respectively, capitalist and socialist models of developments.

Parise's political collocation is rather peculiar considering the time. He had leftist ideas but he was not consummately engaged into politics, nor was he affiliated with any political party and extra-parliamentarian organization in spite of the general political activism of the time. At the same time, as the Italian literary critic Armando Balduino argued, Parise was certainly not politically disengaged. He was rather an intellectual with no ideological straitjackets (Balduino 1997, 80–82).¹⁴ His discontent for the political activism characterizing Italy in the late 1960 and early 1970s emerged in the publication of his short story collection *Sillabario n.1* (1972), for which he was openly criticized as “reactionary” in Italian newspapers (Parise 1987, LVII).¹⁵ His peculiar political position stands out in his portrayal of the Chinese society during the years of the Cultural Revolution.

Goffredo Parise traveled to China in the spring of 1966.¹⁶ The writer and journalist felt the necessity to visit China after a trip to the United

14 See Armando Balduino “i ‘miti’ americani di Parise” in Ilaria Crotti, ed., *Goffredo Parise*. Venice: Leo S. Olschki, 1998, 79–97.

15 See also Bruno Callegher and Mario Portello's notes to *Sillabario n.1* in Parise 1989, 1633–1635.

16 Goffredo Parise traveled again to the PRC in 1969 and published the following newspaper articles for the magazine *Espresso*: “Qui parla Pechino” (May 25, 1969),

States, as he wanted to see “l'altra civiltà di massa esistente al mondo” (Parise 1989, 1653).¹⁷ Parise was both critical and fascinated by the United States and he was greatly interested in its consumeristic-technological model of development which he saw as expanding worldwide, and to which he contrasted to the “utopico recupero di perduti valori etico-esistenziali” (Balduino 1997, 95–96).¹⁸ In the first accounts of his Chinese journey, Parise gradually moved from the canonical view of China characterizing most of the 1950s, to a portrait of the country as the archetype of socialist society:

Sono a Canton da poche ore: è il crepuscolo di una stagione molto simile alla primavera siciliana, umida, calda e profumata di gelsomino e di acacia. Passeggio lungo il Fiume delle Perle osservando le manovre delle giunche che rientrano silenziose dal piccolo commercio nei villaggi sulle sponde verso nord e lasciano cadere di colpo la grande vela a forma d'ala di pipistrello. Dentro le giunche, alla luce di lumini a olio o di lampade al carburo donne accovacciate e bambini agitano le bacchette dalla ciotola del riso alla bocca con rapidità e la frenesia di insetti e farfalle. A poppa un uomo e una ragazza dai lunghi capelli sciolti, vestita di un pigiama nero e lucido, la pagodina di paglia abbottonata sulla schiena, muovono lentamente il grande remo alla maniera dei gondolieri veneziani.

... Sulla strada, a pochi metri dalla giunca ecco un'altra immagine della Cina che invece non ha nulla di tradizionale e convenzionale: ai piedi di alti e vecchi palazzi di stile europeo operai e contadini passeggiano, in grandissimo numero, vestiti più o meno allo stesso modo, uomini e donne, cioè con l'abito della nuova Cina che è quello che si vede in tutte le fotografie di Mao Tse-tung [Mao Zedong]. Passeggiano a piedi o in bicicletta, con la sportina di plastica in mano, una specie di borsetta d'aereo, vagamente sorridenti e, si direbbe, estaticamente e ipnoticamente felici. (Parise 1999, 5–6)¹⁹

“Gli occhi della Cina” (June 1, 1969), “Da Maometto a Mao” (August 3, 1969), and “La Cina in Italia” (September 6, 1969).

17 “... the other mass civilization in the world” (Parise 1989, 1653).

18 “... utopian recovery of lost ethical and existential values” (Balduino 1998, 95–96).

19 “I arrived in Canton a few hours. It is dusk. The weather is very similar to a humid, hot, acacia and jasmine scented Sicilian spring. I stroll along the Pearl River and I look at the junks unfurling their big batwing-shaped sails as they approach the shore, as they return from their petty trading with the villages in the Northern shore. Inside the junks, under the dim light of carbide oil lamps, there are squatting women and children rapidly and frantically eating rice with their chopsticks, like insects and butterflies. Abreast, a man and a young girl with loose hair and wearing a bright black pajama, with a pagoda-shaped hat on her shoulder, slowly move a

In the first image, the main characteristics of the narrativization of China during the Fascist Ventennio and during the 1950s seem to merge: the similarity of the “humid, hot, acacia and jasmine scented Canton” to Sicilian summers, as well as the resemblance of the Chinese couple to Venetian gondoliers are counterbalanced by the taste for the eccentric, visible in the description of the batwing-shaped sail and the two gondoliers dressed in glossy black pyjamas, and the zoomorphic description of some Chinese women and children eating like insects and butterflies. More importantly, Parise defined such an image as “exotic though familiar,” and “traditional and conventional,” and therefore as meaninglessness (6) in comparison with the portrait of Maoist China, which he described as an ecstatically happy multitude of “wage-workers and peasants walking beneath tall, European-style old buildings, and all wearing the same dress, the same one that you see in all Mao Zedong’s pictures” (*ibid.*). In both images, however, China, the Chinese civilization and the Chinese people, were perceived and narrated as the Other, as the opposite of Italy, the Western civilization and even of Western people.

Parise described the Chinese people as ecstatically, hypnotically happy (*ibid.*), distracted and child-like (8–9), and overall likable. More importantly, Parise was struck by the poverty of the Chinese people he saw wandering through the streets of Beijing with “*la naturalezza, la semplicità, l’umana dignità che manca a qualsiasi altro povero di ogni parte del mondo*” (10); and by the moving purity of their lives, which he defined as in void of any vulgarity (17–18).²⁰ Even in materialistic terms, the level of poverty never approached misery (24). An element of Chinese purity, according

big oar together like Venetian gondoliers ... A few meters away from the junk, on the road there is another image of China, which is not the traditional and conventional at all. At the bottom of tall, old European-like building a big number of peasants and wage-workers are strolling around. They are dressed all in the same way, men and women. They wear the uniforms of the New China, the same as that in all the pictures of Mao Zedong. They walk or bike around, holding a small plastic bag which looks like a travel bag. They all smile and they look ecstatically, hypnotically happy” (Parise 1999, 5–6).

20 “... with such a simplicity, naturalness and human dignity peerless in the whole world” (Parise 1999, 10).

to Parise, transcended the total politicization of the lives of the Chinese people. And although Parise was also astonished by the primary importance of politics in the lives of the Chinese people, as stated by his young Chinese interpreter (6–10).

Parise based his analysis of China not on Marxist theory, but on his knowledge and experience of the Catholic religion and fascism, which he regarded, respectively, as an ancient ideological dictatorship and a recent military dictatorship (Balduino 1997, 95–96).²¹ Consequently, he defined Maoism as a political theology and the PRC as a “seminario ... dove si studia e si pratica il marxismo-leninismo non come scienza bensì come teologia politica” (Parise 1999, 19).²² He argued that Maoist society had a hierarchical structure similar to the ecclesiastic structure of Catholicism.²³ The idea of Maoism as a totalitarian religion was also shared by Alberto Moravia, as argued further on in this chapter.

Parise did not believe in the symbolic value of the Cultural Revolution as a spontaneous, equalitarian, and innovative act of direct democracy, regardless of the fact that such an idea was increasingly popular among some Italian pro-Maoist intellectuals, politicians, and student groups of the period. Parise, instead, argued for the absence of individual freedom in Maoist society, as well as the absence of the necessary epistemological devices to express individual freedom in the Chinese people (22). While Parise referred to it as a “terremoto nella gerarchia dei dirigenti cinesi” (61), the author, in fact, did not give much space to the impact of the Cultural Revolution in Chinese society.²⁴ Instead, Parise focused on the official starting cause of the sociopolitical phenomenon, which was the prosecution of the Chinese historian and vice-major of Beijing Wu Han, who was

21 “... knowledge and experience of Catholicism and Fascism” (Balduino 1998, 95–96).

22 “... an immense seminary where to study and practice Marxism-Leninism as political theology rather than a science” (Parise 1999, 19).

23 Later on, Parise used again the analogy Chinese communism/religion, in occasion of his visit to the Shanghai Women Association, defining the women at the association as political nuns animated by the Maoist ideological fervour and all dressed in black (114–120).

24 “... an earthquake among the ranks of the Chinese cadres” (Parise 1999, 61).

criticized for his theatrical piece *Dismissal of Hai Rui* (海瑞罢官) by the Chinese literary critic Yao Wenyuan in the renowned article “On the New Historical Play Dismissal of Hai Rui” published in the Shanghai newspaper *Wenhuibao* (文汇报) on November 10, 1965. While the Italian pro-Maoist journals, such as *Vento dell’Est*, focused on the critique of Hai Rui on the basis of Yao Wenyuan’s article and its anti-Mao subliminal content (Niccolai 1998a, 78–79), Parise was principally concerned with gaining a better understanding of the mass criticism received by the theatrical piece written by Wu Han, and its interpretation as an allegory of Peng Dehuai’s criticism of Mao Zedong’s Great Leap in 1959. Parise emphasized the state of uncertainty and malaise of the Chinese intellectuals risking involvement in the purges, and the all-pervasive mediatic resonance of the so-called “Wu Han case” in Maoist society. At the same time, Parise expressed his dissatisfaction with the Chinese intellectuals of the Left Wing Writers Association for taking the side of the Maoist government instead of supporting Wu Han. Moreover, in Parise’s interest for the “Wu Han case” it is also possible to see his criticism of the Italian Leftist intelligentsia of the time. Parise implicitly compared the Chinese and Italian leftist intellectuals, emphasizing that while the former had gone through the Long March, the latter had gone through the “salotto e coccodè,” or the chitchatting in social and cultural gatherings (1999, 62).

The critique of the ideological control that Western tourists were subjected to in the PRC is another main characteristic of Parise’s travel narratives differentiating him from pro-Maoist Italian intellectuals visiting the country, such as Macciocchi and Iacoviello, who will be discussed later in this chapter.²⁵ Parise sarcastically vented his dissent concerning the strong ideological and even propagandistic interference of the Chinese Communist Party in the information presented to all Western travelers. As outlined by Di Nucci (1988, 671–673), Parise disliked the rigidity of the itinerary organized by CCP’s China Travel Agency, as well as the omnipresence of his Chinese interpreters. Moreover, Parise identified the fictitious

25 Alberto Moravia too mentions being exposed to information control, in particular staged interviews (Moravia 1973a, 95). However, he does not give much attention to such issues.

nature of the interviews of Chinese people, particularly those undertaken in a visit to an agricultural commune (Parise 1999, 83–90), a Chinese factory (91–97), or even that of a Chinese actress (120):

Quello che mi colpisce, come in ogni altro luogo di lavoro che ho visitato fino a questo momento, è che le persone che incontro sono sempre membri del partito, poi che le frasi sono uguali, alla lettera. I termini di confronto sono sempre: prima della liberazione, dopo la liberazione; nella vecchia società, nella nuova società. E molte altre che sembrano uscire, e infatti escono, da un libro stampato. Inoltre, mi colpisce una certa contraddizione tecnica nelle spiegazioni, che però coincide con la coerenza ideologica. (91–92).²⁶

Finally, Parise questioned the significance of travelling to China in his time. On the one hand, he remarked that the Italian travelers to China were the expression of the “convenzione ideologica e politica del gruppo etico a cui appart[engono]” (76)²⁷; and on the other hand he argued that China had become “la massa prevedibile, senza ombre e indiretta (Cina comunista) ... appartenente ad una uguale anche se opposta convenzione” (ibid.).²⁸ Consequently, in his concluding remarks, Parise distinguished between the cultural experience of China and of the Chinese civilization and the political experience of Maoist society. He remarked with dissatisfaction that, during his Chinese journey, he had been able to experience only the extent of a political China and its application of the Marxist ideology in the People’s Republic of China:

26 “I am astonished at finding out that in each working place that I have been to until this moment, the people I have met are always party cadres. And that their sentences are always the same ones, word by word. The terms of comparison are always: before the liberation, after the liberation; and in the old society, but the new society. And many other ones, that seem to come from – as they for sure do – a book. Apart from that, I am astonished at finding that the technical contradictions present in their explanations are ideologically coherent” (Parise 1999, 91–92).

27 “... ideological and political conventional knowledge of their ethnic group” (Parise 1999, 76).

28 “... a shade-less, devious and unpredictable multitude belonging to an equivalent though opposite convention” (Parise 1999, 76).

Se un viaggiatore accetta come strumento di conoscenza l'ideologia marxista che ... copre tutta la Cina, può dire, teoricamente senza possibilità di errore, di conoscere quel paese in un solo giorno. Se non accetta questo strumento di conoscenza (e non lo deve accettare) può dire di avere compiuto un viaggio, lungo o breve non ha importanza, attraverso una serie pressoché infinità di fenomeni a lui sconosciuti e sarà facilmente portato a concludere di non aver capito nulla. (1999, 218)²⁹

While maintaining a leftist eye on Maoist China and speculating on PRC's importance on a global scale, Alberto Moravia too did not accept the dogmatic Marxist approach characterizing the intellectuals akin to the PCI. As a non-aligned leftist intellectual Moravia disapproved of the strategy of the PCI of supporting Soviet Union. Instead, he sympathized with the Marxist-Leninist movements and student organizations, although they in turn saw in Moravia elements of the Old Left.³⁰

The travel narratives that Moravia wrote as a result of his 1967 visit to the People's Republic of China were published in *Corriere della Sera*, and collected in the book: *La Rivoluzione Culturale in Cina, ovvero il convitato di pietra* (1967). Similarly to Goffredo Parise, Alberto Moravia was enthusiastic about the poverty in Maoist China. Moravia argued that poverty was the chief characteristic of the PRC. The Italian writer saw in such poverty a purifying and salvific condition of the Chinese people implying the total absence of wealth inequality and the "inhumanity of wealth" and, consequently, of social classes (Moravia 1973a, 8–9). Furthermore, Moravia located the origins of the Chinese purity exactly in the "estensione alla vita

29 "If a traveler is willing to take the Marxist ideology as the instrument of knowledge encompassing China as a whole, he/she can theoretically and flawlessly say that he/she knows China even after a day. If, on the other hand, a traveler does not accept such an instrument of knowledge – and he should not accept it – he/she can say that during his/her travel he/she has experienced a series of phenomena which he/she does not know. And, therefore, he must conclude that he/she did not understand China at all" (Parise 1999, 218).

30 During a student assembly at La Sapienza University in 1968, students accused him of working for what was regarded as a capitalist, bourgeois newspaper, and erroneously arguing that Moravia was closely connected to the PCI. Therefore, they contested his presence yelling at him slogans such as "Mao sì, Moravia no!" or "Corriere della Sera!" (Paris 1996, 300–302).

urbana dei valori e dei costumi della campagna” (1973a, 175).³¹ The special status of poverty of Maoist society, according to the Italian intellectual, rendered Maoist China an exemplary “utopia realizzata” exemplary for the mankind (8–10),³² though he specified that such a utopian condition was transient rather than a normal, durable, and historical condition (14).

Moravia, like Parise initially suggested the physical resemblance of Chinese cities and landscapes to Italian ones: “Canton è una città di portici, una specie di Bologna cinese affogata dall’umidità, nell’afa, nella promiscuità delirante dei tropici” (38).³³ At the same time, in his travel narrative, Moravia emphasized the alterity and unique nature of the People’s Republic of China. Being the new socialist utopia, the model of alternative development, Moravia described it as a transcending place. Moravia’s first observations after crossing the border between PRC and Hong Kong – between capitalism and socialism – represented the traveler’s awareness of his/her entrance into a political situation rather than into a physical country, the situation to be found in Maoist Society in the years of the Cultural Revolution (35), whose all-pervading propaganda obliterated the physical China. In this regard Moravia’s initial observation of the PRC were directly linked to Parise’s epilogue and final observations of the PRC:

Appena passato il confine, a Lu Wu, tra la colonia inglese di Hong Kong e la Repubblica Popolare Cinese, ci accorgiamo subito che non stiamo entrando in un paese ma in una situazione. Il paese è la Cina: risaie allagate che scintillano al sole, selve di bambù su per le colline verdissime, gialli villaggi colore del fango seccato misto con paglia, contadini coi i pantaloni rimboccati al ginocchio, chini sui solchi. La questa Cina fisica di oggi, di ieri e, senza dubbio anche di domani, appare obliterata dalla Cina della situazione. La quale poi è quella universalmente nota della Rivoluzione Culturale

31 “... extension to urban life of rural values usage” (Moravia 57, 1973b) Moravia used the terms puritanism to define the set of social practices aiming at the purification of the Chinese people, though distinguishing it from the idea of British puritanism” (Moravia 1973a, 175).

32 “... achieved utopia” (Moravia 1973a, 8).

33 “Canton is a city of arcades, a kind of Chinese Bologna drowned in the humidity, sultriness and delirious promiscuity of the tropics” (Moravia 1973b, 31).

... la Rivoluzione Culturale ha la consistenza di una realtà che prima ancora che alla mente si offre e si impone ai sensi. (1973a, 35)³⁴

As stated earlier in this chapter, Moravia too described Maoism as a religion. The mass mobilization that resulted from the Cultural Revolution was regarded by the Italian intellectual as a major religious event. Moravia's first impression of the Red Guards was that of a group of young Chinese women all dressed alike, marching and chanting Maoist slogans aloud while holding Mao's *Little Red Book* and playing the accordion and the drums. Those scenes immediately reminded Moravia of the folkloristic dances and songs of Italian religious feasts, thus acquiring both a religious and a peasant origin in the eyes of the Italian writer (37). Similarly, he connected the omnipresent portraits of Mao to Catholic religious iconography (*ibid.*), and the *Little Red Book* to a breviary that each Red Guard would faithfully carry around everywhere (48).

On the other hand, in the same scene, Moravia introduced the "obsessive presence" of the *dazibao*, which he described as unintelligible, unpredictable, threatening, and ultimately Kafkaesque, since Moravia did not speak or read Chinese language. Moravia regarded the *dazibao* as an absolute innovative character of Maoist politics and the Cultural Revolution and thus as a symbol of its ultimate alterity (1973a, 37–38). Maoist socialism was thus a symbol of the "grande differenza tra Europa e Asia,"³⁵ emphasizing both the alterity of China, and the uniqueness of the Maoist revolutionary experience (54).

34 "As soon as we crossed the border, at Lu Wu, between the British colony of Hong Kong and the Chinese People's Republic, we realized that we were not entering a country but a situation. The country is China: flooded rice paddies sparkling in the sun, bamboo forests growing up bright green hills, yellow villages the color of dries mud mixed with straw, peasants with their trousers rolled up in the knees bending over the furrows. But this physical China of today, yesterday, and undoubtedly tomorrow seems obliterated by China the situation. A situation, by the way, that is known throughout the world as the Cultural Revolution ... the Cultural Revolution has the consistency of a reality that, before it is offered to the mind, is imposed on the senses" (Moravia 29, 1973b).

35 "... the great difference between Europe and Asia" (Moravia 42 1973b).

More importantly, Moravia described the Cultural Revolution as the “avvenimento politico più importante che si sia verificato nel mondo comunista dopo la destalinizzazione” (1973a, 57).³⁶ Hence, in Moravia’s opinion, the whole point of legitimating the Cultural Revolution as a “lotta per l’ortodossia, di specie ideologica e religiosa” (107),³⁷ resided in the specific character of Maoism which stood in opposition to the socialist model of development of the Soviet Union. A peculiarity that Moravia also detected in the different leaderships of Mao, Stalin, and even Khrushchev:

Il dibattito verte su un punto molto semplice anche se importantissimo: è più ortodosso il sistema russo dalla direzione partitica dall’alto o quello maoista della direzione delle masse dal basso? Ecco tutto ... Ma Mao non è Stalin. Mao non vuole il potere personale attraverso la violenza, come Stalin. Mao l’educatore, Mao il dialettico, vuole il potere ideologico attraverso la persuasione e l’educazione. (1973a, 107)³⁸

Certo Kruscev avrà un posto nella storia per aver abbattuto il mito menzognero di Stalin; ma sarà un posto, inevitabilmente, di specie negativa. Mao, invece, secondo noi, avrà un posto positivo; e non soltanto per motivi “nazionali,” cioè cinesi, ossia per aver salvato la Cina dalla catastrofe; ma anche per avere creato un’ideologia nuova capace di soppiantare l’ideologia sovietica. (1973a, 113)³⁹

By describing the sociopolitical and economic development of the PRC’s internal and international’s post-1956 policies, as well as the

36 “... the most important political event that has taken place in the Communist world since de-Stalinization” (Moravia 43, 1973b).

37 “... a struggle for orthodoxy of an ideological and religious order” (Moravia 76, 1973b).

38 “The conflict concerns a simple but extremely important point: which is more orthodox – the Russian system of party control from above or the Maoist system of leadership by the masses from below? That is all that there is to it ... But Mao is not Stalin. Mao does not want personal power based on violence, as Stalin did. Mao the educator, Mao the dialectician wants ideological power based on persuasion and education” (Moravia 1973b, 76).

39 “Khrushchev will have a place in history because he demolished the false myth of Stalin, but his place will necessarily be on a negative order. I believe Mao will have a positive place, not just for ‘national’ – that is, Chinese – reasons, for having saved China from catastrophe, but for having created a new ideology capable of supplanting Soviet ideology” (Moravia 1973b, 79).

contrasting roles of Mao Zedong in Chinese society and Stalin's in the Soviet Union, Moravia, showed his own political stand with regards to the leftist intelligentsia and the proliferation of pro-Maoist, extra-parliamentarian and student organizations in opposition to the PCI and PSI. Moravia's proximity to those organizations is also visible in his considerations on Chinese university students. After interviewing a group of Chinese university students concerning their primary role in the Cultural Revolution in contesting the structures of power (the CCP and the schooling system), Moravia's conclusion was that those students were comparable to the young crusaders of the fifth crusade (1212 AD) for their naivety, ignorance, and total trust in Mao Zedong (102). This in turn echoes his conclusion on the Italian students during the 1968 movement: "I giovani del Sessantotto, e quelli che sono venuti dopo, pensano che il mondo vada cambiato, cambiato con la violenza, ma non vogliono sapere perché, e come cambiarlo. Non vogliono conoscerlo, e dunque non vogliono conoscere sé stessi." (Moravia 1994, XXI).⁴⁰

Aware of the decade long debates on the noxiousness of the Stalinist cult personality on Soviet society, the *Little Red Book* also introduced, according to Moravia, the main distinction between the cult of Mao in the PRC and the cult of Stalin in the Soviet Union. Moravia distinguished the former from the latter, defining the former as a cult of thought rather than of the man, embodied by the *Little Red Book*, and characterized by a "religiosità contadina e primitiva" (peasant, primitive religiousness) (1973a, 53). Furthermore, Moravia justified the attention on the Chinese chairman, firstly suggesting that in socialist economies, and especially in the PRC, the social and economic development mainly depended on the will of its leader, and secondly, required a complete identification of China's – not only the PRC's contemporary history – with Mao's life (58–59).

Alberto Moravia referred again to Mao Zedong's cult of personality in the last days of their Chinese journey. In Beijing, the Italian writer felt haunted by the image of a big white gypsum Stalinist-styled statue of Mao

40 "The youth from 1968 onwards think that the world needs to be changed with violence. But they do not want to know why and how the world needs to be changed. They do not want to know the world itself, therefore they do now want to know themselves" (Moravia 1994, XXI).

surrounded by red steps and adorned with flowers “come nelle nostre chiese intorno all’altare del santo” (182),⁴¹ which he saw in the atrium of the deserted *Albergo delle Nazionalità* [Heping Hotel]. That statue showed, according to Moravia, the obsessive usage of the cult of personality for political reasons in Maoist society, albeit Moravia still preferred to distinguish between Stalin and Mao Zedong, whom he, respectively, described as a bloodthirsty dictator and the peaceful father of the Chinese people (182–183). Apart from that, Moravia’s sight of the gypsum statue of Mao, most importantly, was described as symbolical of Moravia’s entire experience of the People’s Republic of China. That same night that Moravia saw the gypsum statue of Mao, Moravia and his companion Dacia Maraini were invited for a dinner in a renowned restaurant to taste the Beijing duck. On that occasion, Moravia referred to the statue of the commander in Moliere’s comedy *Dom Juan ou le festin de pierre*. In the play’s fourth act, the statue appears to Don Juan and his servant Sganarelle and, refusing to take part to their supper, he invites Don Juan to dine with him on the following day; day in which, in the fifth act, Don Juan is judged guilty by the statue and sent to hell. Moravia’s identification with Don Juan was therefore symbolic of the impossibility of the Italian writer to repent and his consequential damnation through his return to the hell of capitalistic society.

Finally, it is worth noting that Moravia’s idea of Maoist China also reveals the influence of the fascist representation of the country, especially because Moravia had visited China in the 1937 as a young reporter for *La Stampa*. Moravia referred to the China as an isolationist and even self-referential civilization (73), and to the Cultural Revolution also as “una specie di Grande Muraglia autarchica e nazionalista” (85)⁴² aiming at the closure of the PRC in order to create an “una immobilità assoluta e duratura” (ibid.).⁴³ On the occasion of his visit to the Great Wall, Moravia brought the matter of the presumed isolationist and conservative nature of the Chinese civilization up again and he defined the Great Wall like the shell of a lobster (143) – and China itself as a “paese aragosta” (lobster

41 “... like there is in Catholic churches around the altar of a saint” (Moravia 1973b, 128).

42 “... a kind of Great Wall, despotic and nationalistic ...” (Moravia 1973b, 61).

43 “... an absolute and enduring immobility” (Moravia 1973b, 62).

country) (137). Among the other stereotypical notions that recall the Fascist representation of China there was Moravia's claim of the presence in Contemporary China of a kind of patriotism with strong xenophobic and nationalist connotations (1973a, 163).

The Red Heart of the Revolution

Per conto mio, io avevo deciso di non seguire, sotto alcuna forma, la furbizia diplomatica che accompagna il PCI nel piano internazionale e di non badare – come ogni onesto militante deve “osare fare” all’atto di impegnare una lotta politica – al prezzo che ciò mi sarebbe costato. Decisi così di scrivere, senza subire alcuna censura, un libro sulla Cina della rivoluzione culturale, che fosse un atto politico. (Macciocchi 1974, 9)⁴⁴

The politicians and journalists Maria Antonietta Macciocchi and her husband Alberto Iacoviello traveled to China in 1970 and 1972. As active members of the PCI they were regarded as an exception by the CCP and allowed a semi-formal visit to the country (Macciocchi 1972, 18). Macciocchi oftentimes emphasized that they were treated as special tourists by the Chinese authorities rather than as Communist comrades (1971, 21), thus hinting at the tense relationship between the PCI and the CCP, continuing regardless of Italy's formal recognition of the People's Republic of China on November 6, 1970. The original motivation of Macciocchi's trip to the PRC was to gather “un'informazione diretta sulla vita cinese e sull'azione del partito [comunista cinese]” (Macciocchi 1971, 15), initially under the advice of Mario Alicata, chief of

44 “I made my decision of not following, in any way, the diplomatic cunning that characterized the PCI at the international level. And I did so, regardless of the price that I would have to pay, just like any honest militant must ‘dare’ to act. So, I decided to write a censure-free book on China during the Cultural Revolution as a political act” (Macciocchi 1974, 9).

the newspaper *Unità* in 1966.⁴⁵ However, the aim of Macciocchi in 1971 became that of narrating her own idea of Maoist China during and after the Cultural Revolution regardless of the guidelines suggested to her by the Italian Communist Party, as evident in the above-quoted text from Macciocchi's 1974 Italian edition of *Dalla Cina*.

Dalla Cina was circulated widely in Italy and France, and reprinted and re-edited in the years that followed, and was widely and positively received among the Italian and French readership.⁴⁶ In Italy, Macciocchi and the publisher Giacomo Feltrinelli hoped to spark a constructive discussion among the Italian Left and to obtain the open support of the PCI (Macciocchi 1973, 7), however the PCI firmly disapproved of Macciocchi and Iacoviello's positive, acritical and enthusiastic portrayal of China (Macciocchi 1974, 8). As a result, in 1972, the PCI decided not to support the candidacy of Macciocchi to the Italian general elections in the same year, and dismissed her as a party official. Similarly, Alberto Iacoviello was dismissed as the head of the Foreign Policy department in the PCI's official newspaper *Unità*. In France, *Dalla Cina* sparked an intense public debate resulting in conferences, talks and newspaper articles on the matter, at times very critical on the validity of Macciocchi's work.⁴⁷ The Parti Communiste Français (PCF) immediately showed its dissent and skepticism for Macciocchi's depiction of China. In November 1971, *Dalla Cina* was in fact not accepted for display at the *Fête de l'Humanité/Festival of Humanity*, organized by the

45 "... to gather first-hand information concerning Chinese life and the activities of the [Chinese] Party" (Macciocchi, 1972, 9).

46 *Dalla Cina* was published in two versions published in 1971 and 1974, both by Feltrinelli Editore. The 1971 version refers to Macciocchi's travel in China in 1970, and it is translated into French and English. The 1974 version refers to the travels of Macciocchi in 1970 and 1973, and has a supplementary chapter focusing on the "Lin Biao incident" and the 10th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (August 24–28, 1973).

47 See Hervé Serry, "Les conditions éditoriales d'un essai à succès: De la Chine de Maria-Antonieta Macciocchi aux Editions du Seuil" in *Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, figure intellectuelle et passeur politique des années Vincennes*, Actes des conférences, organisées le 7 avril 2009, Université Paris-8. Url: <<http://www.pilefacebis.com/sollers/IMG/pdf/colloque%20MAM%202009%20.pdf>>.

newspaper *L'Humanité*, the official journal of the PCF. A few months later, Macciocchi's book was harshly criticized by the French historian Antoine Casanova and the journalist Jacques de Bonis on *Nouvelle Critique*, which was created by PCF, and directed since 1968 by the French journalist Francis Cohen. Such harsh critiques as well as the exclusion of *Dalla Cina* from the festival, caused the reaction of many influential French leftist intellectuals (such as Charles Bettelheim, Philippe Sollers, Guy Scarpetta, Michelle Loi, and others) against the PCF, resulting also into the *casus belli* for the split between the Tel Quel group and the PCF.⁴⁸

In addition to the official reports released by the CCP “per essere res[i] public[i] ad amici communisti stranieri” (Macciocchi 1971, 342), Macciocchi portrayed Maoist China and the Cultural Revolution through the direct accounts from roundtables with students and professors from Tsinghua University, party cadres attending May Seventh Schools (五七干校), and workers from the Factory 17 in Shanghai.⁴⁹ Macciocchi described such roundtables and interviews as moving and inspirational – exceptional experiences that provided first-hand data and valuable informants that “ci hanno offerto, su un vassoio, il cuore della rivoluzione culturale” (Macciocchi, 1971, 82).⁵⁰ Macciocchi's personal observations and reflections on China often served as concluding remarks on the topics that emerged from those conversations, and always implied a comparison between the PRC and Italy often emphasizing the differences between the two countries. Such differences were perceived as chiefly political and ideological, and reputed to be at the basis for the supposed primacy of the PRC as a model for socialist development.

Macciocchi's first image of 1970 China is that of the country of the Cultural Revolution: “la Cina di Mao Tze-tung [Mao Zedong], antimperialista, anticapitalista, antirevisionista, che porta nel suo cuore

48 See Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, *Polemiche sulla Cina*, Milan: Feltrinelli, 1973; and François Hourmant “L'affaire Macciocchi et la radicale palinodie de Tel Quel” in *Le Désenchantement des Clercs. Figures de l'intellectuel dans l'après-Mai 68*, Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015, 17–55.

49 “... for publication by Communist friends from abroad (Macciocchi 1972, 323).

50 “... taking us into the very heart of the Cultural Revolution ...” (Macciocchi 1972, 75).

rosso la rivoluzione” (Macchiocchi 1971, 23).⁵¹ Of course, Macciocchi perceived China as a political entity that could be analyzed only by means of the Marxist-Leninist ideology (quoting Marx, Engels and Gramsci, but also Marcuse, Althusser and Bettelheim). The PRC and the Cultural Revolution were therefore contextualized in the history of the worker’s movement (Macciocchi 1972, 467) and compared to past revolutionary experiences, such as the Paris Commune and the October Revolution:

Poiché in Cina ogni realtà è politica, se si adatta il metodo di valutazione marxista-leninista, allora si penetra in questa realtà *per l’essenziale*. L’essenziale sta in una semplice verità assiomatica: in Cina si vivono gli anni di una grande rivoluzione, che è passata, ma che è tuttora presente: la rivoluzione culturale proletaria. Il clima, l’atmosfera che si respira sono rivoluzionari. (Macciocchi 1971, 32)⁵²

As a genuine Maoist intellectual, Macciocchi portrayed the Cultural Revolution as a groundbreaking experience, and she argued for the social and political integration between cadres, intellectuals and masses in Maoist society. Thus, Macciocchi described the Cultural Revolution as “l’attacco durissimo a tutta la scala di valori insiti nella divisione tradizionale del lavoro, allo schema organizzativo della vita produttiva, ereditato dall’industrializzazione – sia capitalistica che post-staliniana” (129).⁵³ As for the cultural aspect of the Cultural Revolution, Macciocchi identified it in the process of implementation of a “linguaggio politico comune” (a common political language), whose symbol was Mao’s *Little Red Book* (195). The *Little Red Book* was therefore supposed to be “il

51 “This is the country of Mao Tze-tung [Mao Zedong]- anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist ad anti-revisionist, the revolution enshrined in its red heart” (Macciocchi, 1972, 17).

52 “Since the Chinese reality is primarily political, the Marxist-Leninist method enables one to grasp the essence of this reality. This essence can be summed up in a simple axiomatic truth: China is living through a great revolution which has been achieved yet continues to pervade everything – the Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The climate, the very atmosphere we breathe, are revolutionary” (Macciocchi 1972, 26).

53 “... basically an implacable war on the values underlying the traditional division of labor, the type of leadership associated with it, and what was left in China of capitalist and later post-Stalinist industry” (Macciocchi 1972, 121).

testo politico unitario per 750 milioni di Cinesi” making it possible for the Chinese to read “parole identiche, dall’identico significato, per fare politica, ma non solo per questo; per aver grandi regole di vita morale e collettiva, per il coraggio, la dedizione, la parsimonia, la modestia” (195).⁵⁴ Similarly, Macciocchi enthusiastically described the Red Guards as a generation of Chinese revolutionary youths akin to the generation of Yan’an [see Figure 16], namely their Chinese forefathers who fought Japanese and Nationalist troops and achieved the reunification of the Country under the leadership of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai. In order to discredit the critical description of the Red Guards as vandals and anarchists by many western intellectuals and academics, Macciocchi stated that the Red Guards were a necessary historical component of any revolutionary process, thus referring both to the French Revolution and the October Revolution (36–37). Macciocchi had enthusiastic views also on the process of re-education of Chinese cadres to socialist thought and agricultural work under Mao’s “May Seventh Directive” (1966). Therefore, the practice of relocating students and cadres in factories and farms for manual work, and peasants and wage workers to universities, was described as a nonviolent revolution, affecting the entire Chinese society homogeneously, and eliminating careerism, egocentrism, and elitism (96).

In accordance to the feminist emancipatory movements characterizing the 1960s, and with her role of member of the *Unione Donne Italiane* (Union of Italian Women – UDI) and former editor of the UDI’s Italian weekly magazine *Noi donne* (We Women), Maria Macciocchi gave chief importance to the role of Chinese women in Maoist society. The author argued that the re-evaluation of the conditions of Chinese women was “uno dei temi di quella rivoluzionizzazione dell’ideologia, che ha caratterizzato la rivoluzione culturale” (Macciocchi 1971, 351),⁵⁵ and acknowledged Mao’s idea of Chinese women being at the forefront of

54 “The Little Red Book is thus the *unifying political work* for 750million Chinese; they can read the same words with the same meanings and apply them not only to their political work, but also in order to have moral and collective rules: courage, devotion, thrift, and modesty” (Macciocchi 1972, 187).

55 “... one of the objects of the ideological transformation that has characterized the Cultural Revolution” (Macciocchi 1972, 351).

political and revolutionary activities (Macciocchi 1972, 352). Macciocchi supported the legal equality of sexes in Maoist society (359), as well as the women's identity being autonomous from their husbands' (353), their possibility of occupying high-level posts (360), and foresaw for Chinese women's a future of total emancipation (360) [see Figures 17 and 18]. Most especially, Macciocchi believed that Chinese women would become the next revolutionary force in Maoist society after the Red Guards (376).

Macciocchi enthusiastically asserted that the Cultural Revolution had ignited the active participation of the masses in the political and social life of the PRC, without the need of political and military coercion (477). In doing so, Macciocchi also marked the difference between Maoist China and Stalinist Soviet Union: "i Cinesi hanno molto ben compreso che la rivoluzione non era soltanto "l'elettrificazione + i soviet," ma anche rivoluzione nell'ideologia, negli apparati "ideologici di stato" (Macciocchi 1971, 473).⁵⁶ The emphasis on the PRC's difference from the Soviet Union is present throughout Macciocchi's book, together with the denigration of Nikita Khrushchev and his politics. The author considered the PRC immune to the post-1956 critiques to the Stalinist model of Soviet Russia, as the Cultural Revolution challenged the same organizational structure of the Soviet model, thus positioning Maoism as the alternative to Stalinism (Macciocchi 1972, 78–79). In disaccord with the PCI's official line on the People's Republic of China and Maoism, Macciocchi praised the Chinese cult of the personality of Mao [see Figure 19], albeit distinguishing it from the Soviet cult of the personality of Stalin, which was abhorred after Khrushchev's Secret Speech of 1956. Macciocchi therefore claimed that "whereas quotations from Stalin were used by the state apparatus in the ideological repression of the masses, Mao's thought teaches them that 'to rebel is justified,' and gives them the freedom to express themselves." (303) Macciocchi distinguished again Stalin from Mao's political authority and states that the nature of Cultural

56 "The Chinese have clearly understood that revolution consists not only of 'soviet power plus electrification,' but also of a revolution in ideology, in the 'state ideological apparatus'" (Macciocchi 1972, 471).

Revolution is “antidogmatica” [anti-dogmatic] (1971, 483), and Mao himself is “essenzialmente l’antidogmatico e l’antiautoritario” (484), and “leninista al cento per cento” (503).⁵⁷

Macciocchi also praised the Cultural Revolution for arguably breaking through the Cold War bipolar blockade, as well as its consequential contribution to the PRC’s gradual consolidation on the geopolitical scene (1972, 113–114). However, the Italian journalist and politician did not conceive of the international role of the PRC as that of the “third block.” Macciocchi, on the contrary, believed that the PRC could represent a pacifist alternative for a “*world without poles* [emphasis of the author]” (1972, 414).⁵⁸ Maoism was therefore regarded by her as the only communist alternative to the social, political, and cultural model of Western Capitalism symbolized by the United States, and its technological barbarism (Macciocchi 1971, 129).⁵⁹ Macciocchi, at the same time, argued that Maoism and the Cultural Revolution were not to be regarded as a model to be transposed mechanically to other countries, but a specific case suited to the concrete situation of China (498), and which needed to be studied in order to find solutions specific to the situation of one’s own country. Therefore, Macciocchi argued that the imposition of a “*modello unico può diventare una trappola paralizzante, anche se questo modello è la Cina*” (Macciocchi 1971, 502), thus echoing the political stand of the PCI, which advocated the possibility for all communist parties to develop a political program in line with the specific sociopolitical and economic situation of their own countries.⁶⁰

57 “... basically anti-dogmatic and antiauthoritarian” (Macciocchi 1972, 482) and “... 100 percent Leninist” (ibid., 500).

58 The section on the positioning in the geopolitical dynamics of the time is not present in the two versions in Italian (Macciocchi 1971 and 1973).

59 Macciocchi’s stand was often anti-American, in line with the widespread anti-Americanism characterizing the 1960s and 1970s in Italy. Curiously, Macciocchi reports the PRC’s anti-Americanism, as well as the readiness of the People’s Liberation Army – and the whole of China – for a Sino-American armed conflict, in spite of the US president Nixon’s imminent official visit to China in 1972 and the consequential establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

60 “A single model can become yet another, paralyzing trap, even if this model happens to be China” (Macciocchi 1972, 499).

As Maoist China and the Chinese people were described as a positive model opposite and complementary to Italy and Italian people, they were functional to self-identification although out *Dalla Cina*. Chinese society was supposedly truthfully egalitarian and just, and the Chinese were authentically politically committed (Macciocchi 1972, 96), while Italians were regarded as apathetic, and Italian society was regarded as hierarchically structured and doomed by capitalism (96). Similarly, everything Chinese was poor, clean, honest, and basic, and thus regarded as exemplary. Macciocchi, therefore, emphasized the Chinese people's purity: "il popolo cinese emana il grande fascino degli uomini puri, quelli senza peccato, per servirsi della nostra nomenclatura" (Macciocchi 1971, 115).⁶¹ Macciocchi also supported the analogy between the Italian Resistance and the People's Liberation Army unification of China in 1949, similarly to the generation of Italian intellectuals who visited China in the 1950s. At the same time, Macciocchi argued for the relevance of the Maoist guerrilla strategy and connected it to her experiences as a partisan during the years of the German occupation of Rome (Macciocchi 1972, 386). Implicitly, such an analogy also showed her political stand in relation to the violent protests by the Italian leftist extra-parliamentarian organizations and university students expressing their dissent against the Italian government and the PCI in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The pro-Maoist propagandistic representation of China by Macciocchi also implied a critique of the different representations of the PRC and the Cultural Revolution by contemporary Western intellectuals, artists and academics who did not share her enthusiasm [Figure 20]. Macciocchi was particularly critical of the attitudes of those experts who criticized Maoist China, and she defined them as bourgeois sinologists (496). The derogatory use of term "sinologist" hinted particularly at the Belgian academic and writer Pierre Ryckmans – whose pseudonym was Simon Leys – and his work *Les Habits Neufs du Président Mao* (1971), which evoked the indignation on the part of many French and Italian "Maoist" intellectuals; but also at Italian figures like Maria Regis and Edoarda Masi, who, as seen earlier,

61 "The Chinese people emanate purity; they are men without sin as it were – using our categories" (Macciocchi 1972, 106).

were among the most influential Italian experts on China, Maoism and the Cultural Revolution. At the same time, Macciocchi used the term to refer to the PCI experts on Chinese politics and culture that analyze Chinese contemporary politics in accordance to the PCI's guidelines, which were influenced by the PCI's ties with the PCSU (15).⁶² Macciocchi was also critical of Western literary intellectuals, and in particular of Moravia and Parise whom she referred to in her book, for portraying China as immeasurably Asian and distant (496). Similarly, Macciocchi also criticized the idea of the religious nature of politics in China, widespread among Western diplomats and journalists, and supported by both Alberto Moravia and Goffredo Parise (109).

Macciocchi's biased portrayal of China included the denial of information control, violent coercion and censorship that both the Chinese people and the foreign visitors were subject to at the time. Concerning the criticism on the PRC's information control both on Chinese people and Western visitors, Macciocchi argued that Western tourists or delegations were not subject to any information control or repressive measures, despite the fact that all tourism in China was solely and exclusively political and that the tourist agency was directly managed by the CCP (385). Macciocchi, therefore, asserted that all the interviews and roundtables were by no means staged (39), and that the recordings of their observations were not checked at the border (118). Similarly, Macciocchi argued that the Chinese people as well did not suffer any political control and repressive measures, since according to her "quello che colpisce, insisto, è l'*assoluta libertà* [emphasis of the original author] di ognuno nel manifestarsi, nel narrare quel che non va, quel che è in contraddizione con la vita di uno stato socialista, senza preoccupazioni gerarchiche di sorta" (Macciocchi 1971, 340–341).⁶³

The apologetic attitude of Macciocchi toward the People's Republic of China is even more explicit when her portrayal of the country is contrasted with the accounts by two influential Italian journalists in the ranks of the PCI who traveled in China during the same years: the journalist and

62 Ryckmans criticized Macciocchi also in his book *Ombres chinoises* (Leys 1974).

63 What is striking – at this point must be stressed – is the *absolute freedom* of each person to express himself, to say what is wrong, what is in contradiction with the life of a socialist state, without the least concern for hierarchy" (Macciocchi, 1972, 320).

vice-head of the PCI newspaper *Unità* Luca Pavolini, and the writer and journalist for Gianni Rodari, who visited China in different delegations in May 1971 and in September and October 1971. The considerations of these two authors were initially published in articles, respectively, for *Unità* and *Paese Sera*, and later collated into books: *Due Viaggi in Cina* (Pavolini 1973), and *Turista in Cina* (Rodari 1974). As active members of the PCI, Pavolini and Rodari's depictions of the country were in line with the official attitude of the Italian Communist Party toward the People's Republic of China. It is also worth noticing that the travel narratives of those two influential intellectuals from the Italian Left did not have the same impact and resonance of Macciocchi's *Dalla Cina*, nor were they subject to harsh critiques, precisely because they complied with the PCI guidelines.

As introduced at the beginning of this chapter, the official reception of Maoist China and the Cultural Revolution during the mid-1960s and early 1970s by the PCI, on the one hand, resulted in the praise of Maoism as a sociopolitical discipline seeking to overcome the social unrest and underdevelopment of mid-twentieth-century China. On the other hand, the PCI criticized the revolutionary, violent, and sectarian connotation of Maoist China during those years. By doing so, the PCI sought to maintain the same distance between the PRC and the Soviet Union after their split, as well as to promote dialogue between the two countries, and preserve its own autonomy from both the PCSU and the CCP (Bordone 1979, 308). Similarly, while Pavolini praised the PRC as an exemplary socialist system of development, and thus capable of rehabilitating the Chinese peasant and working classes and creating a productive and efficient society in one time (1973, 19), he also argued that Maoist society placed undue ideological pressure on its people (30). Concerning the Cultural Revolution, Pavolini held that its major contribution was that of allowing the working classes and the army to participate in the political leadership of the country (1973, 26). However, he also referred to the cult of Mao as a noxious procedure (53). With regard to the political guidelines of the CCP, Pavolini expressed his dissatisfaction for the lack of information provided about the circumstances of the controversial death of the marshal of the PRC Lin Biao in a plane crash in the Mongolian region, as well as of the dismissal of head of

the Cultural Revolution Group Chen Boda, condemned as a revisionist in the 1973 (1973, 66).⁶⁴

Rather than taking sides, Rodari, on the other hand, argued the necessity of re-establishing cooperation between the two countries, in line with the directives of the PCI (1974, 11). Furthermore, Rodari was critical of the Chinese “refusal to consider the Soviet Union as a socialist country as well as the dogmatic way of teaching” (1974, 9). Rodari was also perplexed by the harshness of the critiques to the Soviet Union by the Chinese Communist Party, and he even defined as insulting the Chinese idea of the Soviet Union as a social-imperialist country (1974, 152–153), while keeping a distance also from the Russian critiques to the PRC. With regards to the Cultural Revolution, Rodari expressed his skepticism for the way China was narrated by his Chinese informers (101). Instead, he pointed out, that their data were only inconclusive “sintesi a posteriori” (106),⁶⁵ since the “lineamenti definitivi di questo nuovo volto [della Cina] non sono già chiari a nessuno” (1974, 113).⁶⁶

The travel narratives of the two authors also referred to Italian society, and evoked themes that were reputed as significant by the PCI, such as the necessity of political and diplomatic cooperation between the two countries, support for the wage-working class, and development of agricultural areas, especially those in southern Italy. Pavolini praised the establishment of Chinese-Italian official diplomatic ties, emphasizing the intentions of developing economic and commercial exchanges between the two countries (1973, 15). Rodari, instead, saw some signs of relaxation of the tensions between the CCP and the PCI since he noticed that their Chinese hosts did not express any judgment on the political situation of Italy in the 1970s, nor did they criticize the PCI’s guidelines. Regarding the visits to the Chinese factories, Pavolini praised the Chinese industrial model of development that privileged the workers over productivity. He also criticized the Italian

64 On the Lin Biao incident and the power dynamics characterizing the PCC leadership in Maoist China during the Cultural revolution, see Jin Qiu, *The culture of power: The Lin Biao incident in the Cultural Revolution* (1999).

65 “... a posteriori synthesis” (Rodari 1974, 106).

66 “... the definitive features of [China’s] new facets are not clear to anybody” (Rodari 1974, 113).

industrialists on the trip for failing to acknowledge it (1973, 32). Similarly, after visiting some agricultural communes, Pavolini praised the decision of the Chinese government for choosing a gradual and extensive agrarian development over more fast-paced and economic-oriented policies, and he criticized the Italian government for failing to develop the agricultural sector (37). Rodari, on the other hand, emphasized the similarity of Chinese and Italian peasants, as he saw in them a moderate attitude to revolutionary change in society, both in their manner and in their behavior, balancing between “la costruzione socialista e la ricerca del benessere” (1974, 54).⁶⁷ Therefore, according to Rodari, Chinese peasants and the Chinese agricultural communes did not express the necessity of a radical change as emphasized by Macciocchi; on the contrary, they represented the idea of a slow-paced and moderate social change, which was in tune with the idea of social change propagandized by the PCI.

Finally, concerning the harsh debate on the authority of specific intellectuals to represent the Chinese reality, Rodari argued that “i libri sulla Cina li debbono scrivere gli esperti di cose cinesi. E io non sono un ‘sinologo’ (emphasis of the author)” (Rodari 1974, 7).⁶⁸ The direct reference to “sinology” clearly expressed Rodari’s discontent for how Macciocchi and Iacoviello had situated themselves as privileged informers analyzing the “reality” of Maoist China through the ideological lenses of Marxist-Leninist thought. Pavolini too marked his skepticism of any idealistic portrayal of the People’s Republic of China, as well as from interpreting the PRC as an ideological expedient (1973, 112), in line with the critique of the PCI of Macciocchi and Iacoviello’s positive, acritical, and enthusiastic portrayal of China. Rodari’s criticism of the positions, reputed to be radical, of Macciocchi and Iacoviello was also self-evident when he distinguished his idea of the country, which he defined as a school, from Macciocchi’s portrayal of the PRC as a barracks. On such an occasion Rodari also dismissed Macciocchi’s polemic statements on the accounts of China produced by less enthusiastic Italian intellectuals:

67 “... the socialist system and the pursuit of wealth” (Rodari 1974, 54).

68 “The books about China are to be written by those who are experts in Chinese things. I am not a ‘sinologist’ (emphasis of the author)” (Rodari 1974, 7).

Qualcuno anche dei nostri compagni di viaggio ha visto la Cina come un enorme formicaio, come una grande caserma. A noi ha dato piuttosto l'impressione di una grande scuola: una scuola per settecento milioni di scolari ... Una scuola con un solo maestro, che però non sarebbe del tutto esatto identificare semplicemente in Mao Tse Tung [Mao Zedong]. Non è la stessa cosa. E scoprire la differenza tra le due entità non è una finezza bizantina, ma una delle più curiose esperienze che il visitatore possa vivere nella Cina d'oggi. (Rodari 1974, 30)⁶⁹

The Apolitical China of Giorgio Manganelli

Camminando e guardandoci attorno, noi siamo in qualche modo sordi, soffriamo di un disturbo esotico che ci costringe e consente di vedere solo forme, oggetti, disegni, colori. Ecco: i colori ... Vi è un primo luogo l'innumerabile folla di vestiti blu, di cui varrà la pena parlare come di uno dei tratti dello stile cinese; vestiti, neri; color legno o sobri colori nelle vetrine; raro il rosso: autobus, fasce al braccio delle Guardie Rosse, non molto frequenti, fazzoletti rossi al collo, la bandiera cinese, rosso e oro dei pensieri di Mao (Manganelli 1974, 25).⁷⁰

Finally, it is worth introducing yet another peculiar representation of the People's Republic of China during the 1970s, that of the Italian writer and

69 "Among our travel companions, someone has described China as an enormous ant nest, someone else as a big military barracks. In my opinion, China is like a big school. A school for seven hundred million students. A school with one single teacher, which is not exactly Mao Zedong, but the Mao Zedong-thought. To understand the difference between those two entities is not a byzantine subtlety, but one among the most peculiar experiences that a traveler can make in today's China" (Rodari 1974, 30).

70 "As we walk and we take a look around, we are somehow deaf and suffer from an exotic disfunction, which forces us to see only shapes, objects, drawings and colours ... At first, there is the countless blue-dressed mob, which is one of the specific traits of the Chinese fashion. And black clothes. Then, all objects in the shop windows there are wood-like coloured, brown coloured; or of other sober colours. The colour red is quite rare: the buses, the arm-bands of the red guards, which are not many; red handkerchiefs covering people's neck; the Chinese flag; and the red and gold-coloured slogans of Mao" (Manganelli 1974, 25).

journalist Giorgio Manganelli. The depiction of Maoist society drawn by Manganelli stands out for its refusal to provide for a political representation of the country, which is in line with his *disimpegno*.

Giorgio Manganelli traveled to China in 1972 as a reporter for the Italian newspaper *Il Giorno*. His articles were collected and published again in 1974 by Bompiani in the travel narrative *Cina e altri orienti*, which collected Manganelli's travel narratives on the People's Republic of China, the Philippines, and Malesia. The author's narrativization of China was lively, extravagant, and ironic, at times sarcastic. Manganelli was skeptical of his intellectual role of narrator of his Chinese experience to the Italian readership, as well as of the possibility of "knowing" China at all in a ten-day trip to the People's Republic of China (Manganelli 1974, 8–10). Most importantly, Manganelli disregarded the Marxist instrument of analysis which defined China as a "political reality" according to Macciocchi, a method also adopted by Parise, Moravia, Pavolini, and Rodari, albeit critically. Instead, Manganelli, described China as an enigmatic, dream-like, and surreal other-space: "l'arcaico, medievale Catai"⁷¹ rather than the People's Republic of China as the socialist model of development: "L'aereo scende nel Catai: atterra a Shanghai – bizzarro, drammatico, ilare nome" (16).⁷²

Manganelli's prose avoided "politicizing words" to describe the social and political structure of the People's Republic of China, its all-pervasive, discursive, and propagandistic nature. Manganelli mentioned that China was a revolutionary republic (1974, 49) – the People's Republic of China – only at the end of his trip, at the contrasting sight of Hong Kong, which he defined as a colony of a monarchy (50), and thus as an odd, humorous, anachronism to escape from (50–52). Similarly, Mao Zedong was a marginal character in Manganelli's representation of China. The author briefly mentioned Mao thrice: the first time to state that the red color in Beijing is a rare color (25); the second to reinforce the author's description of the Chinese representation of Stalin as a "nonno mitologico" (34)⁷³; and the

71 "... the archaic and medieval Cathay" (Manganelli 1974, 15).

72 "The plane descends in the Cathai. It lands in Shanghai – such a bizarre, dramatic and hilarious name" (Manganelli 1974, 16).

73 "... mythological grandfather" (Manganelli 1974, 34).

last, in relation to an exposition Manganelli has visited in Canton where he saw Mao's famous quote "let a hundred flowers blossom, let a hundred schools of thought contend" (百花齐放, 百家争鸣), quotation symbolic of the Hundred Flowers Movement (1956) though still in use in the Maoist China of the 1970s (1974, 48).

Manganelli's initial gaze on the Chinese reality was structured by the China of his childhood memories (17). The China of the "cinesi che fanno ridere, hanno il codino, sono vestiti alla mandarina, sono piccoli e sorridenti" (1974, 18).⁷⁴ Manganelli's memories had a precise political connotation corresponding to the fascist representation of pre-Maoist China, and the China of the Italian Concession in Tianjin propagandized in the Italian textbooks of his childhood (18). However, such an image rapidly faded away at the sight of the Chinese people in Shanghai's airport, and it was the image of a hostess serving the meals on the plane to Beijing that became symbolic of the Chinese alterity, as an "Oriente senza esotismo" (20).⁷⁵ Such a space, that Manganelli characterized as homely and radically stranger, similar and different, close-by and far-away, familiar and unsettling at one time, structured the entire travel narrative:

Ha le gote rosee e vive, "come mele casolane," hanno, quei colori, un che di toscano e villereccio, ma il progetto orientale del volto è del tutto estraneo; così di lei si incontrano qualcosa di familiare, di intimo, e qualcosa di estremamente lontano, un'idea del corpo che le nostre membra non conoscono e che allude ad altre distanze; costei ci è insieme accosto e lontana, e quanto la vicinanza ci è domestica, tanto la lontananza ci provoca e cruccia. (1974, 20)⁷⁶

74 "... the Chinese who make you laugh. Those small and smiling Chinese that have the ponytail and are dressed like mandarins" (Manganelli 1974, 18).

75 "... exotic-less Oriental space" (Manganelli 1974, 20).

76 "Her cheeks are lively and rosy 'like Casolan apples,' and these colours remind me of rustic Tuscany. But the oriental outline of the face is utterly unknown. So in her, I find something familiar, intimate, and extremely far at one time. I see an idea of body that my body does contemplate, and that stands for a different distance. She is close-by and far away at one time. And the more her proximity appears as familiar to us, the more her distance leaves us perplexed" (Manganelli 1974, 20).

The physical spaces that Manganelli visited were described, therefore, as dream-like and “exotic-less oriental” spaces. Beijing was narrated as a “città geometrica, astratta, un quadrato attorno ad un quadrato con viali predisposti come itinerari per il vento” (1974, 21)⁷⁷; the Forbidden City as “fragile e consumabile, consunta e rifatta, tarlabile e arcaica, [essa] si regge in forza dei suoi simboli, è un luogo fittizio, un ricettacolo degli eventi celesti” (41)⁷⁸; the Summer Palace as a most perfect chinoiserie (45); and Canton as a “tumultuare di folla, un’esposizione, crepe nei muri, un’aria tepida e fitta, profumata e tropicale” (47).⁷⁹ Moreover, the China that Manganelli described acquired a sense of literary alterity as a consequence of Manganelli’s use of literary references to describe the Chinese alterity. Apart from the textual reference to Cathay (14), the Forbidden City was like by Marco Polo’s Forbidden City (41), the Great Wall was Kafka’s Chinese Wall and therefore absolutely different than the Maginot Line (44), which was a political image of reference used by Moravia (Moravia 1973a, 140). Similarly, Manganelli described a peculiar variety of shellfish that he tasted in China as Emilio Salgari’s Trepang, clearly referring to Salgari’s *I pescatori di Trepang* (*Trepang Fishers*) (1974, 38). And the round lively cheeks of a Chinese hostess as “Casolan apples” referring to Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (III.4.6).

Concerning the long-debated issue of the practices of staged reality and information control toward the Italian intellectuals visiting China, Manganelli simply disregarded the issue. Therefore, Manganelli argued that Chinese society was unknowable if not mediated by Chinese interpreters (1974, 24–25), and he regarded the presence of the Chinese interpreters as comforting and efficient (29). Similarly, after defining the nature of the social practices of Chinese society as a theatre in which Chinese people rehearsed their public social role (32), Manganelli stated that what separates

77 “A geometrical and abstract city. A square in a square whose avenues were projected as itineraries for the wind” (*ibid.*, 21).

78 “... a fragile and consumable city. It is worn out and rebuilt. It is archaic and prone to termites. It is anchored on its own symbols. It is a fictitious place; a receptacle of celestial events” (*ibid.*, 41).

79 “... a cradle of people. An exposition. Its walls are cracked. Its weather is cool and dense; scented and tropical” (*ibid.*, 47).

the Chinese from the Italian observer was simply the fact that the latter was unaware of being subject to such a condition (32).

Manganelli's de-politicizing description of the People's Republic of China must have sounded provocative in the early 1970s. However, Manganelli's portrayal of the country matched both the political non-engagement of the author and his adherence to the *Gruppo 63*. Furthermore, Manganelli's depiction of China also matched the rapid de-politicization faced by *Il Giornale* in the 1972, after the Italian journalist Gaetano Afeltra became the editor-in-chief of the newspaper. Most importantly, Manganelli's non-political take on the PRC matched the rhetoric and discursive strategies enacted in the narrativization of China by other Italian intellectuals with a similar political and artistic background who traveled to China in the 1980s, in particular, the writers Alberto Arbasino and Luigi Malerba, who are discussed in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The idealistic portrayals of Chinese society during the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1975) mainly served the purpose of giving voice to the political beliefs and intellectual affiliations Moravia, Parise, Macciocchi, Rodari, Pavolini, and Manganelli. In addition to expressing the geopolitical position of the PRC after the Sino-Soviet split, their divergent depictions of Maoist China as anti-Stalinist and anti-capitalistic, as well as “anti-revisionist” and anti-hierarchical, and pacifist and progressive, chiefly resonated with the political debate characterizing Italian society in the years of the *Lungo Sessantotto/Long 1968*. That is also the case of Manganelli's representation of the country, which deliberately aimed at erasing all political references in order to voice the author's *disimpegno*.

At the same time, Parise's idea of China as a “political teleology” (1999, 19), Moravia's and Macciocchi's different ideas of utopian Maoism, Rodari's China as a “big school” (1974, 30), and even Manganelli's China as an “exotic dysfunction” (1974, 30), all expressed the textual validity of the PRC for these authors. The politics of textuality also emerges in relation to

the heterogeneous lenses of observation that the authors use to conceptualize their different Chinas, implying different theoretical and sociopolitical approaches: Moravia's non-dogmatic Marxism, Macciocchi's Marxist-Leninist-inspired Maoism, Pavolini and Rodari's moderate, "Togliattian" Socialism, and Manganelli's disengaged structuralist approach.

Furthermore, in spite of their discordant narratives, these authors (except Manganelli) all reassessed the cultural, ideological, historical, and even spatial proximity between China and Italy. They therefore engaged in an Italy/China, Us/them dichotomic comparison promoting self-identification to emphasize the similar and, at the same time, utopian nature of the PRC. In Macciocchi's case the emphasis on similarities between the two countries and people served to underscore the validity of Maoist China as a model of development for Italy. In the years following the Lungo Sessantotto in Italy and the end of the Cultural Revolution in China, however, these utopian representations of Maoist China were replaced by a new and totally opposite set of portrayals of the country, in which China was regarded again as distant, backward, and culturally unintelligible.

On the Nonexistence of a Chinese Utopia: Italian Narratives of Disbelief, Disenchantment, and Nostalgia (1978–1985)

Ci arrivai [in Cina] nel gennaio 1980 e mi fu subito chiaro che la realtà era meno affascinante dei sogni. Andai a cercare quella speciale forma di socialismo che si diceva fosse costruita in Cina ma non vi trovai che le rovine di un esperimento fallito malamente. Andai a cercare quella nuova cultura che doveva essere nata dalla rivoluzione e non trovai che i mozziconi di quella vecchia, splendida cultura che nel frattempo era stata sistematicamente distrutta.

– Terzani [1984] 2011, 649¹

The late 1970s and early 1980s in Italy generally reflected the decline of literary and political commitment to social change, coinciding with the increasing disillusionment with politics following a decade of hegemonic control of the government by the Christian Democratic Party (DC) and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), which was described as *riflusso* – or “the waning of political enthusiasm” (Burns 2001, 1). Those years are indeed a pivotal period that “enregistre avec force les effets démultipliés

- 1 “I arrived [in China] in January 1980, and it was immediately obvious that the reality was less attractive than my dreams. Looking for the unique form of socialism that had allegedly been built there, I found only the ruins of an utterly failed experiment. Looking for the new culture that had supposedly sprung out of the revolution, I came across only the stumps of the old culture that had been methodically, systematically destroyed in the process” (Terzani 1986, 9). The translation in English of the quotes from Terzani’s *La Porta Proibita* (1971) are from the English version of the book (Terzani, 1986). Similarly, the quotes from Masi’s *Per la Cina* (1978), are from the English version of the book (Masi 1982), I also refer to the English translation of Luzi’s poem *Reportage* (1992). The quotations in Italian from other works were translated by me.

de ce reflux idéologique et les relaient avec une intensité renouvelée” (Hourmant 1997, 125).²

In the wake of the Italian travel writing produced in the mid-1960s and early 1970s, the travel narratives on China by the Italian writers and journalists discussed in this chapter all resonate with the decline in popularity of the communist ideology and admiration of foreign communist systems in Italian society that characterized the decade. On the one hand, the travel narratives were affected by the international downfall of communism characterizing the 1980s and reaching its climax in the demolition of the Berlin Wall in 1989. On the other hand, they were deeply influenced by the dramatic aftermath of the emancipatory events engendered by the political activism of the extra-parliamentary left- and right-wing groups, which culminated in years of national political violence and civil terrorism.³ In this chapter I suggest that, whether nostalgic or disillusioned, or enraged and pessimistic, the travel narratives from these Italian authors are all symbolic of the sociopolitical and cultural situation of Italy in these years, as well as of the authors’ consequent reconsideration of their own political engagement.⁴

The chapter is centered on two different experiences of China by prominent Italian writers, poets, essayists, and politicians visiting China between 1976 and 1985. In the first section of this chapter, I situate the interest of post-Maoist China in relation to the sociopolitical scenario of Italy in these years. The first experience is discussed in the second section through the travelogues and poems written by the writer and politician Aldo De Jaco; the poets Mario Luzi and Vittorio Sereni; the journalist, politician, and novelist Alberto Arbasino; and the novelist Luigi Malerba. These authors visited the People’s Republic of China (PRC) together on a three-week

2 “... takes in with force the multiplying effects of this ideologic reflux and passes them on with renewed intensity” (Hourmant 1997, 125). Hourmant refers to the cultural and sociopolitical situation of France in the same years; however, his considerations are also valid for the Italian context in those years.

3 See Burns (2006, 81–92).

4 It is also worth noting that scholarly production on the topic is scarce, reflecting the difficulty of finding an unbiased historical perspective of the sociopolitical events characterizing Italy in the 1970s. See Palandri (2006, 115–120).

tour in an official delegation as representative members of the Sindacato Nazionale Scrittori (Italian Writers Association, SNS) in November 1980. The second experience is discussed in the third section and emerges from select travel narratives in China by the essayist, translator, and sinologist Edoarda Masi and the journalist Tiziano Terzani. Masi and Terzani lived in China as foreign residents for rather long periods, and they were proficient in the Chinese language and knowledgeable about Chinese history, philosophy, culture, and politics.

The two experiences of China generated several heterogeneous perspectives and considerations of the country, which reflected both the sociopolitical and the cultural situation in Italy during these years and the different political disillusionment of their authors. De Jaco, Luzi, Sereni, Arbasino, and Malerba all conceptualized China as a distant, hostile, and dystopian reality. Their considerations are quite dissimilar in spite of the fact that they were on the same organized tour. De Jaco's travelogue expressed his disillusionment with active political participation in Italian society as a member of the PCI. While admitting his interest in Maoism during the years of the Cultural Revolution, De Jaco underscored that his political commitment had not been inspired by any Italian pro-Maoist extra-parliamentary group. By connecting their disbelief in Maoist China with their experience of fascism and Nazism in Italy, Luzi and Sereni expressed their dissent from all totalitarian forms of government conceived in the twentieth century. Luzi's considerations were more philosophical and moral than political, and they reflected the main themes of his poetic production of the time. Reflecting their positioning in the Neoavanguardia artistic and literary landscape as well as their reliance on French structuralism and post-structuralism, Malerba and Arbasino regarded Maoist China as both a universe of undecipherable signs and a fictional entity created by Western observers.

Masi and Terzani regarded the PRC as a familiar and much cherished space that had, however, failed to achieve socialism and had turned into a totalitarian regime.⁵ Their attitude was disillusioned, but they also felt

5 As seen in the preceding chapters, Masi had quite an important role in the diffusion of information on Maoist China as an essayist, principally for *Quaderni Rossi* and *Quaderni Piacentini*. Terzani, on the other hand, became an internationally

nostalgia since they also saw in China the political activism of their youth. Their travel writings were motivated by a desire to provide more accurate data on the country by investigating the years of turmoil that followed the Cultural Revolution, the death of Mao Zedong and the radical shift in policy-making characterizing the PRC in those years. Furthermore, their travelogues gave voice to Masi's and Terzani's frustrated ambitions of political participation in Chinese society. Terzani and Masi's approach to the Otherness of China is, however, mediated by the main historical events characterizing Italian society in these years, as well as by the authors' own disillusionment with socialism and disengagement from politics.

The travel narratives selected for this paradigm also contain a critique of the representations of the PRC produced in the previous decades. The desires of De Jaco, Arbasino, Malerba, Masi, and Terzani to keep their distance from the overenthusiastic representations of the PRC produced by many Italian leftist intellectuals from 1949 onward is certainly a consequence of the new information diffused in China and abroad about the repressive and violent character of the Maoist government, particularly during the years of the Cultural Revolution. At the same time, in addition to denoting a change in the attitude of the authors concerning their literary and political commitment to social change, the radical shift in the representation of China visible in the travel narratives from the late 1970s and early 1980s expresses a major shift within the Italian leftist intelligentsia, which echoes the obliteration of the fascist discourse on China produced by the leftist intelligentsia of the 1950s.

well-known and influential voice of war journalism after the publication of his early- to the mid-1970s Vietnam diaries as two best-selling books, *Pelle di leopardo* (1973) and *Giai Phong* (1976).

China, Political Violence, and the Downfall of the Italian Left

Like the majority of Western capitalist countries, from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, Italy faced years of harsh economic stagnation and mass unemployment. This critical period was engendered by the worldwide 1973 oil crisis and consequent inflation, dollar devaluation and low economic growth. In Italy, the recession caused a decline in production, depreciation of the Italian lira and increase in prices, as well as growth of the black economy (Ginsborg 2003, 351–354).⁶ In the same years, Italy also went through a decade of extreme political violence, the so-called *anni di piombo* (Years of Lead), which was characterized by numerous terrorist activities by ultra-leftist and ultra-rightist political organizations.⁷ The *anni di piombo* culminated in atrocious events such as the 54-day kidnapping and execution of Aldo Moro (March–May 1978), the bomb explosion at the Bologna railway station (August 1980) and the assassination of academic and senator Roberto Ruffilli (April 1988), among others. The controversial killing of Moro and his bodyguards by the ultra-leftist *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades) had a strong resonance in Italian society. It caused a massive social, political, and military anti-terrorist mobilization, as well as a harsh political diatribe by the political forces of the time on the eventuality of compromising with the terrorist group.⁸ The killings by the terrorist groups, particularly the *Brigate Rosse*, increased in the years to follow. However, the terrorist groups became more and more isolated as a consequence of the growing popular discontent with their violent insurrectional activities and the efficiency of the anti-terrorist offensive led by General Carlo Alberto dalla Chiesa (Ginsborg 2003, 385–387). While the majority of left-wing intellectuals of the period preferred not to examine directly their own experiences of terrorism and to “shun what might have been an uncomfortable reflection on their own politics and

6 Concerning the Italian economic crisis, see Sassoon (1997, 58–74).

7 For further details on the term “Anni di piombo,” see Ward D. (2017, 28–29).

8 On the Moro case, see Drake (1995) and Satta (2003).

recent past” (Ward D. 2017, 2–3), political violence prompted a public debate among prominent intellectuals and writers, such as the poet Eugenio Montale, the writers Italo Calvino, Alberto Moravia, Giorgio Bocca, Leonardo Sciascia, and Alberto Arbasino, the playwright Dario Fo, and many others.

With regard to the sociopolitical situation in those years, the mediation between the PCI leader Enrico Berlinguer and the DC leader Aldo Moro led to the political strategy of the *compromesso storico* (historic compromise). This strategy was conceived by Berlinguer to counter the sociopolitical tension of the time and the fear of establishment of an extreme right-wing government following the example of the 1973 Chilean coup d'état that overthrew the socialist president Salvador Allende. According to the historian Donald Sassoon, the *compromesso storico* was also regarded as necessary by the PCI, first, to gain access to the government in the Italian proportional electoral system, since an (unlikely) PCI–PSI alliance would not secure victory against the DC in a general election. Secondly, it was reputed to be a necessary step for the full legitimization of the PCI in order to gain a national and international consensus in terms of active participation in the Italian Parliament, and eventually in the executive (Sassoon 1997, 574–575, 584). The years of the *compromesso storico* also saw the brief ascendancy of Italian communism on the European scene. On the one hand, the PCI developed a plan of political cooperation with the French and Spanish communist parties, the so-called Eurocommunism; on the other, it abandoned its opposition strategy to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and distanced itself from the Soviet Union (Sassoon 1996, 581–582). In the 1976 general elections, the PCI experienced an unprecedented high percentage of votes. However, in the following years the party suffered a rapid, relentless decline, culminating with its dissolution in 1991.

Internationally, the demise of the PCI reflected the geopolitical order of these years, characterized by the progressive collapse of European communism, culminating in the 1989 civil revolutions in Eastern Europe (Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Romania), the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the end of the Cold War, symbolized by the demolition of the Berlin Wall (1989).⁹ Nationally, the decline of the PCI was a result of major sociopolitical and economic challenges. First, the PCI

9 With regard to the worldwide collapse of communism and the consequent attempts at reform of the communist ideology, see Sassoon (1997, 730–754). The

had to withstand the negative impact of the terrorist attacks by ultra-leftist organizations, which greatly affected the popularity of all leftist organizations (Sassoon 1997, 585). Secondly, it had to face the widespread popular discontent engendered by the austerity measures necessary to face the economic crisis, as well as the accusations of mismanagement of the emergency caused by the Irpinia earthquake in November 1980. Moreover, as Sassoon argued, the PCI made major tactical mistakes by not giving enough consideration to the PSI, as well as not having a well-defined plan for the alliance with the DC. In the 1980s, as a consequence of such challenges, the PCI gradually lost appeal, mainly in favor of the Italian Socialist Party, which had gone through significant reorganization prioritizing social-democratic programs under the leadership of Bettino Craxi. The decline of the *compromesso storico* was followed by the *Pentapartito* strategy, which relegated the PCI to the ranks of the opposition in the following years.¹⁰

The major travel narratives on China produced in these years resonated with the sociopolitical situation of the time. Such narratives were resulted from both individual acts of engagement and the participation of formal delegations, as was the case with their counterparts in the previous decades. The list of authors who visited the PRC during the 1976–1986 decade is quite long, since China became more accessible after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. The most interesting delegation of these years was that of a group of writers, journalists and poets affiliated with the SNS in November 1980. This delegation included the writers, journalists

generalized decline of communism also implied that communist countries reconsidered their anti-capitalistic, centrally planned economies in favor of a market-based economy. Before facing its own dissolution, the Soviet Union attempted in vain to develop a series of social-democratic reforms in 1985, under the direction of Mikhail Gorbachev. Similarly, the PRC and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam successfully started developing a market economy under the direction of their communist parties in 1978 and 1986, respectively.

- 10 The Pentapartito comprised a coalition of the DC and PSI, the Italian Socialist Democratic Party (PSDI), the Italian Liberal Party (PLI) and the Italian Republican Party (PRI). Through this strategy, these parties were in power for a decade (1981–1991), with the DC in the leadership of the coalition, although the leaders of the PRI and PSI, Giovanni Spadolini and Bettino Craxi, were elected as prime ministers in 1981–1982 and 1983–1987, respectively.

and politicians Alberto Arbasino (*Trans-Pacific Express*, 1981) and Aldo De Jaco (*Nel giardino del cattivo amministratore*, 1983); the poets Mario Luzi (*Reportage*, 1984) and Vittorio Sereni (*Viaggio in Cina*, 2004); and the novelist Luigi Malerba (*Cina Cina*, 1985). Among the most prominent authors traveling individually were the journalists Enzo Biagi (*Cina*, 1979), who visited China in 1978; and Piero Ostellino (*Vivere in Cina*, 1981) and Ilario Fiore (*Mal di Cina*, 1984), who lived in China from mid-1978 to mid-1980 and from mid-1980 to late 1983, respectively. Apart from the above-mentioned authors, there were two prominent leftist intellectuals of the time who had unique experiences. The former was the sinologist and essayist Edoarda Masi (*Per la Cina*, 1978), who worked in China as a language instructor in 1976–1977, the very years characterized by the death of both Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong, and the ensuing dramatic sociopolitical and cultural changes. The latter was the journalist Tiziano Terzani (*La Porta Proibita*, 1984), who reported from China for roughly four years in the period 1980–1984.

The authors from the 1976–1985 decade were all socially and politically engaged. They all regarded their artistic productions as sociological and ethical tools for the analysis of the social and political issues plaguing Italian society in those years. Aldo De Jaco had been part of the leftist intelligentsia as a member of the PCI since the late 1940s. Vittorio Sereni and Mario Luzi belonged to the older generation of intellectuals who had experienced fascism, although they had not been actively involved in the Italian Resistance. Enzo Biagi had joined the *Resistenza* and worked at the partisan newspaper *Patrioti*. Of the others, Edoarda Masi and Tiziano Terzani had analyzed Soviet and Maoist societies and systems of government since the 1960s, albeit to different degrees and from divergent ideological standpoints. The writers Alberto Arbasino and Luigi Malerba were prominent members of the artistic movement Gruppo 63, and they were chosen to replace the writers Italo Calvino and Paolo Volponi, who had refused to tour China.¹¹ Arbasino had been politically active as a member of the Italian Parliament for the socialist Italian Republican Party in the

11 Gruppo 63 emerged from the political activism of the 1960s. It was influenced by French structuralism and Marxism, and formed in opposition to the previous generation of Italian intellectuals, in terms of both stylistic research and social

years of the *Pentapartito* when the PSI leader Bettino Craxi was prime minister (1983–1987). The writer Luigi Malerba was the least politically active among the above-mentioned authors.

The travel narratives produced in the 1976–1985 decade are therefore all representative of the rapid decline in the popularity of communism in Italian society. Their portrayal of Maoist and Dengist China was disillusioned and pessimistic because the 1980s Chinese society was regarded as dystopian. Their authors questioned both the ideological lenses of Marxism or Marxism-Leninism and the reputedly exceptional character of Maoism and the PRC. As they approached the country with disenchantment and disbelief, they described with pessimism the major sociopolitical, cultural and economic developments that occurred in the PRC after 1976 with the intention of re-evaluating the overly enthusiastic representations of China that had been diffused in Italy since the 1950s. The depictions of the country by these authors did not, however, follow a monolithic discursive pattern because they were shaped by the heterogeneous backgrounds and degrees of political participation in Italian society of their respective authors. In particular, the travel narratives of Masi and Terzani differed substantially from those of Italian travelers visiting China in tours organized by the China Travel Agency, such as the SNS delegation in 1980.¹² By their re-evaluation of the PRC and its social and political developments since its foundation in 1949, their travel narratives sought to interrogate the possible reasons for the infatuation and disenchantment of the Italian left intelligentsia with the country.

While significantly heterogeneous in terms of content the narratives analyzed in this chapter shared the same interest in the sociopolitical scenario of the PRC, which served as a basis for the re-evaluation of the entire “revolutionary” spirit of Maoist China. Italian intellectuals were greatly interested in the political and social resettlement that followed the deaths of Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong in 1976. These events were characterized by years of harsh political controversies internal to

engagement, in order to promote the renewal of literary language as well as a sociocultural critique of the post-economic boom in Italian society of the 1960s and 1970s.

12 That is also the case of Piero Ostellino's narrative (1981).

the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), as well as by massive changes in both contemporary Chinese society and China's geopolitical collocation. In particular, Italian intellectuals were attentive to the late 1970s power struggle between Hua Guafeng, advocating socialist economic and industrial planning, and Deng Xiaoping, promoting the introduction of market-based economic reforms to develop agriculture, industry, scientific, and technological research as well as military power. They also narrated with skepticism the sociopolitical changes that occurred as a consequence of the reforms put in place after Deng Xiaoping secured the leadership of the country. In addition, Italian intellectuals gave their chief attention to the detention (1976) and the trial (1981) of some of the most prominent Chinese politicians in the ranks of the CCP during the previous years: Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen, known as the "Gang of Four." Among the other significant events was the reconsideration of the political struggle that led to the controversial death of Chinese Marshall Lin Biao in a plane crash in Mongolia on September 13, 1971. Italian intellectuals were also interested in the emerging "scar literature," which critically narrated the three decades of the PRC, with particular attention to the sociopolitical phenomena of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Finally, they also narrated the totalitarian character of the new campaigns by the Chinese government launched by Deng Xiaoping against dissident Chinese intellectuals, known as the "spiritual corruption" campaigns (1983 and 1986).

China as a Bibliographic and Babelic Abstraction

E che andavo cercando, in quel lontano Katai, io scrittore italiano? Ovviamente l'ombra delle mie personali ossessioni alle quali la Cina – la Cina dei sogni, la Cina delle ideologie – non era stata certo estranea, anche se il sottoscritto non ha mai compilato un paragrafo che sia un paragrafo del "libretto rosso" e non ha mai avuto voglia di "sparare sul comitato centrale" agli ordini del capintesta di quel comitato stesso. Ma i problemi del potere rivoluzionario, la battaglia contro i

burocrati, [...] i problemi del continuare la rivoluzione senza cascare nella quiete mortale dei "post" ...

– De Jaco 1983, 9¹³

Aldo De Jaco regarded China and the Chinese people as reminiscent of southern Italy and its people, which he was fond of. When visiting the hutongs (back alleys) in Beijing, he compared them to the typical Neapolitan popular houses called *bassi* because of their shared vitality (De Jaco 1983, 42). Similarly, the narrow streets of Shanghai reminded him of the lively and vibrant Neapolitan areas of La Duchesca or Forcella (72–73), at the time symbolizing the vitality of the local people. Shanghainese people living in those areas reminded De Jaco of the Neapolitan people also because of their physiognomy and social behavior, as “gente che si affanna a non far niente intrecciata in una serie di traffici minimi [e che] ha le stesse guance incavate, gli stessi occhi lucidi” (72–73) [see Figures 21 and 22].¹⁴ De Jaco considered such an act of self-identification as illusory and necessary at the same time because it triggered sudden memories of nostalgia for specific moments in his own political past through the understanding of the “abisso di differenze che c’è fra i due mondi che stiamo giustapponendo così inchinandoci a ciò che è nuovo, e diverso, e incomunicabile.” (73–74) [see Figure 23].¹⁵ At the same time, De Jaco emphasized the “touristic” – meaning not revolutionary – value of his experience of China (106), as well as his distance from the locals and their day-to-day life: “Ma siamo sicuri di essere stati in Cina o

13 “So, what was I, an Italian writer, looking for in that far-off Cathay? Obviously, I was looking for the shadow of my personal obsessions to which China – the China of my dreams, the China of ideologies – was not unrelated. And yet, I have never spelled out a paragraph from the ‘Little Red Book’; nor have I ever wanted to ‘bombard the headquarters’ according to the orders of the leader of those same headquarters. But the problems of revolutionary power, the battle against the bureaucrats [...] the problems of continuing the revolution without falling into the deadly standstill of the ‘posts’ ...” (De Jaco 1983, 9).

14 “People busying themselves in doing nothing, all weaved within a network of minimal deals. They have the same sunken cheeks and the same watery eyes” (De Jaco 1983, 72–73).

15 “The abysmal differences between the two worlds that we are juxtaposing, which make us bow down before what is new, different and incommunicable” (De Jaco 1983, 73–74).

non è meglio dire che l'abbiamo attraversata su di un vagone riservato?" (132) [see Figure 24].¹⁶

De Jaco's self-identification is also explicit in the opening words this section of the chapter, which underscore that he was indeed looking for his own personal political obsessions in China (1983, 12). As a member of the PCI, he had distanced himself from the pro-Maoist Italian intellectuals whose criticism of Italian society in the previous decade, had been inspired by Mao Zedong and the Red Guards. De Jaco specified that he had never been willing to "sparare sul comitato centrale" (bombard the headquarters), paraphrasing the famous slogan by Mao Zedong widely used in Italy during the sociopolitical protests of the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁷ Yet De Jaco considered some of the issues raised in the Italian reception of the Cultural Revolution as still valid and current in the 1980s. In addition, De Jaco never associated Maoist China with fascist Italy. He argued instead that the generic and decontextualized use of the term fascism to define a dictatorial regime was fallacious, as was the analogy between the experiences of the Cultural Revolution in the PRC and the Fascist Ventennio in Italy suggested by the Chinese author Ding Ling (24–25) as well as by other Chinese writers: "A che serve far confusione sulla natura di classe di certi fenomeni? Se poi per fascismo si intende genericamente dittatura e sopraffazione i pesi si capovolgono" (37).¹⁸ Instead, De Jaco argued that China's post-Maoist sociopolitical situation continued to be worthy of investigation, whereas the Italian counterpart was remarkable merely for its outbursts of political violence and the reputedly ruinous policy-making of the PCI characterizing these years:

Abbiamo voglia noi di fare alchimia di socialismo e democrazia, a inventare eurocomunismi, a portare in giro quella immensa giraffa che è il PCI, a

- 16 "Are we sure that we have toured China? Or should we rather say that we went across the country in reserved coach class?" (De Jaco 1983, 132).
- 17 De Jaco referred to Mao's famous document *Bombard the Headquarters* (炮打司令部), globally symbolic of the Cultural Revolution and published in the CCP's official newspaper *People's Daily* on August 5, 1967.
- 18 "What is the use of creating such confusion about the nature of these class phenomena? If fascism generically means dictatorship, then the argument loses its force" (De Jaco 1983, 37).

inventarci – scherza oggi che alle cose serie pensiamo domani – una teoria omicida capace di spingere decine di persone ad ammazzarne centinaia, tirando nel mucchio, senza badare il colpo dove va. (De Jaco 1983, 13)¹⁹

Nonetheless, De Jaco, a few pages later, refers to the Cultural Revolution and the Red Guards as synonymous with the terroristic acts that were performed by and/or ascribed to the extremist, extra-parliamentary left, and in particular by the Red Brigades, which he described as the “fautori del diritto alla rivolta, alle rivoluzioni culturali e alle cannonate da sparare sul portone di Via delle Botteghe Oscure” (1983, 35).²⁰

The political and discursive nature of China particularly stood out in De Jaco’s description of the trial of the Gang of Four, which was broadcast daily on television and on the radio, and published in the local newspapers. De Jaco regarded the trial as the Chinese version of the Moscow Trials held by Stalin against his opposition – the “Trotzkistis” – in the years 1936–1938, and therefore as an event useful in the reconsideration of the global validity of communism in the twentieth century. He was fascinated by the daily media attention given to the trial of the Gang of Four, and he even submitted an official request, ignored by the Chinese authorities, to attend the trial in person. At the same time, as De Jaco quizzically watched the trial of the Gang of Four on the television screen, he felt the trial was being staged like the Beijing Opera (1983, 111). The image of the trial, and of China generally, as a theater is a much used analogy in the travel narratives of most of the Italian authors visiting the country at the time. Arbasino regarded the trial of the Gang of Four as similar to Giacomo Puccini’s *Turandot* (Arbasino 1981, 174). Malerba argued that it was the expression

19 “We can go on mixing together socialism and democracy, inventing Euro-communisms, leading around the enormous giraffe that is the PCI. We can go on inventing – by taking it easy today and worrying about it tomorrow – a homicidal theory that can make dozens of people kill hundreds by shooting randomly into the crowd, not caring whom they hit” (De Jaco 1983, 13).

20 “Supporters of the right to rebel, the cultural revolutions and the shootings at the front door in Via delle Botteghe Oscure” (De Jaco 1983, 35). The headquarters of the PCI were located at 4 Via delle Botteghe Oscure in Rome.

of “simulazione e menzogna, eufemismo e dissipata fantasia” (1993, 28),²¹ which he regarded as specific traits of Chinese civilization.

Whereas De Jaco sought to locate his own political past in the alterity of China, the portrayals of China by Sereni and Luzi were marked by the authors’ unwillingness to come to terms with such alterity. During his 1980 trip, Mario Luzi produced a 20-page travelogue, “Taccuino di viaggio in Cina,” which was published in four installments in the newspaper *La Nazione* in November 1981. Luzi also wrote a poem, “Reportage,” on China, which he published in the magazine *Almanacco dello Specchio* (no. 11, 1983), and in *Per il battesimo dei nostri frammenti* (1985). Luzi’s travelogue and poem were republished as a book, *Reportage*, in 1984. Vittorio Sereni wrote a 21-page diary of the trip, but he refused to publish it.²² Consisting of concise notes and descriptions of the activities scheduled in the itinerary, the travelogues of Luzi and Sereni were pervaded by a sense of “spaesamento” (disorientation). As argued by Sartorelli, in the travelogue written by Sereni “a prevalere è il senso di una irriducibile estraneità, l’incapacità di aderire con il proprio vissuto umano e culturale a un mondo la cui distanza finisce col neutralizzare la scrittura” (2004, 29).²³ Sartorelli’s consideration is also valid for Luzi’s travel writing on China. The unsympathetic and uncomfortable tone of their travel writing shows their reluctance to come to terms with the Chinese reality surrounding them (Luzi 1984, 14), or even to take part in the scheduled tour activities, which Sereni regarded as an act of “penitenza” (atonement or punishment) (Sereni 2004, 20). Sereni’s reluctance is evident in his epigrammatic description of the Forbidden City:

Visita nella Città proibita. Più impressionante per gli spazi esterni vuoti, pianeggianti e quadrati, ossia per le prospettive e i cortili che non per il resto. Mi confermo

21 “Pretence and lie, euphemism and dissipated imagination” (Malerba 1993, 28).

22 Sereni’s diary was published in 2004, almost 20 years after his death.

23 “... the sense of an irreducible unfamiliarity prevails, which is the inability to subscribe with [the author’s] past to a world whose distance results in neutralizing [his] writing” (Sartorelli 2004, 29).

nell'idea di me stesso come di un pessimo visitatore, che non vede molto e si stanca presto. (Sereni 2004, 4)²⁴

Sereni's conclusions about the validity of their trip were, of course, negative. He thought that his impressions of the country were so superficial that he could not write coherently about China (2004, 11). Moreover, after three weeks in the country, Sereni inferred that "siamo tutti un po' saturi di Cina e non esiteremmo a prendere il primo aereo per l'Italia se appena fosse possibile" (20).²⁵

The depiction of China emerging from the travelogue of Luzi was that of a backward society, an "Asian ant nest" (1984, 27). Luzi described the praise of the Chinese government for later achievements of the PRC's industrial development as an "entusiasmo rudimentale per le meccanizzazioni, primo vanto e primo fondamento di ogni collettivismo" (25).²⁶ He portrayed the Forbidden City as symbolic of the despotic and repetitive nature of Chinese civilization, where "è esaltata e resa irraggiungibile l'idea del potere: un'idea matematica e insieme leziosa ma con accigliamenti terribili" (26).²⁷ And he noted down that the trial of the Gang of Four seemed "costruito" (42),²⁸ and similarly the official talks by the Chinese cadres and artists appeared "non del tutto liber[i]" (37).²⁹ Finally, he regarded some of the theoretical underpinnings of the Chinese authors and literary critics as "banalità oggi in voga" and "scempiaggini" (44).³⁰ This impression of the country is clearer in Luzi's poem "Reportage," in which he defines China as an "eternal stern satrapy" (1992, 53):

24 "Tour of the Forbidden City. It is astonishing only for its square, flat empty spaces, or rather for its perspectives and courtyards. I am now sure that I am a terrible visitor, who does not see much and tires quickly" (Sereni 2004, 4).

25 "We have all had enough of China. And we would not hesitate a minute to get on the first flight available to Italy as soon as possible" (Sereni 2004, 20).

26 "... the rudimental enthusiasm for mechanization, which is the first and foremost pride and foundation of all collectivism" (Luzi 1984, 25).

27 "... the idea of power is exalted and made unattainable: an idea that is mathematical, simpering and terribly stern at the same time" (Luzi 1984, 26).

28 "... staged" (Luzi 1984, 42).

29 "... not completely spontaneous" (Luzi 1984, 37).

30 "... currently popular banalities" and "... scempiaggini" (Luzi 1984, 44).

Qui il potere è sommo e confina con la sua assenza.
 Lo scriba tartaro s'imbrogia con le sue carte.
 Mutati in parte i caratteri, più semplici
 – ma quanto? – gli ideogrammi: mutata
 forse – ma in cosa? – l'eterna satrapia
 accigliata dietro quelle muraglie mongole.
 Si parla di una nuova équipe legittima
 insediata nel palazzo al posto di una cricca
 altrettanto poco nota oggi sotto processo.
 Il potere tace perso nel suo monumento.

(1984, 21)³¹

By using the term satrapy, Luzi hints at both the supposedly exotic and anachronistic nature of China (satrapy meaning a province from the Persian empire) and the totalitarian nature of Maoist and Dengist governments (satrapy also understood as a government usurping its authority). While the final remarks of Luzi were not as negative as Sereni's, Luzi also questioned the possibility of understanding China at all (1984, 45): "Ma ci siamo avvicinati almeno un poco alla 'mente' cinese? Forse, a distanza l'immagine si ricomporrà, un'idea imperfetta si delineerà" (45).³²

Sereni and Luzi both commented briefly on the Irpinia earthquake (Luzi 1984, 41; Sereni 2004, 18); however, there are almost no references to the Italian sociopolitical situation of the time in their travelogues. Sereni briefly mentioned the assassination of the personnel manager Renato Briano by the Red Brigades on November 12, 1980, and the subsequent difficult

31 "Here power is supreme, and it borders on its absence.

The Tartar scribe gets his papers mixed up.

The characters are partly changed, simpler

– but how much? – the ideograms: changed

Perhaps – but into what? – the eternal stern

Satrapy behind those Mongol walls.

There is talk of a new legitimate team

Installed in the palace in the place of an equally

Little-known gang of trial today.

Lost in its monument, power is silent" (Luzi 1992, 53).

32 "Did we get even slightly closer to the Chinese 'mind'? Probably, the image [of it] will be put back together with time, and an imperfect idea [of it] will appear" (Luzi 1984, 45).

era of the DC prime minister Arnaldo Forlani as well as the ENI-Petromin scandal, when the government covered up the illegal transfer of funds to Saudi Arabia by Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (ENI): “A Milano hanno fatto fuori un dirigente della Marelli, mentre dilaga lo scandalo del petrolio e Forlani è già in difficoltà. Su tutti i fronti ci risiamo” (2004, 9).³³ Luzi did not refer directly to any political event characterizing Italy at that time. Nonetheless, Luzi’s travel writing resonated with his ethical and civil dissatisfaction with Italian society, a feeling that also characterized other poems written during the Anni di piombo, and collected in *Al fuoco della controversia* (1978) and *Per il battesimo dei nostri frammenti* (1985). Luzi specified that his analysis of the sociopolitical situation of the late 1970s and early 1980s or of any “stato dittatoriale dell’est” (Eastern dictatorial state) – China in this case – served to draw a map of the contemporary world, for a theoretical investigation of the disparities inherent to human sociopolitical relations (1999, 184).³⁴ Consequently, Luzi’s dissatisfaction with the 1970s and 1980s Italian society was more of an investigation of the relationship between humankind and power and the fallacy of the sociopolitical structures of the time (1999, 185–187), rather than a critique of the outcome of the political activism and violence characterizing these years, as in De Jaco’s narrative. In the final analysis, Luzi’s “theoretical”

33 “They killed a manager from Marelli in Milan, right in the middle of the oil scandal, and Forlani is already having a rough time. Here we go again” (Sereni 2004, 9).

34 Concerning *Al fuoco della controversia* (1978), Luzi specified that his poems expressed his “indignazione morale e politica” (moral and political indignation) for contemporary society as well as the “agonia della storia” (agony of history), in which the author regarded the historical development as exemplary of the extreme battle against evil innate in humanity (1998, 1610). The motivations for Luzi’s ethical and civil dissatisfaction are clearly stated in “Muore ignominiosamente la repubblica” from *Al fuoco della controversia*, but originally published in 1976 in the journal *Filologia Italiana*. Similarly to “Reportage,” the poem investigated the degeneration of society in correlation with the human strife of power, and it even returned to the same allegory: that of a trial that not only did not grant social order, but legitimated despotic power. As the Italianist Jewell argued, “Luzi increasingly felt it necessary to examine, practically and theoretically, the directions of the destiny of Italian society, culture, and politics within the larger design of the nature of human life itself” (1985, 133).

take and Sereni's silence and aloofness concerning Italy both express the authors' political disillusionment and disengagement of the time, which certainly contributed to their reluctance to come to terms with China and post-Maoist society.

The attitudes toward the PRC of Alberto Arbasino and Luigi Malerba are quite different from those of their fellow travelers De Jaco, Sereni, and Luzi. Arbasino and Malerba similarly regarded China as an anachronistic and static dystopian society, but they also questioned the possibility of understanding the country, its people and culture. However, the two intellectuals from the Gruppo 63 portrayed China as a literary space, a text and an orientalist construction, under the influence of French post-structuralism. Therefore, they often referred to literary sources to characterize China and the Chinese people. They both linked their ambition to that of notorious Italian authors who had written on China as travelers, such as Marco Polo, and the Jesuit priest and missionary Matteo Ricci, and those who had written on China in spite of never having traveled to the country, such as the Jesuit writer and historian Daniello Bartoli, and the seventeenth-century Italian philosopher Lorenzo Magalotti. As was characteristic of his literary style, Arbasino also reinforced his depiction of China through the abundant use of quotations from Western authors and their literary works (Gadda, Pasolini, Borges, Orwell, Rabelais, Rodin, Antonioni, Ariosto, Dumas, Puccini, Brecht, and others), and references to iconic characters and places of Western popular culture (such as Carmen Miranda, Walt Disney, and Harry's Bar). Malerba, on the other hand, referred more to his own literary works, in particular to his short story collection *Le rose imperiali* (1974). The narrativization of China thus produced by the two authors resulted in a witty, irreverent, and surreal other-space resembling Giorgio Manganelli's China. Similarly to Manganelli's China, Arbasino's and Malerba's depictions of the country contrasted with the solemn and supposedly realistic portrayal relying on Marxist analysis that characterized the narratives on China by the majority of the Italian leftist intellectuals traveling to the country since the proclamation of the PRC in 1949.

Arbasino initially evoked the analogy between Italian and Chinese people based on a supposed exclusive relationship of affinity that, as seen

in the preceding chapters, many leftist Italian intellectuals from the 1950s and from the 1960s stressed in their travel accounts of China:

Belli, gentili, cattivi, spiritosi, sorridenti, bugiardi, elegantissimi, e molto simpatici: i Cinesi ci somigliano più che ogni altro popolo europeo o mediterraneo nostro vicino. Sembrano così affini a noi, nel modo di comportarsi e di ridere, anche in una certa spensieratezza e indolenza, e poi nei comportamenti spiritati. (Arbasino 1981, 130)³⁵

However, Arbasino rapidly dismissed that idea of affinity, stating that “i loro segni sono tutti diversi, le loro forme non coincidono” and “i nostri strumenti, le nostre chiavi non funzionano né combaciano là [in Cina]” (1981, 130).³⁶ He therefore described China as a quasi-unintelligible symbolic space, the opposite of Italy, to be accessed through deciphering the Chinese people, places, and things as semiotic signs (Santarone 2004, 51). Arbasino deliberately disregarded the deep sociopolitical, industrial, economic, and cultural changes that China had gone through in the twentieth century, particularly after the foundation of the PRC in 1949, and he aimed at creating an anti-historical portrait of the country (Santarone 2004, 52, 57). Consequently, he identified the specific traits of Chinese civilization as “ripetizione, iterazione, serialità e monotonia” (Arbasino 1981, 134),³⁷ which he regarded as the historical and anthropological factors determining the supposed immutable nature of Chinese society. Such remarks on the complete opposition of the two countries, cultures and peoples, as well as on the supposed immutable nature of Chinese society, also expressed Arbasino’s dissatisfaction with how China had been depicted as a possible model of development for Italian society in the previous decades (Santarone 2004, 52). Arbasino even ironically remarked that “viaggiando

35 “They are beautiful, kind, mean, humorous, cheerful, deceitful, very elegant and very likable. The Chinese resemble us more than any other European or neighboring Mediterranean people. They seem so close to us in their manners and way of laughing, in their lightheartedness and indolence, and in their rowdy manners” (Arbasino 1981, 130).

36 “Their signs and forms are completely different” and therefore “our instruments and keys do not work there” (Arbasino 1981, 130).

37 “Repetition, iteration, seriality and monotony” (Arbasino 1981, 134).

in Cina, non si riscontrano affatto taluni cinesismi all'italiana" (1981, 214),³⁸ pointing out that such depictions were biased by the ideological standing and political commitment of their authors. At the same time, Arbasino's depiction of China as a backward, static, and immutable country populated by zoomorphic and puerile figures echoes the fascist narrativization of Republican China during the Fascist Ventennio.

The principal discursive device supporting such a representation was Arbasino's use of distance and alterity to emphasize not only China's distance in time and space from Italy but also the unreal depiction of Maoist society presented to the SNS delegation. Arbasino's point of view is clearly visible in his characterization of the Chinese landscape, which he perceived as "medieval and Latin American," and therefore completely opposite to the Italian landscape:

Usciamo a Canton, fra il Medio Evo e l'America Latina, vegetazione tropicale in città, hibiscus e insalate giganti, alberoni, viali larghi erratici, autobus vecchi, notturne a piedi, negozi senza serramenti per il gran caldo, artigianato per strada sotto portici fatiscenti, fili tesi e pendula a grovigli e masse, costruzioni cominciate e abbandonate, galline, polvere, bambini piccoli come scimmionti attoniti. (Arbasino 1981, 166)³⁹

Arbasino relied on the misleading definition, according to Maoist ideology, of pre-Maoist China as a "feudal society." At the same time, the author's definition of Chinese society as an ancient, slow-paced, frugal "feudal society" (1981, 131) served to emphasize the backward and obsolete nature of the Maoist model of development and of the PRC in general, in accordance with the historical characterization of the European Middle Ages as a dark era of imperial fragmentation, famine, backwardness, and

38 "When travelling around China, there is absolutely no trace of those Italian-style Chinesisms" (Arbasino 1981, 214).

39 "In Canton, we find ourselves somewhere between the Middle Ages and Latin America with tropical vegetation in the city, hibiscus and giant lettuces. Big trees. Wide meandering avenues. Old buses. Nocturnal walking crowds. Shops with no windows or doors for the heat, artisans working in the streets beneath porches. Taut wires. Dangling wires. Entangled. In a bundle. Partly constructed abandoned buildings. Chickens. Dust. Tiny children resembling small stunned monkeys" (Arbasino 1981, 166).

isolation. Interestingly, Arbasino's critique of the rural frugality, low-cost commodities, and scarce use of natural resources in the PRC clashed with the 1950s and 1960s portraits of China by leftist intellectuals, in which such characteristics were judged positively and linked to early- and mid-twentieth-century southern Italy's agrarian society. More importantly, Arbasino argued that the presumed unrealistic nature of the PRC was itself the major reason for Italian intellectuals' interest in the country over the previous three decades. As he disbelieved in the effective validity of his Chinese experience, in his concluding remarks, Arbasino once again linked Maoist China with Latin America, specifically Peronist Argentina, defining the two countries as "Maoland" and "Borgesland" to emphasize their unreality: "sussurra l'ideologia: un miliardo di cinesi è solo un'astrazione bibliotecaria o bibliografica, babelica, e non ha davvero nulla di umano" (220).⁴⁰ Arbasino therefore concluded that Italian intellectuals found the PRC inspiring precisely because their portraits of China were unreal, because they were constructs resulting from imaginative geography and ideological propaganda. Most importantly, such unreal geographical localization enabled these intellectuals to identify themselves in Maoist China's alterity:

Maolandia e Borgeslandia sono forse Paesi egualmente privi di Realismo, e magari di Realtà, mormora l'immaginario: abitati e vissuti, piuttosto da allegorie, apologhi, archetipi, allusioni, aneddoti, favole, parabole, simboli, miti, gesti, schemi, emblemi, parvenze, demenze, deliri – non di rado elegantemente strutturati. Perciò ci piacciono. (Arbasino 1981, 220)⁴¹

Luigi Malerba also characterized China as a distant oriental and exotic country, radically different from Italy (1993, 7), located on a different

40 "Ideology whispers: a billion Chinese people is a mere bibliothecarian or bibliographic, Babelic abstraction that contains nothing that is human" (Arbasino 1981, 220).

41 "My imaginary whispers that Maoland and Borgesland are probably countries equally void of any realism, and even reality. [These are] countries inhabited by allegories, apologues, archetypes, allusions, anecdotes, fables, parables, symbols, myths, jests, schemes, emblems, semblances, dementias, deliria – all often elegantly structured. That is why we like them" (Arbasino 1981, 220).

geographic and chronological horizon (20).⁴² At the same time, Malerba regarded China principally as an “altrove letterario” (literary elsewhere), serving as a canvas for his own creativity (15)⁴³ where “l’immaginario assolve ad una funzione demistificante delle abitudini e degli istituti sociali” (Accardo 2012, 297).⁴⁴ A few years earlier, Malerba had written a short story collection set in imperial China, *Le rose imperiali* (1974), in which his literary creativity coexisted with specific aspects of the contemporary culture and society of both China and Italy, in the belief that the coexistence of imagination and reality would produce specific “congegni esotici” (exotic devices) capable of representing the alterity of China (1993, 15–16). In the travel narratives from *Cina Cina* (1985), Malerba’s portrait of China resonates with the notions of the Chinese civilization that he elaborated before as well as after traveling to the country. While the initial intention was that of consolidating his relationship with China as an exotic device, at the same time Malerba was willing to reconsider his Eurocentric assumptions (1993, 7), and gather historical data on the PRC. He was also critical of the past stereotypical representations of China, both as a fairytale consisting of “muraglie e pagode, giade e draghi, porcellane e ma-jong [mah-jong]” and as a utopian socialist society (Malerba 1993, 18).⁴⁵ However, Malerba also regarded the Maoist and post-Maoist PRC as a country regulated by an ahistorical and cyclical civilization. Consequently, he portrayed the Cultural Revolution as one of the many “anti-historical gusts” shaking the country over four millennia (32). Malerba also traced an analogy between Mao Zedong and the PRC, and Qin Emperor Qin Shi Huang (259 BC–21

42 All the quotations and their relative page numbers from *Cina Cina* refer to the edition Luigi Malerba, *Il viaggiatore sedentario*, Milan: Rizzoli, 1993, 13–74. *Il viaggiatore sedentario* also contains Luigi Malerba’s account of his second trip to China, in 1989, “Cina nove anni dopo” (75–118).

43 As a literary elsewhere to “deposit my own inventions, fables and outstanding mythologies” (Malerba 1993, 15).

44 “The imaginary has the same demystifying function as social habits and norms” (Accardo 2012, 297).

45 “... walls and pagodas, jade and dragons, chinaware and mah-jong” (Malerba 1993, 18).

BC) and his empire, emphasizing the supposedly ahistorical and cyclical nature of Chinese civilization:

Che cosa ha fatto Mao Tse-tung [Mao Zedong]? Anche lui come l'antico imperatore Qin Shi Huang aveva deciso di ricominciare tutto da capo e se non fece tagliare la testa ai letterati, molti ne rinchiuse nelle galere e altri mandò ad allevare porci e galline. Si era proposto di cancellare il passato e come marchio della nuova era invece aveva fatto stampare la propria effigie e i propri detti su tutti i muri della Cina. (Malerba 1993, 33)⁴⁶

Similarly to *Le rose imperiali*, in which Malerba mocked the authoritarian power symbolized by Qin Emperor Qin Shi Huang, Malerba thus desecrated the reputed exceptionality of Mao Zedong, Maoism, and the Cultural Revolution, and at the same time expressed his skepticism for post-Maoist China. Such intent is most evident in Malerba's small poem "Il dopo-Mao" (The After-Mao), whose style is irreverently reminiscent of Japanese haiku poetry:

Meno male
Meno Mao
Questo è il mio dazebao.

(1993, 72)⁴⁷

Most importantly, Malerba questioned the experience of traveling in China and the effective possibility of "knowing" China that the majority of Italian leftist intellectuals had claimed since the 1950s. After discovering

46 "What di Mao Zedong do? Just like the ancient emperor [Qin Shi Huang], Mao too decided to start from scratch. And while he did not have intellectuals beheaded, he did lock many of them up in prison and send others to raise pigs and chickens. He also resolved to erase the past as the marker of a new era; nonetheless, he had his effigy and slogans printed on all the walls of China" (Malerba 1993, 30).

47 "Thank goodness/less of Mao/This is my dazibao" (Malerba 1993, 72). Malerba's irreverence is also evident in the poem "Per Deng Xiaoping" (To Deng Xiaoping), which mocks the so-called ping-pong diplomacy: "Non c'è ping/Senza pong/Ma le palle/ Dove Song?" (There is no ping/Without pong/ But the balls/ Where are Tang?) (72). Note that in translating Malerba's "Per Deng Xiaoping" I substituted "they" for "Tang" (Chinese dynasty), just like in the original "sono" (are) is replaced with Song (Chinese dynasty) by Malerba.

that the term “China” was unknown to most Chinese people, he deduced that “China” was an abstract concept invented by European travelers and concluded that that “China” was “un mito geografico, una leggenda, una favola, un luogo immaginario” (1993, 71).⁴⁸

The literary critic, writer, and politician Romano Luperini argued that in Malerba’s travelogue, “anziché essere ricondotta alla ‘normalità’ occidentale o respinta in un ‘mostruoso’ inconoscibile, la Cina diventa un’allegoria di tale alterità, dell’abisso che si è aperto fra ‘nome’ e cosa” (1985, 8).⁴⁹ Therefore, according to Luperini, Malerba needed to use linguistic devices and figures of speech, such as paradoxes, allusions, word puns, and epigrams in order to portray China, since Western theoretical instruments – such as Marxism, Marxism-Leninism and the like – are not appropriate for defining the alterity of China (11). Luperini’s apolitical take on Malerba’s *Cina Cina*, emphasizing the (Barthesian) textual validity of China as well as the influence of French post-structuralism, certainly emphasizes Malerba’s intention to focus on the indecipherable nature of reality, and the Chinese reality in particular, in order to distance himself from the approach of other Italian reporters and writers in the decades preceding his own trip to China (De Pascale 2001, 181). At the same time, however, the context for Malerba’s and Arbasino’s post-structuralist approaches is nonetheless political.

Although Arbasino and Malerba did not refer directly to the historical events in relation to political violence in 1960s and 1970s Italy, they considered Maoist China to be as much an autarchic and self-sufficient world as the Italian Fascist Ventennio (Malerba 1993, 34). They described the Cultural Revolution as similar to Orwell’s *1984* (Arbasino 1981, 209) and a “fenomeno autoritario e repressivo come il fascismo” (Malerba 1993, 34),⁵⁰ or the work of ultra-leftist reactionary movements such as “ultrafascismo di stampo feudale, un oscurantismo culturale di tipo totalitario” (Arbasino

48 “... a geographic myth, a legend, a fable and an imaginary place” (Malerba 1993, 71).

49 “Instead of being framed into the Western ‘normality’ or refused as an uncognizable ‘monstrousness,’ China becomes an allegory of such alterity, of the abyss between the ‘name’ and the thing” (Luperini 1985, 8).

50 “... an authoritarian and repressive phenomenon just like fascism” (Malerba 1993, 34).

1981, 182).⁵¹ Similarly, the post-Maoist PRC, in particular the trial of the Gang of Four, was compared to the years of the Verona Trials and the Nuremberg Trials during which prominent members of the Fascist and Nazi regimes were prosecuted (Arbasino 1981, 200). The Chinese writers interviewed during the trip (Ba Jin, Ding Ling, Mao Dun, Zhou Yang, among others) were compared to the generation of Italian intellectuals who went through the transitional phase from fascism to republican Italy, such as Emilio Cecchi, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Elio Vittorini, Curzio Malaparte, Alberto Moravia, Enrico Emanuelli, Giancarlo Vigorelli, Corrado Alvaro, and Cesare Pavese (Arbasino 1981, 202). When the Chinese writers exposed the basis of the Chinese genre of scar literature, Malerba and Arbasino skeptically compared the Chinese literary panorama to the 1950s and 1960s Italian polarization of neorealism versus avanguardia. As Malerba concluded, “già si intravedono tutti i percorsi, le strade maestre e sentieri, e le delusioni letterarie che saranno tanto simili a quelle del nostro dopoguerra.” (1993, 32).⁵² Arbasino’s nonconformist narrativization of China was, nonetheless, characterized by his civil and moral engagement, just like his main works of the time, *Fantasmisti italiani* (1977), *In questo stato* (1978) and *Un paese senza* (1980) – a civil and moral engagement not subject to any ideological or political affiliation.⁵³ A similar conclusion might be formulated regarding Luigi Malerba, who was certainly the least politically involved artist of the delegation.

In the final analysis, whether nostalgic or disillusioned, or enraged and pessimistic, the travel narratives from Aldo De Jaco, Vittorio Sereni and Mario Luzi, Alberto Arbasino, and Luigi Malerba are all based on the specific context of the sociopolitical situation of Italy in those years, as well as the past experience and political engagement or disengagement

51 “... a feudal-like ultra-fascism, a totalitarian-like cultural obscurantism” (Arbasino 1981, 182).

52 “All the [literary] routes, main ways and paths, as well as the sources of disappointment that are so similar to those characterizing our afterwar are already visible here” (Malerba 1993, 32). Such considerations were partially shared by De Jaco (1983, 101, 125).

53 With regard to the political engagement of Arbasino in the 1970s, see Belpoliti, “Politica,” in Belpoliti and Grazioli (2001, 355–363).

of the authors. Moreover, although in different ways, these authors all consolidated their identities by using their Italian experiences to relate to China through a process of othering in which the political reference is of primary importance.

Living in China between Disillusionment and Nostalgia

Il 5 marzo, all'alba, vado all'aeroporto. Lascio a casa i miei abiti cinesi e mi metto di nuovo la cravatta. Tutti i formulari della dogana e della polizia li riempio in inglese, non in cinese come un tempo. Mi firmo "Terzani." Deng Tiannuo non esiste più.

– Terzani 2011, 967⁵⁴

The accounts from the PRC by the sinologist and political activist Edoarda Masi and the journalist Tiziano Terzani stand out for their insightfulness. Masi and Terzani had visited China several times and lived in China for relatively long periods, and they were both knowledgeable about Chinese politics and culture and proficient in the Chinese language. Most importantly, Masi and Terzani shared a similar approach to China, its society and its culture. They shunned the blue-penciled portrayal of the country that the Chinese cadres promoted to all foreign visitors. While the two authors did not dismiss completely their fascination with China and Maoism, their analyses of Chinese society revealed the coercive, anti-democratic, and totalitarian nature of the PRC through a detailed scrutiny of the political and social events occurring in the country at the time of their stay. Nonetheless, Masi and Terzani relentlessly sought to mediate the sociocultural and political differences between themselves and the

54 “On March 5, at dawn, I drive to the airport. I have left my Chinese clothes at home. Once again I wear a tie. I fill in all forms in English, not in Chinese as I used to do, and I sign as ‘Terzani.’ Deng Tiannuo no longer exists” (Terzani 1986, 262). Deng Tiannuo was Terzani’s Chinese persona.

Chinese people, and between Italy and China, in order to better understand China –its culture, society, and people.

Edoarda Masi worked in Shanghai in 1976 and 1977 as an instructor of Italian language at the Shanghai International Studies University (SISU) for one year, after spending a few months in Beijing at the Italian Embassy as a guest and informal assistant of the Italian ambassador Marco Francisci Di Baschi. As mentioned in the preceding chapters, Edoarda Masi had studied at the Peking University for nine months during 1957 and 1958. In addition, in the 1960s and early 1970s, she had taught Chinese language and literature at several Italian universities and research institutes, such as the University of Naples “L’Orientale” and at the IsMEO, and she had published many sociopolitical essays on the PRC in *Quaderni Rossi*, *Quaderni Piacentini* and other Italian journals.⁵⁵ Tiziano Terzani lived in China from 1980 to 1984, for the most part in the company of his wife, Angela Terzani Staude, and their two children, Folco and Saskia.⁵⁶ The two authors had similar reasons for choosing to live in China in those years, in spite of their quite different ideas about intellectual activism. Fundamentally, there was certainly a sincere belief in the uniqueness of the PRC as a socialist model of development, regarded by both initially as “il più grande esperimento di ingegneria sociale che l’umanità avesse mai tentato” (Terzani 2011, 647).⁵⁷ As a publicly engaged leftist intellectual, Masi had been among the most influential voices in the debates on China and Maoism among the Italian leftist extra-parliamentary movements throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Terzani, on the other hand, had developed a deep interest in Maoism and China in the years of the Cultural Revolution while working as a manager for Italian typewriter manufacturer Olivetti. As a result, Terzani had interrupted his career to study Chinese language, culture and politics in

55 In those years, Masi also translated into Italian the Qing masterpiece the *Dream of the Red Chamber* by the writer Cao Xueqin (Torino: UTET, 1964), and *Wild Grass* and several essays and speeches by the Chinese writer, poet, and intellectual Lu Xun (*La falsa libertà. Saggi e discorsi 1918–36*, Torino: Einaudi, 1968).

56 Angela Terzani Staude published a diary on the Terzani family’s stay in China from 1980 to 1983, entitled *Giorni cinesi* (1987).

57 “... the greatest experiment of social engineering in the history of humankind” (Terzani 1986, 9).

the United States, obtaining a master's degree in journalism at Columbia University and a Chinese language proficiency certification at Stanford University in 1968. In New York, Terzani wrote a series of articles on US politics, the US Vietnam War and the Black Power movement, as well as on Maoist China and the Cultural Revolution. These articles were published mainly by two major socialist journals, *L'Astrolabio* and *Il Ponte*, respectively, directed by the Italian partisans and PSI politicians Perruccio Parri and Enzo Enriques Agnoletti, and by the newspaper *Il Giorno*, directed by the Italian partisan and socialist journalist and writer Italo Pietra. Once Terzani was back in Italy in 1969, he became politically active as a young leftist, pro-Maoist journalist, although he continued to write on the above-mentioned topics. In 1970 he joined the Comitato dei Giornalisti per la Libertà di Stampa e la Lotta Contro la Repressione (Committee for Freedom of the Press and the Fight Against Repression), which was created as a protest against the repression by the Italian government of the student and wage worker protests raging in those years. In mid-1971, Terzani was among the many enthusiasts of Maria Antonietta Macciocchi's *Dalla Cina*, which he described as "il più penetrante, il più intelligente, colto resoconto di un viaggio fatto nella Repubblica Popolare che sia stato scritto negli ultimi anni" (2011, CIII).⁵⁸

While Masi and Terzani shared the intention of providing more accurate information on the PRC and less ideological representations of the country, Masi was also deeply dissatisfied with the Italian sociopolitical situation as well as the increasingly violent terrorist acts of political dissent characterizing the late 1970s. As she specified at the beginning of her travelogue, she had left for China also because of her "disgusto per quello che l'Europa e il mio paese [Italia] stanno diventando" (Masi 1978, 15) and with the intent of situating herself at an "illimitata distanza dalla partecipazione [politica]" (15), which, however, Masi did not regard as a reason to escape

58 "The most incisive, intelligent and well-read travel report written on the People's Republic of China in recent years" (Terzani 2011, CIII). As discussed in the previous chapter, Macciocchi's *Dalla Cina* was published with strong circulation in Italy and France, and it was among the most influential books in Italy on the Cultural Revolution in the early- to mid-1970s. The success of the book also caused Macciocchi's clash with the PCI.

from Italy (15).⁵⁹ Terzani, on the other hand, left Italy after resigning from *Il Giorno* in 1971, to pursue his ambition of becoming an independent foreign reporter in Asia. This decision eventually paid off, since he did gain international recognition for his war reportage from Vietnam and Cambodia, published as *Pelle di leopardo* (1973) and *Giai Phong* (1976).

Edoarda Masi's *Per la Cina: Confuciani e proletari* was published by Mondadori in 1978, and translated into English as *China Winter: Workers, Mandarins and the Purge of the Gang of Four* by the American publishing house E. P. Dutton in 1982. Masi's travelogue was regarded as remarkable primarily for its first-hand analysis of the drastic social and political turmoil following the deaths of the two most prominent and highest-ranked Chinese politicians and cadres of the PCP: Zhu De, on July 6, 1976, and Mao Zedong, on September 9 of the same year. As a Maoist sympathizer, Masi was deeply moved by the deaths of the two leaders, and felt a contradictory sense of participation and solidarity with the Chinese people (1978, 99). However, she immediately perceived that the deaths of Mao Zedong and Zhu De had ignited a political struggle among the institutions as well as feelings of uncertainty and fear (101). More importantly, during the commemoration of Mao Zedong's death, Masi had a clear idea about the PCP's propagandist use of the political participation and grief of the Chinese. Masi therefore questioned the possibility of effectively grasping the meaning of the sociopolitical event she witnessed and concluded by questioning the existence of a "realtà fattuale" (factual reality) in the PRC (274). She convincingly argued that the Chinese history enacted by the socialist government had been continuously falsified, with the aim of consolidating the central political power (145). Masi also criticized the diffusion among the masses of contradictory and unrealistic information by means of *dazibao*, as well as the anti-historical and decontextualized usage of historical concepts and exemplary figures of both the Chinese and Western traditions to give substance to such acts of historical falsification. An example of this process, according to Masi, was the republication of

59 "... revulsion at what Europe and my own country [Italy] are becoming," "... an immeasurable remoteness from [political] involvement ..." and "this is not a flight from my own country" (Masi 1981, 25).

the essays and short stories of the Chinese modern intellectual Lu Xun, which distorted the original political content of Lu Xun's works in order to criticize Maoist society (227).

Edoarda Masi's resentment was also due to her forced isolation from the Chinese people. As a radical leftist, Masi longed for political involvement and a more active sociopolitical role in Chinese society. She was sympathetic toward the Chinese people and she wanted to experience their way of life first-hand. Her knowledge of the Chinese language, however, did not facilitate her attempts to participate more in the social life in China. On the contrary, Masi felt that such knowledge was regarded by the Chinese government as a subversive aspect: "lo straniero che intende il cinese è un'anomalia, da correggere politicamente, nella misura del possibile. Si può in ogni momento cavillare su quello che egli pretenda di aver capito, e anche rovesciarlo, più e più volte, con la libertà de chi è padrone del gioco" (1978, 43).⁶⁰ Such isolation was evident in the language institute where Masi taught Italian, which could be regarded as a microcosm of the PRC. Masi and the other foreign instructors all lived on the fourteenth floor of the same building, which was completely reserved for them.⁶¹ They attended meetings, visited factories, and watched movies together, and discussed the official information on the political happenings of the time. They were not allowed to interact with the Chinese instructors teaching subject-related courses such as history, politics, and Chinese language and literature. Nor were they allowed to access most of the university library, with the exception of the teaching materials of their respective subject areas.

As Masi documented the sociopolitical turmoil engendered by the death of Mao Zedong, she specified that analyzing Chinese society had

60 "The foreigner who comprehends Chinese is an anomaly, and insofar as possible is to be adroitly corrected. It is permissible at any moment to quibble about what the foreigner claims he has understood, and even repeatedly to turn his account topsy-turvy with the impunity of the master of the game" (Masi 1981, 49).

61 There is a touch of irony in reserving the fourteenth floor for foreign visitors. The number 14 in Chinese is regarded as a number to avoid since it is nearly a homophone of the phrase "wanting to die." Such irony is even subtler when we consider that in Maoist society such aspects of Chinese traditional folklore were regarded as "counterrevolutionary" during the Cultural Revolution.

become part of an obsessive and continuous dialogue with herself, which she felt was necessary to both resist her estrangement in Chinese society and communicate her experience to the Italian readership (1978, 429). Masi interpreted her experience as an act of continuous mediation and disillusionment:

Mi ostino a ricercare la possibilità di un rapporto [con la Cina e i cinesi] senza pretendere di misurare una diversa civiltà col metro europeo, ma senza perdere la mia identità europea. È una scommessa rischiosa, perché è giocata contro le intenzioni dei cinesi e dei miei connazionali. Ma è la sola via alla conoscenza, che non è mai un dato acquisito ma un confronto e una continua disillusione; e il rapporto deve essere comunicabile a terzi, affinché quel che si crede acquisito venga disperso e messo in comune. (Masi 1978, 7–8)⁶²

The narratives by Masi (1978) were also critical of those Italian leftist intellectuals who had accepted the role of “friends of China.”⁶³ Edoarda Masi regarded the trips to the PRC by such intellectuals as ambiguous, purposeless, and lacking real political participation (20).⁶⁴ Masi thought that Italian intellectuals, rather than being stupefied by the censorship and information control taking place in the PRC, needed to look beyond it and try to understand the “significato attuale del discorso” (actual meaning of the discourse) (117). Masi also warned them not to seek refuge in an idyllic reconsideration of Italian society in comparison with 1980s China,

- 62 “I persist in searching for the possibility of a relationship [with China and the Chinese] without assuming that I can measure a different civilization with the European yardstick. At the same time I do not forfeit my Italian identity. It is a risky gamble, because it is played against the intentions of the Chinese and my compatriots. This is the only possible path to knowledge, which is never an accepted fact, but a comparison and a continuous disillusionment. This relationship has to be communicable to other people, so that what is reputedly acquired will not be lost, but shared” (Masi 1978, 7–8). The translation of this passage is mine. The E. P. Dutton US edition had a different introductory chapter by Masi, which provided supplementary historical details on late 1970s China for the American readership.
- 63 Concerning the status of the “friends of China” and both their privileges and the control over them by the Chinese government, see Brady (2003, 99–106, 129–136).
- 64 As seen in the quotation opening this chapter, Masi was skeptical of the typical Italian traveler visiting the People’s Republic of China.

just as in the past decades China had forcefully been conceptualized as a utopian society in comparison with Italy (218). In particular, Masi was skeptical of the way in which the intellectuals envisioned the PRC, because of the heavily political and ideological Italian background influencing their judgment (239). Masi indirectly expressed her dissent when she pointed out the decontextualized and generic use among the Chinese cadres of the term “fascism” in its analogy with Maoism: “Non c’è niente da fare: questa paroletta, “fascismo,” che prima nessuno ci sarebbe sentito di pronunciare, l’hanno messa in circolazione e ora si fa impercettibilmente strada, gira come un insetto pestifero e non si sa più chi finirà per colpire” (455).⁶⁵ As seen before, this analogy was among the major criticisms of Maoist society, and was often acritically judged as true by Western observers, such as the Italian journalists and writers visiting the country a few years later as part of the writers’ association delegation.

Masi also connected the violent and authoritarian political behavior of Chinese society to the political activism of the Italian extra-parliamentary left in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In contrast to the authors introduced above, Masi expressed her complete devotion to the political activism characterizing the “lungo Sessantotto,” although she had firmly opposed the political terrorism connected to part of the extra-parliamentary left. Although Masi criticized the preposterous and artificial nature of the political mobilization of the masses in China in those years, she gave a positive portrait of the political mobilization of the masses in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s. She described the mobilization of wage workers in Milan as an “immagine fraterna, sicurezza, fiducia nella coscienza collettive degli uomini,” and as a salvific act against the “minaccia fascista e di stato” (1978, 167),⁶⁶ referring to the Piazza Fontana bombing on December 12, 1969, which was organized by neofascist organizations.

65 “There is nothing for it. This little word ‘fascism,’ which once upon a time no one would have dreamed of uttering, has been put into circulation and is gaining currency, buzzing like annoying insect, and no one knows anymore whom it will end up biting” (Masi 1981, 342).

66 “... that fraternal image, that confidence in themselves and in each other, that faith in men’s collective awareness”; and “... the threat of a fascist coup d’état” (Masi 1981, 148).

His knowledge of Chinese language and culture, and a profound dedication to analyzing Chinese society were also major causes of Terzani's troubles in the country. Terzani's reportage was first published in German, as *Fremder unter Chinesen. Reportagen aus China* by Spiegel-buch in June 1984, then in Italian, as *La porta proibita* in September of the same year by Longanesi. In the following years, Terzani's reportage was published in English in several editions (Asia 2000, 1985; H. Holt & Co. 1986; Allen & Unwin 1986); and since then, it has obtained significant international success and is still being reprinted in new editions. With regard to Terzani's narratives, they include no direct references to the political situation in Italy in those years. However, Terzani's initial political enthusiasm as a pro-Maoist leftist writer was explicit in his introduction to *La porta proibita*, where he clearly stated that his initial interest in Maoism and the PRC was a consequence of the frustrated attempts to change Italian society by the leftist activism of the 1960s and 1970s that he himself had subscribed to: "se il nostro era un mondo vecchio e imperfetto, se le speranze del passato erano state frustrate, ecco una nuova occasione ... E così la Cina divenne un mito, appunto 'il mito dell'altro'" (1984, 647).⁶⁷ Terzani's original idea was to produce a reportage series from the remotest and least toured areas of the PRC. Terzani wanted to go beyond the official discourse, official tours and staged interviews that the CCP had been serving for over 30 years to the majority of the Western intellectuals visiting the country (1487). However, *La porta proibita* became a direct act of accusation of the coercive and repressive nature of Maoist and Dengist China, as a consequence of Terzani's detention, re-education, and expulsion by the Chinese government in early 1984 for presumed counterrevolutionary activities. The reportage also made explicit Terzani's disillusionment with the Maoist utopia (649).

Terzani's disillusionment was complete when, after being banned from the PRC, he remarked that his Chinese persona, Deng Tiannuo, no longer existed (1984, 967). Terzani maintained that the Maoist social

67 "If our world was old and imperfect, if past hopes had turned into great illusions, there was a new chance ... and thus China became a myth, the myth of the 'other'" (Terzani 1986, 9).

renovation of China had failed. He argued that Maoism, instead, had severed the millenary ties between Chinese traditional culture and history and the Chinese people (849). Furthermore, he argued that the priceless historical, cultural, and artistic heritage of pre-Maoist China had been systematically destroyed throughout the country (860). Terzani also distrusted the Dengist Chinese government because of the birth control policy and the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaigns, as well as the death penalty and the mass executions in the PRC. He maintained that the most industrialized areas of the country, the northeastern regions, were in a state of confusion, decay, and distrust (734). He even lamented the distrust of the popular antipathy for the collectivization of land enacted by Mao Zedong and dismantled by Deng Xiaoping (786). However, in spite of his harsh criticism, Terzani, in fact, considered China his home (Loreti 2011, 1495) [see Figure 2.4]. Even on the occasion of his detention and re-education, he felt that he was being treated as a local, and therefore he was even more sympathetic to all the Chinese people experiencing the same injustices (961).

Edoarda Masi and Tiziano Terzani did not forsake their fascination with China, nor did they dismiss completely their appreciation of Mao Zedong. They still regarded Mao Zedong as “il più grande liberatore di uomini del nostro secolo” (Masi 1978, 95),⁶⁸ or as the man who “tentò di costruire una società completamente nuova, una società in cui ognuno, secondo le sue capacità, avrebbe dovuto dare il meglio di sé per il bene comune” (Terzani 1984, 653–654).⁶⁹ While they were disillusioned with the sociopolitical situation of the PRC at the time, they looked at pre-PRC China with sympathy and nostalgia. Masi did not abandon her political ideas about Maoism, and directed her attention toward Yan’an during the 1940s, for its symbolic past as the cradle of the Chinese revolution. In the pre-Maoist China of Yan’an, she arguably found that same genuine political activism of Italian anti-fascist and anti-Nazi activism characterizing Italian Resistance. Masi even described the former headquarters of the People’s Liberation Army in Shaanxi province as similar to Italy: [Yan’an]

68 “He [Mao] ... was the greatest liberator of men in our century” (Masi 89, 1981).

69 “... tried to build a completely new society, where everyone would work to the best of his ability for the common good” (Terzani 1986, 14).

è un grosso borgo di gente povera e dignitosa, come in certo Abruzzo di montagna; hanno tutto l'essenziale ... (1978, 31).⁷⁰ Since Terzani's disillusionment was instead primarily political, he directed his passion toward the artistic, philosophical, and historical past of Chinese civilization. The two authors' affection for China remained the same throughout their lives, in spite of their grievous experiences in the country. In the 1990s, as he reinforced his skepticism for post-Maoist Chinese society, Terzani expressed once again his unconditional love for the country: "È triste per moltissimi cinesi ed è triste per certi stranieri come me che non avendo mai visto la Cina come un grande mercato, ma come una diversa esperienza di civiltà, hanno speso anni a cercare di capirla, finendo per averci una storia che è stata anche una storia d'amore" (2011, 646).⁷¹ A similar feeling of sadness, love for China, and distrust for post-Maoist society pervade Masi's introductory chapter to *Ritorno a Pechino*, regarding the occasion of her last voyage to China in 1991. However, Masi did not repudiate her political commitment

70 "It is a town of poor, dignified people, like in some mountain towns in Abruzzo. They have all the essentials." The translation is mine, since the analogy between Abruzzo and Yan'an is missing in the E. P. Dutton American translation.

It is worth noting that Masi felt a similar sense of identification with Vietnam, where she traveled as a tourist in the latter part of her stay in China. During her trip, Masi perceived the Italian and Vietnamese people as compatible because of their supposedly similar recent historical past: "I vietnamiti hanno vissuto fino in fondo la colonizzazione, si sono appropriati di qualcosa che era loro. Oggi ci conosciamo e siamo uguali" (The Vietnamese have experienced colonization fully; something that was theirs was taken from them. Today we meet and we are the same.) (1978, 335). Masi thus traced an analogy between the Italian anti-fascist Resistenza and the Vietnamese anti-American resistance struggle during the Vietnam War (1955–1975). Similarly, the Vietnamese areas on the border with the PRC reminded her of post-World War II Italy – "un'Italia del sud da dopoguerra ma con assai più silenzio" (a post-war southern Italy but much more silent) (346) – in spite of the evident difference of climate, vegetation, and morphology of the Vietnamese and Italian natural landscapes.

71 "It is a sad thing for many Chinese and also for some foreigners like me who have never looked at China as a big market, but as the experience of a different civilization. Such people have spent years trying to understand China, and they have ended up establishing a relationship with it, one that has also been a love story" (Terzani 2011, 646). This translation is mine.

to Maoism: “Se quel che è stato è irreal, Pechino o gli anni trascorsi della mia vita o la storia del comunismo, allora è irreal anche il nostro presente, il non consistere del tempo è pura inesistenza” (1993, 12).⁷²

Conclusion

The late 1970s and early to mid-1980s Italian intellectuals mentioned in this chapter disregarded the ideologically driven, privileged relationship between Italian travelers and Maoist China seen in the previous two chapters. They did not perceive Maoist society as a possible model of development. On the contrary, those intellectuals regarded Maoist China as a space for self-criticism, where to express their disbelief in, and disengagement with, Maoism and PRC, as well as with the violent political extra-parliamentarian activism and political terrorism mainly associated with Maoism in Italy in those years. Such change was also reflected in the relationship that they had with the Chinese, as those Italian intellectuals did not seek acceptance from their counterpart any longer.

The travel narratives produced by Arbasino, Malerba, Sereni, Luzi, and De Jaco approached China as if it were a completely politicized textual space. On the one hand, they unanimously regarded the PRC as a socialist country that was recovering from forced relocations, political executions, indoctrination of the masses, artistic and cultural destruction, and intellectual and political purges. On the other, they described the country as a totalitarian regime still regulated by an omnipresent, supreme bureaucratic machine usurping its citizens. At the same time, each of these authors approached China differently, in accordance with their own political engagement and past experiences. The comparison to Nazi and Fascist

72 “If what happened in Beijing [during the 1950s], in my life or in the history of communism was not real, then our present is also not real, since the inconsistency of time is pure inexistence” (1993, 12). Masi refers to her stay in Beijing in 1956, which I have discussed in the chapter “Italian Leftist Intellectuals in the People’s Republic of China: A Matter of Spiritual Affinity (1949–1960).”

regimes and ideologies expressed in the narratives of Arbasino, Malerba, Sereni, Luzi, and De Jaco dismissed the idea of the PRC as a unique space for the development of an egalitarian and just society inspired by Maoism and its consequent depiction as a possible model of development for Italy. Furthermore, such a comparison questioned the idea that the Marxist-Leninist lens of observation was the necessary instrument to approach, understand, and narrate the PRC objectively as asserted in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s depictions of the country. Rather than clarifying the nature of Maoist China, the references to the asperities and cruelty characterizing the Fascist, Soviet, and Nazi totalitarian regimes all ultimately served to reinforce the willingness of these authors to distance themselves from what Maoism had become in the 1970s and 1980s, a synonym for in Italian society: violent political contestation led by sectarian, extra-parliamentary leftist groups aiming at the subversion of political and social hierarchies.

Masi and Terzani also conceived of China as a completely politicized textual space. The two authors gathered first-hand information confirming the totalitarian and coercive nature of the country as well as the all-pervading nature of its bureaucratic machine. By exposing the shortcomings of the Chinese party in both Maoist and post-Maoist Chinese society, they declared the failure of Maoism as a communist ideology alternative to Stalinism. Furthermore, they refuted the idea of Maoist China as a possible source of inspiration and model of development for achieving an egalitarian society in Italy. However, the sense of nostalgia pervading the narrations of Terzani and Masi did not derive simply from the failure of Mao Zedong to create a communist society, or from the discomfort of post-Maoist China. The two authors located their *impegno*, or political commitment, in the Chinese space. Their idea of Maoist China was therefore the expression of a desire for political activism not extinguished by the dissatisfaction with the sociopolitical situation and the political violence characterizing the late 1970s and early 1980s Italy. This desire for political commitment is clearly visible in their continuous attempts to participate actively in Chinese society and to narrate the country more accurately, unbiased by either Chinese or Italian propaganda, as well as in their desire to find more suitable alternative utopian spaces, such as Masi's Yan'an or Vietnam, to locate their political engagement.

The critical and pessimistic attitude of all the selected Italian writers, journalists, and politicians from the 1976–1985 period is also expressed by the denial of the cultural, ideological, historical, and even spatial proximity between China and Italy, which served as a premise in the previous portrayals of the country by Italian leftist intellectuals. It is no longer appropriate to regard the PRC and the Chinese people as similar to their Italian counterpart, since they are depicted once again as far away, hostile, and culturally different, and their society and culture as unintelligible, static, and anti-historical.

Afterword

The characterization of China as Other to Italian society and the reimagination of its distance and difference in the five chronological paradigms was primarily shaped by the specific cultural, historical, and political traits of the respective Italian society of the time.

While aligned with the stereotypical Western representations of the country, Barzini Sr., Simoni, and Chiminelli's early 1900s depictions of late Qing and early Republican China as a backward, immutable, and despotic society resonated with Italian patriotism and Italy's desire to be among the greatest imperial powers of the time. In the 1920s, when depicting Chinese society to the Italian readership, the journalists and writers Appellius, Suster, Calzini, Cipolla, and Tomaselli matched their fascist experiences with post-imperial China, and promoted Italy's reputed racial and cultural superiority over China. On the basis of debatable evolutionary and racial theories, they described the country as utterly different and its people as subhuman and hostile, with the aim of creating spatial and cultural distance from fascist Italy. In the 1950s, the authors and politicians Spano, Chilanti, Calamandrei, Fortini, Cassola, Vigorelli, and Levi wrote about the People's Republic of China (PRC) in order to narrate post-World War II Italian culture and society as well as their nostalgia for the years of the Italian Resistance. They depicted 1950s China as a close at hand, spiritually similar civilization, and the Chinese people as comrades and partisans. In the mid-1960s to mid-1970s, Moravia, Parise, Macciocchi, Rodari, and Pavolini, along with other authors, regarded the country as an allegorical space¹ where one could witness the supposedly innovative and sociopolitical and cultural experiment of the Cultural Revolution, and they compared

1 The conceptualization of China as an "allegoric" country based of Tzvetan Todorov's typology (1993) is quite problematic. The politics of textuality subsumed to the depictions of China from the third and fourth paradigms analyzed in this book prevents the classification of the processes of self-identification of the Italian intellectuals visiting twentieth-century China simply according to referential and

it to the alternative forms of political participation characterizing Italy in those years. In the 1980s, the politicians and authors De Jaco, Luzi, Sereni, Arbasino, Malerba, Masi, and Terzani described China as an unfamiliar, different, and distant society, criticizing the political violence of the Cultural Revolution, and thus positioning themselves against the political violence besieging Italy in the 1970s and early 1980s, as well as criticizing the political activism of the previous generation of Italian leftist intellectuals who associated themselves positively with Maoist China.²

Furthermore, the Italian writers, journalists, and politicians from the five chronological paradigms consciously conveyed political messages reflecting their own ideological beliefs, as well as the respective nationalist, fascist, anti-fascist, leftist, and anti-leftist dominant discourses in Italian society. Each travel narrative stabilized and reinforced specific images of Italy: in the first paradigm through the promotion of the technological and cultural prominence of Liberal Italy as well as the goodness, compassion, and courageous character of Italian troops; in the second paradigm through the exaltation of *Italianità* and fascist ideology; in the third paradigm through the celebration of the Italian Resistance and socialist ideology; in the fourth paradigm through the praise of workerism, Marxism-Leninism, independence from the PCI and PSI, and the 1968 political contestation; and in the fifth and last paradigm, through the condemnation of the political violence in 1970s and 1980s Italy.

The five paradigms also reflected political factors that prevailed in Italian society at the time. The early 1900s narratives on late imperial China where the *canovaccio* for the Fascist Ventennio as their patriotic connotation and advocacy on Italy's presumed global prominence suited the fascist rhetoric thoroughly. The depiction of pre-revolutionary China during the Fascist Ventennio, served as a basis for the narrativization of the PRC since 1949. The fascist narratives directly influenced not only how China was depicted in the 1950s by Spano, Fortini, Cassola, Calamandrei, and

apolitical characterizations, such as Tzvetan Todorov's typology as in De Pascale (2001) and Santarone (2004). For more details on such topic, see Basilone 2019b.

2 These authors regarded early 1980s China as utterly different and remote, even non-intelligible, regardless of the improved accessibility to the country because of faster airplanes or the less rigid visa process characterizing the post-Mao PRC.

the other leftist intellectuals of the day, but also the representations that were developed in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. This aspect is even more evident if we consider the direct relation that the authors who visited China in these three decades had with fascism and anti-fascism. This deeply affected their judgment of Chinese Otherness, in that China came to stand as a positive example of an egalitarian and progressive nation animated by anti-fascist values in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s or a negative example of a totalitarian fascist-like regime in the years to follow. The influence of fascism on the depiction of the country since the early 1920s also distinguishes the narrativization of China by Italian authors from the representations produced by other Western authors of the time. With regard to the *Il Ponte* delegation that traveled to China in mid-1955, De Giorgi has underscored the importance played by the anti-fascist Resistance in the representations of China of the time (2017, 176); however, the correlation between the depictions produced in liberal and fascist Italy, as well as the dependence on the influence of fascism and anti-fascism in the representation of China have not been addressed previously by scholarship.

The narratives produced after 1949 are also related to Italian intellectuals' idea of China as a possible model for socialist development, and as an example to stimulate the active political participation of the masses in the Italian societies of those years. As seen in the preceding chapters, the travel literature on the PRC from those decades shows a continuous dialogue among the authors from three chronological paradigms, as well as the significant influence of earlier depictions of Maoist society over the latter ones. As Hourmant argues, any leftist intellectual visiting the PRC in that period organized their narratives as a "système de citations d'ouvrages et d'auteurs, dans un jeu intertextuel plus ou moins affiché, plus ou moins conscient," and therefore their narratives were "le fruit d'une imaginaire et d'une culture qui formate, souvent à l'insu du voyageur lui-même, son récit" (2000, 240).³ Similarly, the narratives from each decade also distance

3 "... a system of references to works and authors, in an intertextual game more or less laid out and deliberate," and therefore their narratives were "produced by an imaginary and a culture that formats the accounts of the travelers, often without them knowing it" (Hourmant 2000, 240). The translations of the quotes from Hourmant (2000) are mine.

themselves from those produced in the preceding decades, in order to direct their attention to those aspects and historical events characterizing both the Chinese and Italian societies of the time. At the same time, my research shows that rather than being only “citations reproduites de récits antérieures” (Hourmant 2000, 240),⁴ the travel narratives from those decades, by referring to the previous narratives, resonate with the precise political engagement of each author in Italian society and his or her stand in relation to specific sociopolitical issues and intellectual intelligentsias of the time. This is particularly visible in the case of the narratives from the late 1970s and early 1980s, which, by distancing themselves from the over-enthusiastic representations of Maoist society produced in the previous decades, also show a direct – and often troubled – relationship between authors who visited China after 1976 and the extra-parliamentary leftist cultural and political organizations, political journals, and student movements that had emerged in Italy since the early 1960s.

The typology of experience undergone by the Italian authors discussed here was strictly regulated by specific political factors that were both external and internal to the writers and their societies. In other words, most of the twentieth-century Italian travel writing on China implied the production of “ideological suppositions, images and fantasies about a currently important and politically urgent region of the world” (Said 1986, 211). The travel narratives produced in the first half of the twentieth century were a consequence of the decline of imperial China and the resulting imperialistic attention from most of the Western powers of the time. The rise of the PRC and its political interaction at the global level motivated most of the production of knowledge about the country. The exception to the rule might be represented by the travel narratives produced during the Fascist Ventennio, because the eyes of the regime were principally on the Mediterranean region. Even in such a scenario, however, ideological suppositions and imperialistic rhetoric continued to shape the production of travel narratives on China.

In the travelogues written in the first half of the twentieth century, particularly during the Fascist Ventennio, the emphasis on difference and

4 “... references reproduced from earlier accounts” (Hourmant 2000, 240).

Chinese civilization's lack of "modernity" and "normality" was a recurring trope analogous to the Sinological-orientalism described by Vukovich and structured by the positional superiority of the travelers and their assumed authority to speak for the Chinese (Vukovich 2012, 126). While adherence to fascist ideology was a precondition of most travel writing on China in the first paradigm (Luigi Magrini's being one exception), the narratives of the PRC are much more complicated. As the political scientist and sinologist Anne-Marie Brady argues, foreign travelers since the 1950s were "selected for their credibility and their favorable attitude toward Beijing," because "a visit to see new China was not meant to be an exchange of ideas: the visitors' role was to learn and admire, and if possible write favorable reports which could be used in China and in the West" (2003, 94). Similarly, foreign residents were granted permission to live in the PRC on the basis of their political sympathies and given status and material benefits while at the same time being strictly controlled (2003, 99–104, 130). In addition, as seen in this research, the majority of the Italian writers traveling in Maoist China had to comply with the guidelines expressed by the PCI and other factions of the Italian leftist intelligentsia. The years following the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 were years of *riflusso*, when many Italian intellectuals of the time were forced to deal with their fascination for Maoism in light of the pervasive influence of the political terrorism characterizing the 1970s and 1980s in Europe.

The depictions of the PRC discussed in this research were produced with the active participation of the Chinese government and people. The production of knowledge about the Maoist period (1949–1978) resulted from a relationship between China and the Chinese people and the travelers. Through this relationship, the travelers "could find acceptance in the society of the Other" to the extent that they themselves became "orientalized" (Dirlik 1994, 101) and used the orient in their self-criticism (102). The Italian leftist intellectuals from the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s sought to find acceptance in Maoist China and relied on the active participation of the Chinese government and people, as well as their official information, to criticize post-World War II Italian society and the mode of modernity – capitalism – that it had embraced. A different relationship occurs in the fifth and last typology analyzed, with a fundamental difference in the attitude

of the travelers. The 1980s Italian intellectuals still required their experience of China to trigger self-criticism, but they were no longer willing to empathize with the Chinese, nor to seek their acceptance. The interaction between the two parties produced “‘contact zones’ in which Europeans encountered non-Europeans, where a European modernity produced and was also challenged by alternative modernities as the Others in their turn entered the discourse on modernity” (Dirlik 1994, 112).

Visibly, the textual and the political are correlated in the travel literature analyzed. By implying that representations of China operated on both the symbolic and the material levels, I have produced an outline of the intellectual history and cross-cultural reading operating in five major paradigms of the representation of China to underline how Italian writers, journalists, and politicians redefined their own ideas of themselves and their societies through their articulation what China and the Chinese meant to them, as proposed by Hayot (2012, xiii). At the same time, I have proposed an analysis of this typology by referring to the precise sociohistorical, political, and ideological scenarios characterizing each representation as argued by Vukovich (2012), since I have focused on the overwhelmingly political relationship between China and the Italian intellectuals visiting the country in the twentieth century. I have analyzed the referentiality of their ideas of China as a vehicle for the promotion or denigration of the specific ideologies and models of development that were operating in the precise, heavily politicized sociohistorical and cultural context of the “scramble for China” and Boxer war, interwar and World War II periods, and of the Cold War dynamics. In doing so, I have also contextualized the depictions of China as the result of both the ideological commitment of the Italian intellectuals narrating the country and the product of information control. I have analyzed the functionality of such depictions always in relation to the specific economic, sociopolitical, and historical dynamics of Italy and China as well as the change in their cultural, political, and diplomatic relationship over time. I have approached the topic in relation to both the post-structuralist critique and the Marxist-inspired anti-colonial theory, in order to fully take into account both the textuality of the Chinas narrated and the political context and discursive function encompassed by Italian travel literature on China written from the turn

of the nineteenth century to the mid-1980s. Finally, the close relationship between the political and the textual suggested in this research has contributed to a re-evaluation of the scholarship on Italian travel writing on China produced in the last five decades.

By contributing to the reinterpretation of the way late imperial, early republican, Maoist, and post-Maoist Chinas were addressed and represented, this research hopes to open up a new direction in the study of the field, as well as in reframing the theoretical and methodological lenses of analysis of twentieth-century production of knowledge focusing on the Italian gaze on China and East, South and Southeast Asian regions.

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