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Abstracts

NICCOLÒ SERRI, Fascist Imperialism and the Italian Arms Trade to nationalist China 1929-1937

The article tracks the history of Sino-Italian relations during the 1930', focusing on the pattern of Italian arms export to the nationalist Republic of China.

Following the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, Fascist influences in Nanking, until then almost inexistent, developed rapidly. Thanks to the dynamism of the new Italian General Consul in Shanghai, Count Galeazzo Ciano, Fascist diplomacy exploited the rising tensions in East Asia to support a policy a military-commercial penetration in China. Under State guidance, major Italian arms industries, such as FIAT and Ansaldo, promoted the export of aircrafts, guns and ammunitions. The objective of Fascist foreign policy was that of empowering Chinese nationalism, thus undermining the influence of other colonial powers in the area while promoting the informal expansion of Italian economic interests.

As the article argues, however, the bases of Italian grand strategy in China were inadequate to support the ambitions of fascist ideology. Italian business was often over-reliant on State aid and proved to be less competitive than other Western firms. The expansion of Italian companies in China became viable only when disputes emerged among foreign powers, opening gaps that were skillfully exploited by Fascist diplomacy to take a lead in commercial negotiations with the Nanking government. The opportunistic character of this strategy contributes to explain not only why Italian influence in China rapidly reached a high point in the mid-Thirties, but also why it easily crumbled in front of the Italian-Japanese rapprochement of 1937.

Keywords:

Fascist Foreign Policy in Asia

Italian Arms export

Gian Galeazzo Ciano